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## Military and Political Aspects of the Croato-Serbian Conflict

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SINIŠA TATALOVIĆ

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb

### *Summary*

The author deals with the political and military aspects of the conflict between Croatia and Serbia. Starting from global political circumstances in which this conflict emerged and developed, he describes the political goals of the conflicting parties, their strategies and military organization as well as the stages of the war in Croatia. After this war, nothing has been the same in Croatia. Croatia has, much sooner than expected and with fewer victims, realized its political goals. Besides the international recognition and the establishment of its authority on almost entire state territory, Croatia has become a major military force. However, the war in Croatia has significantly hindered democratic processes which, in turn, has stood in the way of its taking part in the European integrational processes. Serbia is the loser of this war in every, primarily military respect. The consequence of the Serbian instigatory politics in Croatia has not only been Serbian exodus from Croatia, but the socially unenviable position in which the remaining Serbs in Croatia find themselves. By becoming proponents of Serbian global politics and failing to bring their interests in line with those of Croatia, the leadership of the seditious Croatian Serbs accepted the role of an instrument of global national politics. As Serbian national politics was losing ground and giving up on previous goals - the creation of a great national state - Serbs in Croatia became victims of this politics.

### *Introduction*

The Croato-Serbian conflict, which culminated in the war that was fought in Croatia, is specific in many ways. It is yet to be fully researched and the findings should be made widely available, particularly to those who can use the experience of this war to help prevent future conflicts. The experience of the war in Croatia might be beneficial to other countries helping them to define their defense strategies and develop their defense systems. It is on these lines that we shall discuss the basic characteristics of the Croato-Serbian conflict and war in Croatia by analyzing its four aspects: political, military-strategic, organizational and operational, on both belligerent parties.

Social changes in the former Yugoslavia, particularly the events that took place in the late sixties and early seventies, the 1974 Constitution, the democratic changes in Croatia and Slovenia, the introduction of political pluralism and the multi-party system and the new political forces in power, all this threatened the political achievements of the so called

“fraternity and unity”. Social changes in SFRY, which were directed towards democratization and national and republic independence, undermined socialism as the basis of the multinational federation. This is why dogmatic forces, especially those in the JNA<sup>1</sup> and the federal administration, felt threatened and therefore strongly opposed any democratic process in order to preserve the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a centrally organized federation, in which they could maintain their positions. This is clearly seen in what Veljko Kadijević, the then Federal Secretary of National Defense, said: “The moment when the multi-party system was introduced in Yugoslavia and the way in which it was done marked the end of Yugoslavia within its up-to-then borders. We had, as I said earlier, clearly and publicly foreseen this. The meeting of the military leadership with the leadership of the Socialist Republic of Croatia in Zagreb one month prior to the multi-party elections in Croatia provided a clear example of such forecasts. We told them straightforwardly that they - the leadership of the Socialist Republic of Croatia - would allow ustashas to come to power in Croatia. There were some reactions, but they did not get too excited”<sup>2</sup>

After the multi-party elections in Slovenia and Croatia in 1990, and particularly after the declaration of their independence in June 1991, when it became clear that there was little left of former Yugoslavia, the federal government aided by the JNA started the war, first against Slovenia, and shortly after that against Croatia. In the war against Croatia the JNA was joined by paramilitary forces formed by rebel Croatian Serbs. Even before the war started this had been announced by the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS)<sup>3</sup> at a rally at Voćin in Western Slavonia early in 1991 when he said: “If a war breaks out between the Croatian state and

<sup>1</sup>When the Yugoslav League of Communists dissolved, the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) lost the ideological grounds on which it had been built, and by the break-up of SFRY it lost both its material and geographic basis. This made its existence questionable. Since it involved 150,000 people, out of which 50% were professionals, and the majority being Serbs, Montenegrins and Yugoslavs, their existential fear can be easily understood. Many of them were prepared to engage in a war in order to preserve SFRY and keep their positions.

