

THE SARAJEVO CEASEFIRE – REALISM OR STRATEGIC ERROR BY THE CROATIAN LEADERSHIP?

Davor MARIJAN*

The topic of this work is the post-war controversy centred on the view that the Croatian political leadership made an error in January 1992 when, with mediation by the United Nations, it agreed to and signed a ceasefire with representatives of the Yugoslav People's Army in Sarajevo. Those who hold this view are retired Croatian Army generals, who maintain that the war should have been continued during 1992, which would have achieved a military victory and the liberation of Croatia's occupied and rebellious territories. Since these speculations are systematically promoted by influential media outlets, the author has attempted to respond to the extent allowed by historical scholarship.

Key words: Republic of Croatia, Yugoslav People's Army, war, strategy, Sarajevo Ceasefire

A ceasefire between the Republic of Croatia and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) was signed between Croatian Defence Minister Gojko Šušak and JNA General Andrija Rašeta in Sarajevo on 2 January 1992, mediated by Cyrus Vance, the personal envoy of the United Nations Secretary General. The ceasefire went into effect at 6:00 p.m. on 3 January 1992.¹ This ended the first phase of the war in Croatia, which nobody with any credibility disputes today. Some controversy, however, has been created by the assertion that this was a strategic error, because Croatian forces were allegedly able to end the war by decisive

* Davor Marijan, Ph. D., Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

¹ Croatian Homeland War Memorial Documentation Centre (HMDCDR): Office of the Chief of the Yugoslav Armed Forces Main Staff, Order no. 622-1/91 of 3. 1. 1992; Central Military Archives of the Croatian Defence Ministry (hereinafter: SVA MORH), Croatian Army Main Staff papers (hereinafter: GSHV): SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/92-01/01, reg. no. 5120-01/22-92-2 of 3 Jan. 1992.; Ivo Perić, *Godine koje će se pamtiti* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1995), p. 135.

victory already in 1992, which would have spared Croatia all later warfare and also would have averted the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The key to this claim is the alleged halt of the Croatian Army's liberation of western Slavonia on 3 January 1992.²

The primary advocates of this interpretation are retired generals of the Croatian Army: Anton Tus, Martin Špegelj, Petar Stipetić and, to a certain extent, Imra Agotić. Until they transferred to the Croatian Army, they were on active service in the JNA (Agotić and Stipetić), or they had been retired for a time (Tus). These generals of the JNA, which Tus and Stipetić left to join Croatia's defence sixteen months after Tuđman and his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) opened a new chapter in Croatian history, gathered most recently to reiterate this assertion in May 2011, at the observation of the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the National Guard Corps (ZNG), essentially the Croatian Army. The journalist who presented them as the quartet that created the Croatian Army was not troubled by the fact that only Špegelj had participated in the creation of the ZNG, while the remaining three were in the JNA at the time,³ and based on the assumption that they created the armed force he also gave credence to their dubious claims. This is not the first time witnesses interpret history on the weight of their status rather than on the basis of the facts which they proffer to the public or, stated more simply, they are trusted not on the basis of sound arguments but on the basis of their rank as generals and even more so on the basis of ideological compatibility. Their assertions are welcome to like-thinkers as a confirmation of an arranged Serbo-Croatian war that was aimed at dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to this stance, the war's scenario was outlined in Karadževićo in March 1991 by Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and Serbian President Slobodan Milošević.⁴

Speculation as to 'what could have been' is not the subject of an historian's interest as it cannot be proven either way, so any discussion of the grounds (or lack thereof) for these assertions can only proceed indirectly. In order to obtain a reasoned response to the posed assertion but avoid speculation, it is necessary to answer questions such as: combat plans of the conflicting sides, conditions in the theatre of war at the end of 1991 and at the time when the Sarajevo Agreement was signed, organization and combat readiness of the warring sides and the international aspect of the war. I maintain that these are essential prerequisites for understanding the reason why the political

² Anton Tus, "Rat u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj do Sarajevskog primirja", in: *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini 1991-1995*. (Zagreb-Sarajevo: Naklada Jesenski i Turk/Dani, 1999), p. 88; Martin Špegelj, "Prva faza rata 1990-1992: pripreme JNA za agresiju i hrvatski obrambeni planovi", in: *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini 1991-1995*., pp. 59-60; Martin ŠPEGELJ, *Sjećanje vojnika* (Zagreb: Znanje, 2001), p. 325.

³ Krešimir Žabec, "Tus, Stipetić, Špegelj i Agotić: Dan prije opsade Vukovara Tuđman je Imri Agotiću rekao: rata neće biti!", *Jutarnji list*, 28 May 2011.

⁴ For more on this see Ivo Lučić, "Karadževićo: politički mit ili dogovor", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 35 (2003), no. 1: 7-36.

leadership of Serbia and Croatia made and ratified the decision on a ceasefire which eventually became effective, in contrast to previous ceasefires.

Combat Plans:

The initiator of wartime events in the Croatian theatre of war was the Yugoslav People's Army. In mid-August 1990 it prevented the Croatian police from quelling the nascent Serbian revolt. In the spring of 1991 it blocked entry to the so-called 'Serbian Autonomous District of Krajina' set up by the rebel Serbs. At the end of June it intervened in Slovenia, while in Croatia at the same time the rebel Serbs began to expand their 'Krajina' district to Banovina with an attack on the police station in the town of Glina.⁵ During the Slovenian campaign, the Main Staff of the Armed Forces of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia initiated the development of plans for force deployment.⁶ Since the Croatian leadership had forbidden armed engagement with the JNA, the latter intentionally provoked conflicts and abetted the rebels by allegedly separating the conflicting sides. In late autumn, Croatia could no longer maintain this strategy and on 12 September 1991 it moved to blockade barracks and other facilities belonging to the JNA.⁷ The JNA responded with an offensive that had been systematically prepared since late July.⁸ The plan was to defeat Croatian forces and extract its own troops from Slovenia. The essence of the attack on Croatia was summarized in 1991 by General Veljko Kadijević, at the time the Yugoslav federal national defence secretary:

“ - completely block Croatia by air and by sea;

“ - link the attack routes by the JNA main forces as directly as possible to the liberation of Serbian regions in Croatia and JNA garrisons deep inside Croatian territory. To this end, sever Croatia at the following connective routes: Gradiška-Virovitica; Bihać-Karlovac-Zagreb; Knin-Zadar; Mostar-Split. Liberate Eastern Slavonia with the strongest armoured/mechanized group and then rapidly continue operations westward, regroup with forces in western Slavonia and then continue onward to Zagreb and Varaždin, and the Slovenian border. Simultaneously deploy major forces from the Herceg Novi-Trebinje region to block Dubrovnik by land and to thrust into the Neretva Valley and thereby engage in joint operations with forces moving in along the Mostar-Split line;

⁵ Davor Marijan, *Slom Titove armije: JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987.-1992.* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2008), pp. 228-229, 248-250, 263.