<sup>2</sup>Kadijević Veljko, *Moje viđenje raspada*, Politika, Beograd, 1993, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>Serbian Democratic Party was founded in Croatia in Knin on February 17, 1990. In the first democratic Croatian elections in 1990 the party won 5 seats in the Parliament, but soon withdrew from the Croatian Sabor (parliament). The party leadership encouraged Croatian Serbs not to accept the Croatian government and instead support efforts for territorial secession of “Serbian” areas from Croatia and the establishment of Serbian autonomies in Croatia (“SAO Krajina” - Knin, December 22, 1990; SAO Western Slavonia - August 13, 1991, SAO Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem - February 26, 1991), which were later called the “Republic of Serbian Krajina”.

the Serbian people, it will be a war between the Croatian state and the JNA.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1980s the strategy of silence and non-resistance to efforts to preserve the socialist centralized federal state, as advocated by the Serbian nationalist leadership, was continuously applied in Croatia. However, the process of democratization started in Croatia in the late eighties, and this was soon followed by the establishment of over fifty political parties. Most of them were constituted on national principles. In the first democratic elections, which were held between April 22 and May 17, 1990, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)<sup>5</sup> won. This party managed to fully express the basic aims and interests of the majority of Croats in Croatia and Croatian emigrants. The elections led to a new parliamentary structure with a HDZ majority. The HDZ's inauguration ceremony was charged with national feelings, which led to varied reactions both in Croatia and worldwide, among which prevailed those which suggested possible dangers involved in the practical moves of the new government. This was followed by some political moves due to which the new Croatian government experienced attacks from various sides. Political forces outside Croatia which favoured the preservation of the SFRY did not support it, and in Croatia the threats by Croatian rebel Serbs and dogmatic communists were getting more serious and overt. Their dissatisfaction was increased by the new Croatian spirit, the new free approach to history, especially World War II, and the presentation of the new Croatian identity in the media.<sup>6</sup>

### *Political goals of the belligerent parties*

#### *Serbian political goals*

In the late eighties Serbian global national policy came into open with the idea of “a great Serbian state which will realize the dream (once sacrificed for Yugoslavia) of all Serbs living together in one state. This accounts for the contradictory ideas of the Serbian state - a strong Yugoslav federation (overtly) and a great Serbia (covertly).<sup>7</sup> With this as their

<sup>4</sup>*Vjesnik* of January 21, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Croatian Democratic Union was founded in Zagreb on June 17, 1989; its program was published on November 22, 1989, and its first national convention, which took place on February 24-25, 1990 lead to different responses in Croatia and the international community. After the Convention, the leader of the Croatian Social Democratic Party, called HDZ a “party of dangerous intentions”.

<sup>6</sup>See: Tatalović Siniša, “Peaceful Solutions of Conflicts in Croatia: Case Study of Gorski Kotar”, *Peace and the Sciences*, No. 6/1996, pp. 38-39.

<sup>7</sup>Popov Nebojša (ed.), *Srpska strana rata - Trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju*, Republika, Beograd, 1996, p. 41.

starting point, Serbian nationalist politicians, the leadership of the JNA and the leadership of rebel Serbs in Croatia defined their political goals in several variants:

1. To prevent the possible independence of the Republic of Croatia, thus maintaining it in the new Yugoslav federation by making use of the existing constitutional position of Croatian Serbs (that of a constitutive nation);
2. If the first goal proves unattainable, a part of the Croatian territory following the line Karlobag-Ogulin-Karlovac-Virovitica is to be invaded with the assistance of the JNA, structured as a state and joined with other "Serbian states";
3. If the second goal proves unattainable, with the assistance of the JNA and the local Serbs the largest possible portion of the Croatian territory is to be invaded, put under the protection of the international community for as long as possible, that is, until the conditions for its annexation are fulfilled;
4. In case the third goal proves unattainable, as many Croatian Serbs as possible are to be protected, including their withdrawal from Croatia to the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus improving the local demographic situation.<sup>8</sup>

The analysis of military and political developments in the last six years shows that these goals had been formulated before they became operational and that they were realized gradually, according to the current situation on the battleground and international circumstances.

#### *Croatian political goals*

The main Croatian political goal was the establishment of an independent and sovereign Croatian state, either in the short or the long run. For the realization of this goal necessary constitutional changes were made by the passing of the new Croatian Constitution on December 22, 1990, which defines Croatia as the "national state of the Croatian nation and the state of members of other nations and minorities, who are its citizens: Serbs, Moslems, Slovenes, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews and

<sup>8</sup>Some Serbian authors discuss only one goal. So Konstantin Obradović, for example, in regard to Serbian rejection of the "Z-4" plan says: "Since the very beginning of the conflict Krajina Serbs have clearly had only one, openly proclaimed goal - secession from Croatia and integration with other parts of the Serbian people within a restored, no matter how much "reduced" Yugoslavia, or expecting this to happen, creation of their own independent state". Obradović Konstantin, "Plan 'Z-4': sadržina i i domašaj", *Međunarodna politika*, No. 1031/1995, p. 3.

others, who are guaranteed equality with citizens of Croatian nationality and the realization of ethnic rights in accordance with the democratic norms of the United Nations Organization and the free world countries.”<sup>9</sup> The establishment of the independent national state of the Croatian nation was to be realized preferably by negotiation and peacefully, but, if necessary, by other means. Croatian government was aware of the fact that immediate and full constitution of an independent and sovereign state would not be possible, which is why it put forward the proposal to form a confederal state with the other republics of former Yugoslavia, as a basis for political negotiations. However, at the same time the Croatian government started preparations for the development of armed Croatian forces in case Croatian survival and state independence is to be fought for by arms.

### *Strategies of the belligerent parties*

#### *Serbian strategy*

A detailed analysis of the war in Croatia reveals the existence of certain war strategies in both belligerent parties.

The course of the war in Croatia demonstrated that the Serbian side, which consisted of Croatian rebel Serbs, the JNA and paramilitary groups of volunteers from Serbia, applied the strategy of low and medium intensity conflict, which also included the rebellion strategy.<sup>10</sup> Low intensity conflict, which is the most common type of conflict in modern circumstances, represents a synthesis of armed and unarmed fighting, both expressed as acts of violence that can be considered as the basic feature of any war.

Due to the application of the low intensity conflict strategy, for a long time it was difficult to tell whether a real war was fought in Croatia, since it was not recognizable in its classic form and had not been declared as some political factors might have expected. Such a situation was also created because the application of the low intensity conflict strategy is based on the well-known strategic principle that means are set according to the size of the goal, which results from the interest level. When classic military strategies are applied, these means are predominantly military ones

<sup>9</sup>*The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia*, Narodne novine, No. 56/1990, p. 1237.

<sup>10</sup>This strategy was elaborated in military textbooks and rulebooks of the majority of modern armies worldwide including the JNA, and it represents one of the basic types of warfare in modern circumstances. Low intensity conflict strategy is elaborated in American military literature. For example, its detailed description can be found in the combat handbook *FM 100-20 - Low Intensity Conflict*, Headquarters Department of the Army, Washington, 1988.

and can be easily recognized. On the other hand, when low intensity conflict strategy is applied, the notion of force is wider in scope and content, thus allowing for the choice of various, primarily non-military means. The means can at one time be non-military, at another military or the combination of the two in various forms and with varied intensity.

One of the most significant elements of the Serbian strategy in the Croatian war was the instigation, organization and development of rebellion<sup>11</sup> and the assistance provided by outside factors. To instigate rebellion in a country, certain conditions should be fulfilled, such as a low educational level of the people; a low level of technological knowledge and skills, which results in fearing abrupt changes; primitive agriculture; the existence of an elite which is not willing to share power or give it up; incapability or impossibility for the government to meet the needs of the entire population, particularly some ethnic groups etc. All the above mentioned conditions were fulfilled in Croatia in the early nineties.

However, the rebellion was not started solely due to these general conditions. It was directed, it had its leadership that was trying to convince the dissatisfied people that the current government was to blame for their problems, and that it was the government that was the source of their insecurity. In order to direct the people to rebellion, the leadership of the rebellion used a set of ideas offering solutions to problems, promising a better future and justifying violence. This set of ideas was formulated in the political strategy of the Serbian Democratic Party, which, taking global goals of the Serbian national politics as its starting point, put forward specific demands to the Croatian government, from those for cultural autonomy to those for the secession of the "Republic of Serbian Krajina" from Croatia.

The rebels' chances to succeed were also influenced by the political climate in Croatia. Even when people are oversensitive and when there is an element of rebellion leadership, rebellion is not likely to succeed if the government rules the entire state territory efficiently. In Croatia, the government was initially not capable of performing all the social functions throughout the Croatian territory, primarily due to the great shift of power, not just in the legislature, but also in the administration.