⁶ Branko Mamula, *Slučaj Jugoslavija* (Podgorica: CID, 2000), pp. 213-214.

⁷ D. Marijan, *Slom Titove armije: JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987.-1992.*, pp. 278-279.

⁸ Jevrem Cokić, *Početak kraja* (Ruma: Srpska knjiga, 2008), pp. 217-218.

“- after reaching specific facilities, secure and hold the border of the Serbian Krajina in Croatia, extract the remaining JNA units from Slovenia and thereafter withdraw the JNA from Croatia;

“- 10-15 days will be required for mobilization and preparation of mobilized and preliminarily mobilized units and their transport to the planned axes of engagement, depending on the degree of combat readiness of the units and their distance from the axes of engagement.”⁹

The operation in eastern Croatia, where the main forces were located, was supposed to commence on 21 September, but it was apparent already during the preparatory phase that this would not succeed.¹⁰ The group of leaders from Serbia, Montenegro, and the JNA – whom Borisav Jović referred to as the ‘sex-tet’ (Milošević, Momir Bulatović, Jović, Branko Kostić, Kadijević and Blagoje Adžić) – were informed by General Adžić on 20 September that the mobilization did not succeed and that they need “to implement a reduced plan”.¹¹ The corrected plan was drafted in the days leading up to the end of September. The decision read: “move to offensive/defensive operations with this objective: to blockade parts of Croatia, inflict a decisive defeat against Ustasha forces in Dalmatia and eastern Croatia, and then stage armed strikes against vital facilities in Croatia to force its leadership to allow the withdrawal of our forces along the line bordered by threatened peoples”.¹² After the first strike of the “reduced plan”, the JNA moved toward active defence, with the exception of Vukovar and Dubrovnik, by mid-October.¹³

Croatian Military Plans:

It would be pretentious to speak of Croatian combat plans in the literal sense of the term. Much has been written about the plans of Martin Špegelj, a retired general and the first Croatian defence minister. Their media presentation led to their acceptance by a part of the public as indisputable facts. During the period of the High Command of the National Guard Corps (*Zbor narodne garde* – ZNG), from May to mid-September 1991, there were two circulars which may be deemed guidelines for long-term combat operations, but not actual combat plans. The first, dated 17 May, was jointly signed by the defence

⁹ Veljko Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada* (Belgrade: Politika, 1993), pp. 134-136.

¹⁰ Court files of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague (hereinafter: ICTY): Excerpt from Directive of 1st Military District Commander for operation in Slavonia, str. conf. no. 5-89 of 19 Sept. 1991; ICTY: Experiences in engagement of 1st Military District units in previous combat operations, February 1992.

¹¹ Borisav Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ* (Kragujevac: Prizma, 1996), p. 386.

¹² J. Cokić, *Početak kraja*, pp. 258-269.

¹³ Davor Marijan, “Sudionici i osnovne značajke rata u Hrvatskoj 1990.-1991.,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 40 (2003), no. 1: 59-60.

minister, interior minister and commander of the ZNG, which reflected the concept of defence at the time, involving engagement by all available forces of the police, ZNG and the general populace. The essence of this order was that the Serb rebellion was to be resolved without open confrontation with the JNA.¹⁴ The second was a command signed by the defence minister, dated 12 September 1991, to block barracks and other JNA facilities, which signified the beginning of a brief but vital period of the war that led to a new balance of forces and, as a consequence, the subsequent outcome of events.¹⁵

More guidelines were generated during the period of the Croatian Army Main Staff, which is logical given the duration in question and the expanding war. The Main Staff was established at the time when the JNA's offensive strategy failed and after the first strike of its reduced plan had been endured. After 8 October, the situation in the Croatian theatre of war was no longer as critical. The Main Staff soon realized that the pressure had abated, so on 12 October it released a circular indicating that a standing task was the implementation of active defence in order to gradually create the conditions "for taking the initiative and enhancing our forces on the front, in our own rear positions and in the temporarily occupied territories".¹⁶

Three days later, on 15 October, all operative groups were ordered to prepare and initiate more offensive operations in their zones of responsibility. The Operational Zones of Rijeka, Zagreb, Karlovac and Bjelovar were notified that the engagement of their forces was expected in the Operational Zones of Osijek and Split as well.¹⁷ After several general circulars, on 3 November the Main Staff ordered all operational command headquarters to immediately switch to combined operations and avoid passive defence.¹⁸ The circular issued by the chief of the Croatian Army's Main Staff on 20 November had the elements of a short-term directive. The return of lost positions was sought in eastern Slavonia at positions south of Vinkovci on the Bosut River, as well as the prevention of penetration by the JNA south of Osijek. In western Slavonia, the Okučani-Lipik highway had to be severed, and enemy positions over the wider Okučani area had to be dispersed while the Jasenovac area needed to be taken. Two brigades were deployed from the Osijek zone for mop-up operations in

¹⁴ SVA MORH, GSHV: MUP RH, MORH, ZNG Command cl. 8-01/91-01/03, reg. no. 512-01-91-2 of 17 July 1991.

¹⁵ SVA MORH, Zagreb Operational Zone Command papers, Order cl. Dt-801-03/91-01/01, reg. no. 512-06-02-91-1 of 12 Sept. 1991; D. Marijan, *Slom Titove armije: JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987.-1992.*, pp. 278-283.

¹⁶ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/108, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91 of 12 Oct. 1991.

¹⁷ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/118, reg. no. 5120-01-91-1 of 15 Oct. 1991.

¹⁸ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/129, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91 of 16 Oct. 1991; SVA MORH, ZOZZ: GSHV, Order cl. 804-01/93/62, reg. no. 5120-01-91-42 of 17 Oct. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/206, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91-1 of 3 Nov. 1991.

the Slavonian mountains. In Banovina, the task was to gain control of the wider area of Petrinja and create the conditions for penetration toward Glina and onward to Topusko. On the Kordun and Lika fronts, there were plans to move toward Saborsko and Slunj, extend the clearance of the Gacko and Lika fields and create the conditions for active operations toward Titova Korenica and Gračac. In northern Dalmatia, the plan called for severance of the road from Obrovac to Gračac and then the de-blocking of the Adriatic coastal highway and liberation of the Maslenica Bridge. In southern Dalmatia, the JNA forces had to be broken at Slano and its march toward Ston and Ploče had to be halted.¹⁹

Situation in the Theatre of War at the End of 1991 and at the Time of Signing of the Sarajevo Ceasefire