The strategy and actions of rebel Serbs in Croatia covered a range of means varying from predominantly non-violent ones to an almost exclusive use of violence. First they applied methods which were legal within the existing political system and which did not emphasize overt violence. In

<sup>11</sup>The concept of rebellion implies an attempt made by an organized group to encourage people of a country or one part of the country to overthrow the current government by the use of force. The group's motives can be numerous and can vary (ethnic, social, ideological), but one of their aims is definitely to take over power using force.

their implementation the emphasis was put on the organization of the political party (SDS), with the development of armed forces being less emphasized. After that, efforts were directed to the application of violence, including arms. The purpose of this was to create an atmosphere of uncertainty, primarily through acts of violence. Rebels' aim was to create such circumstances in which an incident could instigate a sudden rebellion of the people against the Croatian government. In terms of organization, rebel parties and armed forces were gradually joined, and the top leadership of the rebellion had a two-fold role - political administration (SDS) and administration of the armed elements (officers of the JNA and Territorial Defense - TO). Mass organizations (village watches, non-political organizations) were being set up and armed surveillance of certain territories (road blocks, sentinels, patrols, rallies) was organized.

Organizationally, the goal was to create a complex political structure, which uses mass civilian organizations and armed elements to confront government forces. The ultimate goal was the establishment of the government under the supervision of the rebel party in one part of the Croatian state territory. If the war in Croatia is viewed through the development of Serbian action strategy, three stages can be seen: Stage 1 - latent or initial rebellion; Stage 2 - guerilla war; Stage 3 - mobile war.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Croatian defense strategy*

Defending its state territory, at the beginning of the war in 1991 the Republic of Croatia had not yet had a clearly defined defense strategy, but several variants of opposing the JNA and the Serbian forces in Croatia. One of these variants was a military one, which is why Croatia started to develop its police and military force at a fast pace. Fully disarmed, Croatia largely relied on its emerging police and military forces. The development of the military and the defense system led to the outline of the defense strategy, which was determined by the following factors: state policy, military strategy of the enemy and the international community.

State policy was aimed at creating an independent and sovereign state, with minimal human and material losses, and it implied a combination of diplomatic and military activities. Seeking viable variants of defense strategy within the state policy, it soon became clear that the strategy of total national defense was inappropriate for Croatia, since this defense strategy is based on an extremely high level of human engagement, afflictions of civilians and economic devastation. In 1991 Croatia entered the war with modest defense potentials, which included the police force and scanty military forces. In order to compensate for its military and technical inferior-

<sup>12</sup>See: Tatalović Siniša, "Strategija obrane i rat u Hrvatskoj", *Politička misao*, No. 4/1994, pp. 18-19.

ity, Croatia was initially forced to adopt the total national defense strategy, but it was gradually abandoned as the war progressed and replaced by the state defense strategy. This was reflected not only in the type of armament, but also in the increasing professionalism of the Croatian Army and the totally centralized decision making and management of the defense forces.

The military strategy of the enemy, being a significant factor, was most directly reflected in the Croatian defense strategy. In an attempt to preserve the SFRY, the JNA and its political partners were not in the position to apply the official defense strategy, i.e. the strategy of total national defense in the early days of war. This strategy was not suitable for internal conflicts, which required a new strategy to be developed with military potentials being suited accordingly. Defense strategy was then replaced by offense strategy, also applying the low intensity (to a lesser degree medium and high intensity) conflict strategy. The time needed for the implementation of these changes in the JNA and the Serbian side was an opportunity for the Croatian side to improve its defense positions.

The international community expressed its interest in ending the war in Croatia by sending UNPROFOR peacekeeping forces. The involvement of international factors in the war in Croatia had a strong impact on the defense strategy of the Republic of Croatia as well as the conduct of the Serbian side. By accepting the arrival of UNPROFOR on the Croatian territory, Croatian state policy expressed, in the first place, its desire to bring an end to the war and reintegrate its temporarily occupied territories as soon as possible. Such state policy was to be followed by a defense strategy. The arrival of the UNPROFOR was seen by the Serbian side as an opportunity for "freezing" the existing situation as long as possible, until favorable circumstances for the secession of these territories from the Republic of Croatia developed. Such an attitude of the opponent, supported by the inefficiency of the international community and the UNPROFOR, helped make the defense strategy of the Republic of Croatia even more active and also include, apart from political means, a military option for bringing the temporarily occupied territories back under Croatian control. Croatia continuously strengthened its military and political position and defense power both due to the pressure imposed on the Serbian side for more cooperation in negotiations and to a possible military solution of the status of the temporarily occupied territories.

## *Organization of the belligerent parties*

### *Organization of Serbian forces in Croatia*

Serbian forces in Croatia were made up of the following basic elements:

1. Party and government administration;
2. Mass civilian organizations;
3. Military forces.

1. The role of the party and government administration was to define the policy and supervise its implementation. In order for this aim to be realized, the party and government bodies, which were under its direct supervision, managed the military and mass civilian organizations. Party leadership was closely tied to outside centers of power, which provided various forms of assistance to Serbian forces on the battleground. The members of government administration on the territory supervised by rebels, were largely the most prominent members of the rebel party.

2. Mass organizations represented one of the basic instruments used by rebels in order to gain influence and supervision over the local population. For example, these organizations were used for intelligence purposes, for supplying military formations, for enlisting new recruits and the like. Generally speaking, the purpose of these organizations was to recruit as many people as possible for the rebel party. It should be noted that some of these recruits were not aware of the fact that they were supposed to get involved in the rebellion. There were basically three types of mass organizations: national organizations, special interest groups and local Serbian militia that considered themselves as part of the mass civilian organizations. Their major task was to remove the Serbian population from the supervision of the Croatian government.

3. Military forces represented an essential instrument for the realization of political goals. Serbian military forces were made up of two parts: main forces and regional forces.<sup>13</sup> Main forces consisted of well-trained and highly motivated soldiers (as well as mercenaries), organized into elite combat formations. They were supervised and managed from a center (headquarters) wherever they were needed. They originated from the for-

<sup>13</sup>Before July 1991, when the war in Croatia broke fully out, Serbian forces in Croatia had about 12,000 men. In this period, JNA forces on the territory of Croatia numbered 70,000 soldiers (15,000 in Kninski corps). As the war progressed, JNA forces were increasingly deployed in areas with Serbian absolute or relative majority, and 4 infantry brigades were deployed in the borderline area of Eastern Slavonia and Baranja. These forces consisted of 70 reconnaissance tanks, 178 medium-weight tanks and 200 artillery devices. In addition to this, there were 870 volunteers from Serbia with 30,000 volunteers being on the alert.

mer JNA and territorial defense structures. Regional forces were recruited by the local population and members of mass civilian organizations, the local militia and territorial defense. As a rule, their activity was restricted to local communities and relatively small territories. Their major task was to make sure that the civilians remain loyal to the rebellion.

After establishing a stable frontline the military of the “Republic of Serbian Krajina” had a total of 55,000 men, but it was estimated that approximately 40,000 were able to participate in a full-scale war against Croatian armed forces. Military service was organized in ground troops and air forces, which were deployed on 12,000km<sup>2</sup> of the Croatian territory and which controlled a 600 km long frontline towards Croatia and a 100km long frontline towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ground troops were organized in 5 military corps, 16 infantry brigades (each with 3000 soldiers) and 3 tank battalions. About 12,000 soldiers were deployed in eastern Slavonia, and they were organized in the Eastern Slavonian Corp whose headquarters was in Vukovar. Banijski Corps, which had 10,000 men and headquarters in Petrinja was in charge of defending Banija. The corps consisted of 3 infantry brigades which were deployed in the area of Dvor na Uni, Kostajnica and Glina. Kordunski Corps with its headquarters in Vrginmost was made up of 3 infantry brigades with a total of 9000 men. Lički Corps with its headquarters in Udbina had about 8000 people organized in 3 infantry brigades which were deployed in the area of Korenica, Lapac and Plaški. The largest corps, Kninski Corps, had 12,000 men and its headquarters was in Đevrske. Its brigades were deployed in Obrovac, Benkovac, Škabrnja and Knin.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Organization of Croatian defense*

It did not take much time for the Croatian government to realize that it could not count any longer on the territorial defense, which had been completely disarmed just before 1990 elections.<sup>15</sup> This is why no attempts were made by Croatian government to turn it into its army, but instead

<sup>14</sup>Vego, M.: “The Army of Serbian Krajina”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, No. 10/1993, pp. 438-445.