The JNA and the rebel Serbs made their greatest gains in the war against Croatia from late June to mid-September 1991. The municipalities with majority Serbian populations in northern Dalmatia and Lika were transformed into an entrenched stronghold from which the rebellion spread to surrounding areas. In northern Dalmatia, the JNA's Knin Corps occupied the villages of Kijevo and Kruševo, the town of Drniš and the Maslenica Bridge. By applying pressure on coastal cities, Zadar first and foremost, it managed to arrange for the withdrawal of personnel and *matériel* from encircled JNA barracks. No wider battles were fought until 18-19 November, when the JNA attacked and seized the villages of Škabrnje and Nadin. After withdrawing from Šibenik, on 31 December 1991 and 1 January 1992 the JNA attacked and occupied Novigrad and the villages of Pridraga, Paljuv and Podgradina. The JNA attempted to conduct mop-up operations on 3 January 1992 along the Suhovare-Poličnik and Smoković-Donji Zemunik lines. Limited progress was made along both lines as a result of dogged and decisive defence mounted by Croatian forces. After these efforts the JNA transitioned to a completely defensive mode.²⁰

In the southern Dalmatian theatre of operations, on 1 October the JNA attacked the wider Dubrovnik region from the Popovo Polje area and Montenegrin territory via Prevlaka. By 5 October, Prevlaka has been "cleansed", while on 15 October the town of Cavtat was occupied, and then Dubrovnik was attacked. A month-and-a-half passed before the next major JNA success, when components of the Titograd Corps occupied Čepikuće on 24 November. Since then, the JNA more-or-less placed Herzegovina up to the Neretva River under its control. Its primary preoccupation was Dubrovnik, under whose walls it

¹⁹ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/281, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91 of 20 Nov. 1991.

²⁰ Zdenko Radelić, Davor Marijan, Nikica Barić, Albert Bing, *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), pp. 123, 143-145.

had endured a public-relations disaster. After blockading Dubrovnik, the JNA attempted to break into the city in various ways. Besides depriving it of the provisions necessary for life, the JNA also shelled the city, which peaked on 6 December 1991. At sea, the Yugoslav navy provided support to the JNA's land forces in its attacks on Zadar and Dubrovnik. A more complex undertaking, the attack on Split and the island of Brač via the Brač Channel inflicted considerable damage on the city on 15 November, but it ended in failure and withdrawal after Croatian artillery damaged several battleships that were participating in the attack.²¹

On the Lika battlefield, the most important event occurred in September 1991, when Croatian forces managed to defend the town of Gospić. By the end of the month, Croatian forces lifted the blockade of the Otočac-Žuta Lokva road, reinforced the defence of Otočac and moved forward in limited attacks and counterattacks in order to push Serbian forces from the Otočac environs. On 7 December, the JNA attacked and occupied villages in the Otočac Municipality, and Korenica, Glibodol and, on 10 December, Čanak. In the counterattack staged from 11 to 13 December, Croatian forces took back Čanak, liberated Glibodol and took the village of Dabar on the route leading to Plaško.²²

In the Karlovac-Kordun theatre of operations, armed conflict broke out in early September and escalated on 4 October when the JNA launched an attack on Karlovac and Duga Resa. The JNA's plans to lift the blockade of the garrison in Karlovac failed, nor did the occupation of Turanj, which was a vital point of resistance for the Croatian defence. After 8 October, hostilities abated and a stalemate ensued in the Karlovac-Duga Resa portion of the front. The most significant event prior to the end of the year occurred on 4-5 November, when JNA forces with some mechanization broke out of their barracks in the Karlovac suburb of Logorište. After this break-out there were no major battles until the end of December, when the JNA repelled a minor Croatian attack on the barracks in Mekušje. Deep in Kordun, Croatian forces attempted to defend Saborsko and Slunj. They attempted to negotiate the surrender of Slunj without combat operations, after which attacks on the town and lone Croatian villages in Kordun commenced. After several unsuccessful attacks, on 25 October Hrvatski Blagaj was seized, followed by Saborsko on 12 November, Slunj on 17 November and Cetingrad on 29 November.²³

By the latter half of September, the JNA and the rebel Serbs occupied most of Banovina and the Pounje (Una River Valley); Hrvatska Kostajnica fell on 13 September, Topusko a day later, and Petrinja on 21 September. The JNA reached the Kupa River by the end of September. Its most extensive undertaking was the attack, on 17-18 October, along the axis from the village of Slana,

²¹ IBID., pp. 146-149.

²² IBID., pp. 140-143.

²³ IBID., pp. 138-140.

through Vratečko to Novi Farkašić, during which it endured a defeat and heavy losses in both personnel and combat mechanization. The last more serious attempt by the JNA and the rebel Serbs was the unsuccessful attack on Sunja on 2 November. In October the frontline stabilized, and the Kupa River served as the boundary, except in the area of the village of Nebojan, where Croatian forces organized a defence on the Kupa's right bank. No progress was made in Banovina up to the Sarajevo Ceasefire, although at certain moments Croatian forces were more apt to take the initiative. The greatest challenge to the JNA and the rebel Serbs was Operation 'Whirlwind', a poorly prepared Croatian attempt to force a crossing of the Kupa toward Glina from 11 to 13 December, which after some initial gains and securing of a shallow bridgehead, ultimately failed, with loss of life and combat mechanization.²⁴

In western Slavonia, the rebellion staged by local Serbs broke out in mid-August 1991. Thanks to the intervention of the JNA's Banja Luka Corps, the wider area around the town of Okučani became a protected zone for rebel Serbs, while the bridgehead at Stara Gradiška made it possible to introduce fresh forces for the Banja Luka Corps. The Serbian rebellion in Pakrac began at the same time, and it rapidly spread to the mountains of western Slavonia. After the failure of the JNA's offensives, the mission of the Banja Luka Corps was to expand the territory around Okučani, Jasenovac and Hrvatska Kostajnica. The corps launched a new attack on 4 October, but it lost momentum by 8 October. Thereafter Croatian forces assumed the initiative. Soon two components crystallized on the battlefield: the western Slavonian mountains, where there was no JNA presence, rather only rebel Serbs, in the Bjelovar Operational Zone; and the Sava River area (Posavina) in the Zagreb Operational Zone. The Bjelovar Operational Zone was tasked with mopping up the western Slavonian mountains and defending Lipik and Pakrac. Intense battles around Lipik and Pakrac continued until the end of the year. Fortunes in the Lipik area were particularly precarious, until 7 December, when the town was placed under the control of Croatian forces. Campaigns were simultaneously conducted to clear the wider Bilogora of rebel Serbs and to push them back from Grubišno Polje and Daruvar. From 31 October to 3 November, the occupied territory of Grubišno Polje was liberated. At the end of November, forces from the Bjelovar Operational Zone, joined by forces from the Osijek Operational Zone, launched a coordinated operation to clear the Slavonian mountains of Papuk and Bilogora, which was completed by mid-December. The Posavina Operational Group was established in the Zagreb Operational Zone's theatre of operations to defend the axes toward Novksa and Nova Gradiška. By reorganizing existing troops and with new reinforcements, the villages of Popovac, Lovska, Brezovica, Korita, Jagma, Gornja and Donja Subocka and Gornja Krička were liberated along the Novska axis from mid-November to 9 December. The operation was preceded by pressing parts of the Banja Luka

²⁴ IBID., pp. 134-137.