<sup>15</sup>Veljko Kadijević explained why the Territorial Defense was disarmed by words: “Territorial Defense was to be fully paralyzed in those parts of the country where it could serve as the basis for the creation of secessionist republics’ armies, or secessionist forces. In order to achieve this all territorial defense was disarmed before armed conflicts in Yugoslavia started. Apart from this, through some senior officers in the Territorial Defense we tried to keep it out of secessionist political leaderships’ control. We were partly successful in doing this, except in Slovenia. Of course, we used the territorial defense of Serbian areas in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in joint actions with the JNA”. Cf. Kadijević Veljko, *Moje videnje raspada*, Politika, Beograd, 1993, p. 94.

under current legal provisions it developed its police force, which numbered about 16,000 men in May 1990. At that time the police consisted of regular, special, border and anti-terrorist units. Special units were organized according to military principles, with military discipline and training. In cities like Zagreb and Bjelovar regular brigades were established within the police. Police forces were poorly armed, which explains the attempts to purchase large quantities of high quality weapons from available sources. Through continuous recruitment police forces soon numbered as many as 45,000 men: 21,360 in regular units, 1100 in special units and 22,900 reserves. However, these forces were insufficient for effective defense, which is why Croatia also started setting up new units called National Defense, using the existing structures of civilian defense. National Defense units were set up on April 7, 1991 in all Croatian cities, towns and villages and were assigned various tasks related to armed resistance, logistics, and since they were getting armed, they also became combat ready. The chief goal was to create armed units, which would, following changes in the legal system, become part of the armed forces. These units had their own uniforms with special insignia, and they included volunteers aged 18-35, organized in classic military formations: squads (10 men), platoons (30 men), companies (90 men), battalions (300 men) and brigades (1000 men).<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 1991 Croatia ceased enlisting Croatians in the JNA, upon which on April 12, 1991, the National Guard was founded - ZNG. It was under immediate leadership of the Ministry of Defence, and was first presented to the public on May 28, 1991.<sup>17</sup> In the early days of war, in late June 1991, Croatian Army, that is the National Guard numbered 10,000 men, while the Ministry of the Interior had 40,000 men (active and reserves). Special and anti-terrorist units had 4000 men and National Defense numbered about 90,000 men. National Guard was organized in 4 brigades with 3-4 battalions each. Each battalion had 4-5 companies with 80 men. These troops were first to confront the JNA. As the war progressed, the Croatian Army continuously grew, got stronger and better equipped and grew to 200,000 people at the time when Carafe cease-fire agreement was signed. Since then, Croatian Army, which managed to stop Serbian forces and the JNA from progressing, has undergone reorganization, has been equipped and has been reduced to a third.

<sup>16</sup>See: Javorović Božidar, *Velikosrpska najezda i obrana Hrvatske*, DEFIMI, Zagreb, 1995, p. 158.

<sup>17</sup>Need for efficient warfare lead to the new Law on Defense which was passed on June 26, 1991, which provided formal prerequisites for the establishment of the Croatian Army. This Law provided the basis for the establishment of National Guard Corps Command on July 30, the Training Center for Croatian Army Officers on September 1, the Croatian Navy on September 11, the Supreme Headquarters of the Croatian Army, and the military and territorial organization of the Croatian Army was defined in October 1991.

Croatian army recorded its first successful military actions in September 1991, when 40 barracks throughout the Republic of Croatia were blocked.<sup>18</sup> The takeover of barracks enhanced Croatia's combat readiness, which was soon reflected on the battleground. Inviting JNA officers and soldiers to join the Croatian Army in September 1991 was an important move, by means of which the Croatian Army grew even stronger. The situation on the battleground was gradually improving upon the establishment of the coalition government in September 1991, which was followed by the establishment of the Supreme Headquarters of the Croatian army and six operational zones.<sup>19</sup> By the end of 1991 the Croatian Army had been organized in 63 brigades and a large number of independent units. Each brigade numbered about 3000 men and in addition to them there were 30,000 police, out of which 5000 men took part in armed conflicts throughout Croatia. Soon after Sarajevo cease-fire agreement was signed, the Republic of Croatia decided to reduce the number of military units and the total number of soldiers. In early April 1992, when war broke out in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatian Army deployed a relatively large number of combat units made up of men originally from Bosnia-Herzegovina who had been dismissed from the Croatian Army. Assistance provided for Croatian people in Bosnia-Herzegovina also included significant financial resources and logistics.