Corps in the direction of Nova Gradiška around the village of Medari on 12 November.²⁵

In the closing battle, in the final days of December 1991, the Main Staff undertook exceptional efforts to push to the Sava River by having the 127th Brigade from Virovitica thrust forward along the Bijela Stijena-Okučani line, while the Posavina Operational Group's forces flanked it.²⁶ The forces of the Bjelovar Operational Zone halted on the northern section of the battlefield due to the stiff resistance and mine fields they encountered.²⁷ Progress was also limited in the direction of Novska due to a tenacious and effective defence mounted by the JNA, while on the Nova Gradiška axis the villages of Mašička Šagovina and Širinci were liberated by the time of the Sarajevo Ceasefire on 3 January.²⁸

In eastern Croatia, the Serbian revolt began in May 1991. In early July, the JNA entered Baranja, while on 1 August it crossed the bridge over the Danube at Bogojevo and eliminated Croatian forces in Erdut, Aljmaš and Dalj. At around 22 August it had occupied Baranja. Vukovar was attacked on 25 August. After the failure of the JNA's offensives from roughly 20 to 22 September and its orientation toward Vukovar, the focus of the Croatian Army's defence was to defend this town. Attempts were made to prevent it from being cut off from Vinkovci, and when this did not succeed, attempts were made to lift the blockade around it, which proved impossible. In the last days of Vukovar's defence, on 15 and 16 November, the JNA crossed the Bosut River south of Vinkovci and occupied the villages of Lipovci, Apševci, Podgrađe, Nijemci and Donje Novo Selo. The conquest of Vukovar was exploited by the JNA to seize Stari and Novi Seleš and then Ernestinovo, south of Osijek, on 21 November. The village of Laslovo was taken on 24 November, which threatened Osijek and created the possibility of a push toward Đakovo. The final blow by the JNA came on 5 December, when it occupied Tenjski Antunovac, and a day later when it took Nova Tenja, while on 16 December it took Paulin Dvor.²⁹

On 3 January 1992, Croatian forces had good reason to be satisfied with their positions only in western Slavonia. They had gradually begun to take the initiative in this area by mid-October and ultimately they held a considerable territory. But was this sufficient for a military victory on the battlefield? This is certainly a question that cannot be definitively answered. General Tus has no

²⁵ IBID., pp. 130-133.

²⁶ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/438, reg. no. 5120-01-91-1 of 28 Dec. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, cl. 8/91-01/439, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91-1 of 29 Dec. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/441, reg. no. 5120-01-91-1 of 31 Dec. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/92-01/01, reg. no. 5120-01/22-92-1 of 1 Jan. 1992.

²⁷ SVA MORH, GSHV: Bjelovar OZ Command, Extraordinary report Op. no. 276-1 of 28 Dec. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: Bjelovar OZ Command, Daily report Op. no. 974-51 of 28 Dec. 1991.

²⁸ Rudi Stipčić, *Napokon smo krenuli ...* (Zagreb: Sveučilišna tiskara, 1996), pp. 77-79, 83-87.

²⁹ Z. Radelić et al., *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat*, pp. 125-129.

doubt that the Banja Luka Corps was on the verge of defeat. Tus blamed the 127th Brigade for this failure, although the archival documents do not clearly bear this out.³⁰ In a command dated 1 January 1992, he concluded that after “exceptional results achieved after many days of combat operations by the units of the Bjelovar Operational Zone in the territory of Western Slavonia, there ensued ... a relaxation and impermissible behaviour by a portion of the units and command staffs, whereby the entire operation to eject the Banja Luka Corps from the Posavina region was certainly threatened. The aggressor’s forces were reinforced and consolidated, their positions were bolstered and they undertook organized offensives and threatened to re-take Lipik and Pakrac. A particular cause for concern is that the orders of higher command instances, including the Croatian Army Main Staff, are not being observed and executed, and inaccurate and falsified reporting has also emerged. All useful initiatives will always be endorsed by the Croatian Army Main Staff, but arbitrary action and failure to perform assigned tasks cannot and will not be validated.”³¹ It is uncertain as to whom he referred here, but the order makes it clear that an advantageous opportunity, if one had indeed existed, had been irretrievably lost. The successes achieved were less than expected, which in addition to the unfavourable climatic conditions was also influenced by the then already difficult conditions in the Croatian Army’s units. The main force along the Novska axis and the driver of most successful operations, the ZNG 1st Brigade, had roughly 40 percent of its troops out of combat formation, “which in large measure diminished the effect of offensive combat operations”. The condition of Croatian Army brigades brought in from Samobor and Koprivnica was deemed troubling because both had a high number (700-800) of guardsmen who were on medically-certified sick-leave. Thus, these units were halved.³² In a status report submitted to the Zagreb Operational Zone Command Headquarters concerning the situation in which a Croatian Army brigade and battalion from Zagreb were sent to the Nova Gradiška axis, the commander of the local Croatian Army brigade (also line commander) proposed their withdrawal, with the suggestion that their automatic and semi-automatic firearms remain and be distributed to local home guardsmen, while the axis would be reinforced with a Croatian Army brigade from neighbouring Slavonska Požega.³³

The other problem with Tus’ view is the fact that he ignores the other side. Had the Banja Luka Corps been brought to the point of repelled across the Sava River? Broken groups of rebel Serbs on the northern section of the western Slavonia battlefield were subordinated to the Corps Command in the latter half of December, only to be disbanded and their personnel incorporated

³⁰ A. Tus, “Rat u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj do Sarajevskog primirja”, p. 88.

³¹ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/92-01/01, reg. no. 5120-01/22-92-1 of 1 Jan. 1992.

³² SVA MORH, Posavina Operational Group Command papers (hereinafter: ZOGP): Posavina OG Command, Report reg. no. 347/91 of 28 Dec. 1991.

³³ SVA MORH, ZOGP: Report of 121st Brigade of 29 Dec. 1991 for 3rd OZ Command.

into JNA units.³⁴ In late December, the Corps was reinforced with two motorized battalions of recruits from Serbia and Macedonia (from the 84th Motorized Brigade from Bitola and the 125th Motorized Brigade from Titova Mitrovica). Their arrival lifted morale and stabilized the frontline.³⁵ At the turn of 1991 into 1992, the 134th Light Infantry Brigade was brought to the western Slavonia theatre from Titovo Užice. According to Croatian intelligence reports, it arrived on 31 December.³⁶ The conclusion: Croatian forces had been halted due to exhaustion, a lack of ammunition and introduction of new JNA forces in the latter half of December, and not due to some sort of behind-the-scenes games being played by the political leadership. Had Tuđman intended to halt Croatian forces, he could have done so by issuing a direct command to General Tus rather than doing so covertly through a brigade commander!³⁷

The status differed in other operational theatres. The Croatian Army was in an entirely inferior position in southern Dalmatia, with the exception of the Neretva River Valley. In northern Dalmatia, the JNA was predominant but lacking the forces to achieve operative success. A balance was established in the Lika, Karlovac-Kordun and Banovina operational theatres. The JNA held the line without great effort, while the most extensive battles – those on the Lika front – were waged for individual villages which changed hands a number of times, meaning that the reality was a tactical level of operation. In eastern Croatia, the JNA's status was best after it wedged Osijek in; by mid-December it also held this line without notable effort.