The goal of the Croatian government was to create an army based on Israeli, American, German and French models. It was supposed to include elite units of professional soldiers, conventional land troops, troops made up of recruits doing their military service and troops recruited by reserves. Today Croatian Army has 64,700 soldiers - 22,900 professionals and 41,400 recruits.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>As a result of coordinated actions, 36 barracks were taken, with four remaining under Serbian control (Petrinja, Mirkovci, Vukovar and Karlovac). The 32nd JNA Corps based in Varaždin was forced to surrender, which was extremely significant, since this action resulted in capturing 100 tanks (largely T-55), a large number of 155mm howitzers, 10 203mm howitzers and a large number of launchers and other equipment. In these barrack takeovers, Croatian Army won a total of 230 tanks, over 400 heavy arms and huge quantities of light arms and ammunition.

<sup>19</sup>Each operation zone consisted of two or more operation sectors which were made up of several brigades and independent battalions as well as special units. At that point 24 brigades had been formed, and 10 more were being formed.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. *The Military Balance 1996-1997* (Croatia).

### *The development and stages of the war in Croatia*

#### *Stage of political and military preparations for the war in the period between April 22, 1990 and June 26, 1991*

A number of Croatian Serbs started to prepare for armed rebellion long before the first multi-party elections in Croatia. Leadership of Serbian volunteer units in Kordun, Banija and Lika was formed on May 6, 1990 with the aim to prepare armed rebellion in those three regions. Initial Serbian efforts to separate from Croatia were marked by the establishment of "Joint Municipalities of Northern Dalmatia and Lika" in Knin. One of the many signs showing that local Serbs were ready for open provocations directed to the government in Zagreb was the rally organized in Srb, Lika, on July 31, 1990, which gathered about 120,000 people. It was there that the Declaration of Serbian Autonomy within Croatia was adopted and it contained six provisions. This was also when the "Serbian National Council" was established. The Declaration denied the Republic of Croatia control of the territories with Serbian majority. Following the rally at a meeting held in Knin Serbian representatives announced a referendum on cultural economy for Serbs in Croatia. Croatian government sent police forces to stop the referendum, in response to which Serbs blocked some of the roads. This is when the JNA intervened for the first time, using two MIG-21 aeroplanes to intercept three Croatian helicopters with 15 police flying to Gračac and Knin and order them to return to base. Although it was reported that the planes intervened because the helicopters had not followed their route, it was clear that the JNA openly took the side of Croatian Serbs.<sup>21</sup> Serbian referendum was held on August 19, 1990, and its results showed that a large majority of Serbs who had taken the vote, decided on cultural autonomy as long as Yugoslavia remained a federal state, and joining Serbia if Yugoslavia became a confederal state.<sup>22</sup> By the end of August 1990, the rebellion spread to the area of Banija. Local Serbs attacked and occupied Croatian police stations in Knin, Dvor na Uni, Gračac, Benkovac, Glina and Obrovac, which was followed by the exile of non-Serbian population from these areas. Contrary to Serbian and the majority of Western reports, Croatian government was surprisingly passive and did not do much to stop Serbian actions in Kninska krajina and Banija. This might be explained by the fact that at that time Croatian Serbs were far better armed than Croatians, which provided Serbs with strategic advantage.

<sup>21</sup>Blagoje Adžić, the JNA Chief of General Staff at the time, threatened the Croatian government with war if a single Serbian life was lost. See: *Vjesnik*, August 18, 1990, p. 2

<sup>22</sup>Electoral rolls for this referendum, which was organized by the SDS, came into possession of Croatian authorities later in the war, and were in some areas the basis for taking repressive measures against Serbian population.

In autumn of 1990 there were many incidents in which Serbian forces attacked the Croatian police.<sup>23</sup> Existing conflicts and preparations for future ones were intensified after the Statute of the “Serbian Autonomous District of Krajina” was passed in Knin on December 21, 1990 and after the Croatian Constitution was passed on December 22, 1990. The situation got even worse when the resolution separating “SAO Krajina” from the Republic of Croatia was adopted in Knin on February 28, 1991. A mass rally attended by 70,000 (by some sources 200,000) Serbs from Croatia and other parts of SFRY, which was held on Petrova Gora near Karlovac on March 4, 1991, was supposed to express strong Yugoslav feelings. However, contrary to what had been planned, it was charged with Serbian nationalism.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the rally Serbian nationalists engaged in open confrontation with Serbs who advocated the preservation of Yugoslavia, thus bringing Great-Serbian plans out into the open. By declaring the area of Plitvice Serbian national property, the Serbian side managed to provoke the first major conflict with Croatian forces. In order to prevent this, the Croatian Ministry of the Interior took action on March 30, 1991. Two men were killed, and several wounded in the conflict with Serbian forces. Croatian police reestablished its station in the area, but was soon encircled by the forces of the JNA and forced to withdraw. The tension in Kninska krajina reached its peak when Serbian forces and JNA troops blocked the Croatian village Kijevo near Knin, and the conflict between Serbian forces and Croatian police in Pakrac (Western Slavonia) on April 6 resulted in the involvement of the JNA in the conflict.