Several years ago, I wrote that “the Sarajevo Ceasefire ... served as a tactical rest-period for the JNA and rebel Serbs, which was borne out by subsequent events. For Croatia, it was a strategic rest-period. Despite the customary view that the Sarajevo Ceasefire resulted from an agreement between Milošević and Tuđman in order to wage war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this is not accurate. Namely, at the end of 1991, the Croatian Army had a tactical level, an operational level very rarely – only in western Slavonia it may be said, while its strategic level (Croatian Army Main Staff) was not functioning. At the end of 1991, the Croatian Army lacked ammunition to mount even a briefer defence, to say nothing of a more demanding operation”.³⁸ This assessment is still valid now.

³⁴ HMDCDR: Serbian Defence Ministry Operational Group of 16 Jan. 1992, Note, Current status and problems of Territorial Defence in western Slavonia.

³⁵ ICTY: 5th Corps Operational Centre, Status in units conf. no. 13/1-394 of 30 Dec. 1991.

³⁶ SVA MORH, ZOGP: Posavina ZOGP, Report reg. no. 351/91 of 31 Dec. 1991; VSA MORH: Order of 5th C. Command, Regular daily report str. conf. no. 18/13-11 of 11 Jan. 1992.

³⁷ Based on transcripts of meetings between President Tuđman and the military leadership, it is more than obvious that Tuđman was the commander-in-chief and that Tus did not question this, which he later claimed. For example, HDA, UPRH: Minutes to 41st session of Supreme State Council of the Republic of Croatia held on 13 Dec. 1991; HDA, UPRH: Minutes to meeting held in Office of the Croatian President on 18 Dec. 1991.

³⁸ Z. Radelić et al., *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat*, p. 150.

Combat Readiness:

Characteristics and capability of the Croatian armed forces: Was the Croatian Army capable of a strategic offensive in January 1992; if so, where? In order to win a war, personnel, weapons, equipment, ammunition and money are needed. Out of these, Croatia stood best with personnel. With the exception of western Slavonia, Croatia was defended by local forces and the partial engagement of the active formations of the ZNG. The Croatian Army proved most manoeuvrable in western Slavonia. A high percentage of not recruited in the local area were concentrated here. From the end of September onward, forces from Zagreb, Kutina, Ivanić Grad, Samobor and north-west Croatia were deployed at the Novska axis of engagement. Besides local forces, there were troops from Slavonski Brod and, later, Zagreb on the Nova Gradiška axis. Above it was noted about their status at the very end of 1991 that they had achieved success in the western Slavonian mountains in combat with the rebel Serbs. In battles with the Banja Luka Corps, the success was not as great. And even that success was achieved by the ZNG's 1st Brigade, at the time certainly the highest quality unit of the Croatian armed forces. Despite all of the weaknesses and shortcomings in the west Slavonian theatre of operations, it may be asserted that the Croatian Army had prospects for continuing the war if it had been at the same level in all remaining operational theatres. But it did not. All other theatres required reinforcements from the interior. But with the exception of the four active brigades, the levels that were later perceived simply did not exist at the time.

In eastern Croatia, the Main Staff only decided to reinforce the defence of Valpovo, Donji Miholjac and Našice and prevent a JNA offensive from Baranja across the Drava River in early November at the request of the operational command headquarters in Osijek and at the suggestion of chief armed forces inspector Martin Špegelj. The Croatian Army's 104th Brigade from Varaždin was designated for this assignment on 5 November.³⁹ Instead, on 10 November the Main Staff decided to bring the 105th Brigade from Bjelovar to the Valpovo area within a period of two days.⁴⁰ This brigade was at the time the sole available unit of this capacity, for it had been withdrawn for reorganization after it had disintegrated in western Slavonia. It was late in arriving, and then it was re-directed to lift the blockade of Vukovar and finally it rather haphazardly ended up defending the southern section of the Vinkovci Municipality. Weeks passed before it was filled in line with its structural capacity.⁴¹ Subsequently, following

³⁹ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/212, reg. no. 5120-01-91 of 5 Nov. 1991.

⁴⁰ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/236, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91 of 10 Nov. 1991.

⁴¹ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, cl. 8/91-01/238, reg. no. 5120-01-91 of 11 Nov. 1991.; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/333, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91-1 of 30 Nov. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, cl. 801-01/91-01/73, reg. no. 5120-34/22-91-1 of 12 Dec. 1991.

an order dated 15 November, the bulk of the 101st Brigade from Zagreb was brought in to defend the wider Osijek territory on 20 November.⁴² During the battles for Tenjski Antunovac, most of the brigade withdrew and departed for Zagreb.⁴³ In December this front was reinforced with an armoured-mechanized battalion from Koprivnica. The personnel refused deployment, so the combat mechanization was distributed between three local brigades at the end of December.⁴⁴

The western Slavonia theatre was the only one in which the operation of forces from other zones was recorded. Besides local forces, the ZNG 1st Brigade, the 104th, 105th and 117th Brigades, the Croatian Army's 56th and 65th Battalions, and the 15th Mixed Anti-armour Artillery Regiment were deployed there. In November, the group was reinforced with the 151st Brigade, a battalion from the 153rd Brigade, and the 51st and 53rd Independent Battalions. The 121st Brigade, and parts of the 108th, 99th and 198th Brigade and smaller detachments of the ZNG's 1st and 3rd Brigades were deployed along the Nova Gradiška axis.⁴⁵

In the Karlovac-Kordun operational theatre, the 103rd Brigade from Krapina was deployed with a considerable problems, as well as the much better than the 150th Brigade from Zagreb.⁴⁶ Forces from Rijeka were deployed in Lika, where the stationing of the 111th Brigade in the Otočac-Saborsko area took three months.⁴⁷ In early December, the 128th Brigade from Rijeka was deployed in the Gospić area.⁴⁸

These reserve brigades were brought in with great difficulty, and most exhibited a series of shortcomings, so it may be concluded that the local brigades were generally in better condition, with greater value in combat. With the exception of western Slavonia and the 111th Brigade in Lika, all of these units

⁴² SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, cl. 8/91-01/260, reg. no. 5120-01-91-1 of 15 Nov. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: Osijek Operational Zone Command, Report str. conf. no. 525-123-187 of 21 Nov. 1991.

⁴³ SVA MORH, GSHV: Osijek Operational Zone Command, Report str. conf. no. 525-123-244 of 7 Dec. 1991.

⁴⁴ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/354, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91-1 of 4 Dec. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, cl. str. conf. 803-05/91-03/401, reg. no. 5120-26/22-91-1 of 25 Dec. 1991.

⁴⁵ R. Stipčić, *Napokon smo krenuli*, pp. 15-19, 30-31, 37-43, 60-62, 77.

⁴⁶ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/231, reg. no. 5120-02/22-91-1 of 9 Nov. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/366, reg. no. 5120-21-91-2 of 8 Dec. 1991.

⁴⁷ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/233, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91-1 of 9 Nov. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, cl. str. conf. 81/91-02/30, reg. no. 5120-01-91-1 of 12 Nov. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/275, reg. no. 5120-01/22-91-1 of 18 Nov. 1991.

⁴⁸ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/335, reg. no. 5120-21-91-1 of 1 Dec. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/366, reg. no. 5120-21-91-2 of 8 Dec. 1991.

were engaged in defence tasks in the sense of combat operations, which are palpably simpler than offensives.

What was the status of the Main Staff as a body administering the war? After the ZNG was renamed the Croatian Army, the ZNG High Command was renamed the Croatian Army Main Staff on 21 September 1991, and on that day its top command personnel, i.e., the chief and two deputies, were appointed.⁴⁹ The Defence Ministry's order dictating this change in names was signed several days later.⁵⁰ These changes were formal in nature and did not improve the quality of the command structure and strategic operations. The only difference was that the ZNG High Command followed the tradition of the Territorial Defence, while the Main Staff complied with the tradition of an operational military, both the older national guard and the JNA. Up to the Sarajevo Ceasefire, this body did the least of what it was, in fact, supposed to do: conduct the war. It was headed by a retired air force general of the JNA, Anton Tus. Although just as unqualified as the majority of the generals leading the JNA in the attack against Croatia, Tus played a considerable psychological role, for his cultured bearing and demeanour stood in stark contrast to most of his former comrades in the JNA. By the end of 1991, the Croatian Army Main Staff was filled with several generals and high officers of the JNA with the highest peacetime references, but since their chief of staff was a peacetime general, their expertise did not come to the fore. Moreover, at Tuđman's insistence in a session held on 20 November, the Main Staff left Zagreb in December and set up a Forward Command Post in Našice in Slavonia.⁵¹ Its task was to functionally monitor the situation in eastern Slavonia and provide assistance to Croatian Army command staffs and units.⁵²

Besides general circulars sent to Operational Zone command headquarters, which can all essentially be summarized as indicating that everyone was expected to make do to the best of their knowledge and ability, the Main Staff issued a single combat order, on which basis the unsuccessful crossing of the Kupa River was attempted in December 1991.⁵³ Directives that would have specified plans over a longer term were not written. On Christmas Eve, 1991,

⁴⁹ SVA MORH, Defence Minister's Office papers (hereinafter: KMO): President of the Republic of Croatia, Decision no. 1015/91 of 21 Sept. 1991; SVA MORH, KMO: President of the Republic of Croatia, Decision no. 1016/91 of 21 Sept. 1991; SVA MORH, KMO: President of the Republic of Croatia, Decision no. 1017/91 of 21 Sept. 1991.

⁵⁰ SVA MORH, GSHV: MORH, Organization/formation Order cl. str. conf. 801-01/91-01/07, reg. no. 512-06-05-91-26 of 26 Sept. 1991.

⁵¹ Croatian States Archives, Zagreb, papers of the Croatian President's Office (hereinafter: HDA, UPRH): Minutes to meeting held in the Office of the Croatian President F. Tuđman on 20 Nov. 1991; SVA MORH, GSHV: Forward Command Post of Croatian Army Main Staff, Order cl. 8/91-01/312, reg. no. 5120-01-910-1 of 8 Dec. 1991.

⁵² SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order cl. 8/91-01/312, reg. no. 5120-01-91-1 of 8 Dec. 1991.

⁵³ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV, Order for offensive Op. no. 1, cl. str. conf. 8/91-01/134, reg. no. 5120-02-91- of 17 Oct. 1991.

after the Croatian Army's inspectorate "toured all fronts, all brigades and independent battalions, and Operational Zone command headquarters"; General Špegelj, the Croatian Army's chief inspector, submitted a report to President Tuđman, Defence Minister Šušak and General Tus in which he made a damning assessment of the status and operation of the Main Staff and the Croatian Army:

"In combat operations, the fundamental weaknesses emerge already in the initial phase of the Main Staff's functioning. ... The Main Staff does have control over all four elements of armed combat (personnel, combat *matériel*, time and space). The first element – personnel – is both objectively and subjectively incapable of more complex combat operations. The military intelligence service is disorganized, poorly conceived and only functions well in individual brigades on a case-by-case basis. Coordinated action is entirely absent, which according to this inspectorial assessment was the cause of severe consequences in the operations of the 102nd Brigade, 52nd Independent Battalion, etc. It not sufficient to simply issue an order, rather it is also necessary to ensure that said order is implemented by all participants without question, precisely in terms of aim, time and place. Coordinated action has been assessed as very poor. There is also poor coordination of operation between branches as well. Thus, artillery functions independently of infantry, independently of engineering, and so forth. As to the personnel element, another aspect which must be underscored is the increasing and exceptionally dangerous emergence of growing distrust between professional officers and those who rose in actual armed combat. It is impossible to command if there is not even a minimum of trust, if insubordination comes to the fore and if the right to palpable risk is not exercised. ... The second element of armed combat, *matériel* (weapons, gear, ammunition and other equipment essential to armed combat) is generally not under the Main Staff's control. The situation here is chaotic. The conceptual approach also contributes to this disorganization, as well as insufficient command activity in the utilization of manoeuvres and so forth with reference to concepts for conducting combat. To say nothing of banal matters such as the case that one unit has tank and artillery ordnance, but no tanks nor artillery, and *vice versa*. In this shortage of ammunition which (is becoming increasingly critical), balancing it on the fronts is of crucial importance. ... Many negative consequences also ensue from the accumulation of orders one after another, without any of them being thoroughly executed. This compromises the chain of command, and creates the psychological impression of impotence. ... The Croatian Army Main Staff must put itself in the position to command armed combat without exception, professionally, with greater involvement in the execution of its own orders and the orders issued by subordinates".⁵⁴

⁵⁴ SVA MORH, GSHV: Croatian Army Chief Inspector of 24 Dec. 1991 for defence minister.

There are no indications that Tus contested this report. He only wrote “draw lessons” on his personal copy.⁵⁵ An extenuating circumstance for the Croatian Army Main Staff was the absence of a clear defence strategy. Tuđman had long believed – and this ultimately, albeit mistakenly, proved a winning combination – that war could be avoided. The massacre of Croatian police officers in Borovo Selo had a mitigating effect on the Croatian leadership and validated the orientation to refrain from hastily making long-term decisions.⁵⁶ Despite two arduous months in the summer of 1991 (July and August), Tuđman prevented the National Guard Corps and the police from engaging in open conflict with the JNA. Only hostilities with the rebel Serbs was allowed, which soon proved an impossible mission, for the latter never acted unless the JNA was nearby. It was precisely this policy of avoiding war, which in regions such as Slavonia was often interpreted as a lack of courage and perhaps even cowardice if not treasonous, that gave Croatia its most valuable wartime ally – time, which was acknowledged by the JNA’s Admiral Branko Mamula.⁵⁷ This policy was also criticized from within circles deemed knowledgeable by the public. The best-known in the media was General Špegelj. Špegelj left the system due to Tuđman’s refusal to push Croatia into war.⁵⁸ He spoke out in October 1991 with calls for the Croatian Army to launch a counter-offensive.⁵⁹ In November, Tuđman readmitted him to the service and appointed him the Croatian Army’s chief inspector. He reviewed the situation in Croatia’s armed forces while at this post, and, marshalling his emotions, he acknowledge in December that Croatia did not have the strength for a general turnaround and offensive action over a broader territory.⁶⁰ This was additionally confirmed by his above-cited report, which he later “forgot” when writing a series of politically-charged assessments of wartime 1991.

Capability of the JNA: In the latter half of 1991, the JNA exhibited a series of weaknesses which brought into question its functioning as an army. The collapse of the state was reflected primarily in its personnel. In this regard, it had begun to ideologically and nationally unravel since the campaign in Slovenia, when its most indoctrinated portion began to realize that its Yugoslavism was only declarative.⁶¹ From that point forward, the JNA together with components of Territorial Defence forces functioned only with the gradual increase

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ HDA, UPRH: Minutes to 5th session of Supreme State Council of the Republic of Croatia, held on 9 May 1991.

⁵⁷ B. Mamula, *Slučaj Jugoslavija*, pp. 259-261.

⁵⁸ M. Špegelj, *Sjećanja vojnika*, pp. 257-258.

⁵⁹ Mladen Maloča, Darko Pavičić, “Hrvatska mora u ofanzivu”, *Danas*, 15 Oct. 1991, 21-23. Interview with General M. Špegelj.

⁶⁰ Marko Marković, “Jastrebova ruka u hrvatskom džepu”, *Slobodni tjednik*, 4 Dec. 1991, 14-15. Interview with General M. Špegelj.

⁶¹ D. Marijan, *Slom Titove armije: JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987.-1992.*, pp. 212-214, 439-441.

of its reserve personnel, volunteers and dwindling number of troops on regular mandatory military service. It generally maintained forces of uniform strength on the frontlines and rotated reserve sections at intervals of slightly more than a month. This army had very low morale, palpably less than in the Croatian Army. But it had unsurpassable organizational superiority, for its units corresponded to the status in the field. It had weapons and equipment which were sufficient to secure the status quo on the frontlines. This was retained until the late spring and, at places, the summer of 1992. For example, in western Slavonia in the second half of May, the JNA's 5th Corps was "transformed" into the 1st Krajina Corps of the 'Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. But it only withdrew upon the arrival of the UNPROFOR in the first days of July 1992.⁶²

Balance of Forces:

The Croatian Army's Strategic Offensive Directive was drafted by the Main Staff in January 1992. It was certainly written after 19 January, for its text refers to an order on that date. The Directive laid down the fundamentals of liberation operations, the re-deployment of forces and an estimate of the balance of forces. It is logical to expect that the data for the Croatian Army were accurate, but not also those concerning the adversary. According to these data, Croatian forces had four active brigades and 60 reserve brigades with 155,772 members, 216 tanks, 127 other combat vehicles and 1,108 different artillery pieces. The JNA was estimated as having 33 brigades, of which 19 were JNA and 14 Territorial Defence, with 59,500 troops, 833 tanks, 522 armed combat vehicles, and 901 artillery pieces. The Croatian Army in eastern Slavonia had 39,018 troops, while the JNA was estimated as having 12,000. In western Slavonia, the Croatian Army had 24,098 troops, while the JNA was estimated as having 6,500. In Banovina, the Croatian Army had 29,138 troops, while the estimate for the JNA was 8,500. In Kordun, the Croatian Army had 19,660 troops, while the JNA had 5,500. In Lika, the Croatian Army had 14,820 troops while the JNA had 10,500. In northern Dalmatia, the Croatian Army had 19,600 troops while the JNA had 12,000. In southern Dalmatia, the Croatian Army had 9,378 troops, while the JNA had an estimated 4,500 troops.⁶³

According to this entirely faulty estimate, the Croatian Army everywhere had more troops, even in eastern and southern Croatia. There are accurate data for the numerical strength of the JNA in January 1992 for the forces encompassed within the 2nd Military District seated in Sarajevo. These were forces in western Slavonia, Banovina, Kordun and northern Dalmatia. With reference

⁶² ICTY: Order of 1st Krajina Corps, Regular combat report op. str. conf. no. 44-1/217 of 4 July 1992.

⁶³ SVA MORH, GSHV: GSHV Directive from 1992 for conduct of strategic offensive by Croatian Army.

to forces in eastern Slavonia, there are data from mid-November, and data from early December for southern Croatia. Based on the available documents, it is obvious that until the arrival of the UN forces in the summer of 1992, the JNA did not reduce neither its numerical strength nor deployed weaponry. Based on these data from November and December 1991 and January 1992, it may be concluded that in the war against Croatia, Serbia, via the JNA and Territorial Defence, had a minimum of 53 brigades – three of them armoured, seven mechanized, and 15 motorized and two mixed artillery brigade as back up. The numerical strength was approximately 145,059, with 1,100 tanks, 700 other armoured vehicles and approximately 1,980 artillery pieces.⁶⁴ The combat potential of the JNA Air Force and Navy was not computed in these figures, but they certainly cannot be ignored.

The International Aspect of Conceding to the Ceasefire:

The collapse of Yugoslavia accompanied by war had great repercussions not only in Europe, but even farther afield. It was the greatest security challenge ever for the European Community, which proved incapable of resolving it. Several events occurred in the latter half of 1991 which influenced the course of the war. The Peace Conference on Yugoslavia was held in The Hague and the UN Resolution of 27 September 1991 was adopted which instituted the arms embargo against Yugoslavia.⁶⁵ Both of these events significantly influenced the decisions of the warring sides to accept the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping troops in Croatia. The impetus for their deployment came from Serbia, because it expected the peacekeepers to replace the JNA and preserve their conquests.⁶⁶ Croatia, on the other hand, expected to establish control over its rebellious and occupied territories through the peacekeepers without armed conflict.⁶⁷ The prerequisite for the arrival of the peacekeeping forces was the ceasefire signed in Geneva on 23 November.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ ICTY: 1st Military District Command, Inspection of forces str. conf. no. 1614-162 of 16 Nov. 1991; ICTY: Working map of force deployment by 2nd Op. Gr. on 2 Dec. 1991; ICTY: Reference material for 5th Corps commander in Yugoslav Armed Forces Main Staff on 3 Dec. 1991; HMD-CDR: 10th Corps Command, Inspection of numerical status of units, report str. conf. no. 3/15-36 of 17 Jan. 1992; ICTY: 2nd Military District Command, Study on combat readiness of 2nd MD command HQs and units str. conf. no. 09/63-26 of 23 Jan. 1992.

⁶⁵ Anđelko Milardović, *Dokumenti o državnosti Republike Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Alineja, 1992), pp. 156-157; UN Security Council Resolution 713 of 25 Sept. 1991; Michael Libal, *Njemačka politika i jugoslavenska kriza 1991.-1992.* (Zagreb: Golden marketing/Tehnička knjiga, 2004), pp. 67-93.

⁶⁶ B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, 407-411.

⁶⁷ Report of F. Tuđman submitted to Croatian Parliament on 24 Dec. 1991. Published in: Franjo Tuđman, *Zna se*, (Zagreb: Izvršni odbor HDZ-a, 1992), pp. 187-204.

⁶⁸ A. Milardović, *Dokumenti o državnosti Republike Hrvatske*, p. 157; Geneva Agreement of 23 Nov. 1991.

Serbian Reasons for the Ceasefire:

The ceasefire, the signing of the armistice, and the decision on the deployment of UN peacekeepers came at the initiative of Serbia. The Serbian aggression conducted by means of the JNA culminated in the latter half of August 1991 when it had its greatest impact in relation to deployed forces. It established a bridgehead from northern Bosnia into western Slavonia, occupied Baranja and occupied the village of Kijevo in Sinj's hinterland. In the period from the latter half of September until 8 October, after the activation of its reserves and a portion of the Territorial Defence, it established a continuous line more-or-less everywhere, cut off Vukovar, occupied Lipik, occupied Banovina, broke out to the entrance to Zadar and cut off Dubrovnik. This was its last major strike, after the failure of its offensives and reorganization of its troops. Historian Norman Cigar believed that this occurred after the conquest of Vukovar, about which he uncritically accepted the Croatian estimates of major losses for the JNA.⁶⁹ I cannot agree with this. The conquest of Vukovar served as a condition for seeking the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces. This did not make sense with Vukovar in the hinterland of the forward line to which the JNA had advanced. Borisav Jović testified that the Serbian leadership very realistically concluded in early October that not much more could be expected from military operations by the JNA than what had been achieved up to that point. On 6 October, he wrote that he had agreed with Milošević that the incomplete Yugoslav Presidency would accept the ceasefire proposal proffered by the European Community ministers, "with the objective of liberating and de-blocking the barracks in Croatia without casualties, and to orient the army to defend already liberated territories. Regardless of what the army thinks". On the same day, this decision was in fact made by the truncated Yugoslav Presidency.⁷⁰ They attempted to secure a political blessing for what had been accomplished by the JNA at the conference in The Hague. When this did not succeed, they undertook measures to have the UN protect their territorial conquests and replace the JNA in the field so that it could be activated in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Milošević and Jović concluded that that time had come for their territorial conquests to be protected by the UN "with its peacekeeping troops until a political solution to the Yugoslav crisis" not later than 2 November 1991.⁷¹ It is therefore apparent that pure pragmatism impelled the Serbian leadership to accept the ceasefire and the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces, rather than losses in warfare up to that point.

⁶⁹ Norman Cigar, "Okončanje rata i hrvatski rat za nezavisnost: odluka u času zaustavljanja", *Erazmus* (1997), no. 20: 37-38.

⁷⁰ B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, p. 392.

⁷¹ *IBID.*, p. 406.

Croatian Reasons for the Ceasefire:

Like Serbia, Croatia had its own military and political reasons for accepting the ceasefire agreement. At the moment when, at 6:00 p.m. on 3 January 1992, the Sarajevo Ceasefire became effective, the Croatian Army only had a more favourable operative status in a single theatre of war, in western Slavonia. Even here it did not have the strength to successfully carry out the order to push the JNA from Slavonia and advance to the Sava River. Continuation of warfare implied new casualties as well. The option involving UN peacekeeping troops undergirded the – at that point – attractive idea of securing the restoration of the occupied and rebellious territories to Croatian authority without warfare and casualties. The logistics arm of the Croatian Army also opposed the war option at the time, for up to that point it had to more-or-less make do with the ammunition needed to engage in combat. But offensive operations required far more ammunition than what Croatia had at its disposal. The Sarajevo Ceasefire was in fact awaited with depleted stockpiles.

The political reason was the arms embargo and the fact that Croatia was still formally a part of the disintegrated Yugoslavia. It was clear to the Croatian leadership at the time that the question of international recognition was crucial to the survival of the state, including its further conduct of the war. An internationally recognized state had easier access to the world's centres of political power and arms dealers. This was yet another important reason for Croatia to accept the ceasefire and hope that the crisis could be resolved peacefully.

Conclusion

The assertion that the Croatian political leadership committed an error in January 1992 when, with the mediation of the United Nations, it accepted and signed the ceasefire in Sarajevo with representatives of the JNA, is rather preposterous. This assertion has been repeated in the media for years by certain retired generals of the Croatian Army who had transferred to it from the JNA. Both they and the media have the same objective, and that is to transform themselves (extras) into the protagonists of Croatia's process of independence. Their interpretations may be categorized as hindsight, in which everything that occurred during the war is considered by not the situation in the theatre of war at the time the Sarajevo Ceasefire was signed. Besides ignoring this battlefield situation, they do the same with the political conditions and the overall status of Croatia at the time. From the standpoint of a professional historian, this artificially provoked controversy serves as yet more proof that history must be interpreted on the basis of documents and not the subsequent formulations of participants.

Das Waffenstillstandsabkommen von Sarajevo – ein strategischer Fehler der kroatischen politischen Führung oder Realität?

Zusammenfassung

Das Thema dieses Artikels ist die nach dem Kroatienkrieg entstandene Kontroverse darüber, dass die kroatische politische Leitung einen Fehler machte, als sie im Januar 1992 unter Vermittlung von Vereinten Nationen ein Waffenstillstandsabkommen mit den Vertretern der Jugoslawischen Volksarmee akzeptierte und in Sarajevo unterzeichnete. Diese Meinung ging von einigen in den Ruhestand getretenen Generälen der Kroatischen Armee aus, die meinten, dass die kroatische Seite anstatt dessen den Krieg weiterführen sollte und im Laufe des Jahres 1992 den militärischen Sieg erringen und die okkupierten sowie die aufrührerischen Gebiete der Republik Kroatien befreien sollte. Da es sich um eine Spekulation handelt, die weder die damalige politische, noch die Situation auf dem Kriegsschauplatz berücksichtigt und die systematisch von einflussreichen Medien forciert wird, bemühte sich der Autor, eine Antwort darauf zu geben und zwar in einer der historischen Wissenschaft angemessenen Weise. Vom Standpunkt des professionellen Historiker aus gesehen, zeigt diese provozierte Kontroverse, dass geschichtliche Ereignisse in erster Linie auf Grund von Dokumenten interpretiert werden sollen und dass die von Teilnehmern erst später formulierten Standpunkte nur mit besonderer Vorsicht benützt werden sollen.