Soon after that another front was opened after the killing of 12 Croatian police in Borovo selo (near Vukovar) on May 2, 1991. A large number of Serbian volunteers from Srem and Vojvodina (Serbia) got involved in the conflict in that area. After the conflict in Borovo selo, the situation in Croatia got even more complicated. In the period following that conflict the Presidency of SFRY ordered deployment of the JNA in all areas with Serbian majority in order to stop “ethnic conflicts”. This political decision allowed Serbian forces to involve in further provocations and attacks on Croatian forces.

Two days after a large majority of Croatian citizens voted for Croatian independence at the referendum held on May 18-19, 1991, Serbs in “SAO Krajina” decided to separate from Croatia. Political and organizational prerequisites for an open armed conflict were created.

<sup>23</sup>According to a report issued by the Croatian Ministry of Interior “in 1990 there were 390 explosions, 297 armed assaults, 436 criminal charges were filed against known perpetrators of criminal acts, and 80 people were held in custody. They were citizens of Serbian nationality”. Cf. *Vjesnik*, July 4, 1991, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>Retired general Dušan Pekić talked at the rally and threatened to arrest Franjo Tuđman and his government.

*Stage of intensive armed conflicts in the period between June 27, 1991 and January 2, 1992*

At this stage Serbian forces intensified their attacks on Croatian villages and cities in various areas, and several fronts were gradually formed. The frontlines were approaching major Croatian cities. As a result, Drniš fell on September 16, 1991, Hrvatska Kostajnica on September 19, and Petrinja on September 21. Many other towns like Gospić, Karlovac, Sisak, Šibenik, Zadar, Vukovar and Osijek were directly threatened. In order to strengthen their defense, Croatian forces attacked JNA barracks to get hold of substantial quantities of weapons. As a result of largely successful takeovers of JNA barracks in September 1991, Croatian forces were significantly strengthened.

The turning point of the war in Croatia was the offensive which the JNA started on October 5, 1991. This is when Western military experts believed that Croatia would be subjugated within 2 weeks. However, Croatian resistance proved to be much stronger than expected. The key factor of the Croatian resistance and further development of the Croatian Army was the four-month siege of Vukovar in Eastern Slavonia. Although Vukovar fell on November 18, 1991, Croatian defense inflicted huge losses on two elite JNA corps.<sup>25</sup> The long siege of Vukovar provided precious time for Croatian army to strengthen its defense and stop the Serbian forces and the JNA. Towards the end of 1991 the balance of powers gradually changed in favour of Croatia. Croatian Army made use of this situation by starting an offensive with the aim to win back the territory of Western Slavonia. However, due to the fact that cease-fire was signed in Sarajevo on January 1992, this action was only partly completed. At the same time, Croatian Army successfully completed the operation in the south of Croatia the purpose of which was to defend Dubrovnik.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>According to foreign sources, Croatian Army destroyed about 600 tanks and armored vehicles and about 8000 Serbian soldiers. Croatian losses were estimated to be 1800, and 2600 people were reported missing. See: Vego Milan, "The Croatian Army", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, No. 5/1993, pp. 203-210.

<sup>26</sup>Attacks on Dubrovnik did not cease after the Sarajevo cease-fire agreement and were continued until the cease-fire agreement on Dubrovnik region was reached on July 20, 1992.

*Stage of international peace efforts and limited military actions in the period between January 3, 1992 and April 30, 1995*

*Operation UNPROFOR*

Peace in Croatia was to be restored by the UN Security Council, which expressed readiness to send its troops to Croatia and deploy them in crisis areas. According to the peace plan those were “areas with Serbian majority or significant minority and where the tension between communities led to armed conflicts in recent past. As previously mentioned, special arrangements in these areas are to be of a temporary nature and should not be prejudicial to the outcome of political negotiations aimed at reaching a universal solution to the Yugoslav crisis.”<sup>27</sup> According to the UN peace plan, all areas under Serbian supervision at the time of the Carafe cease-fire were brought under UN protection.

Main provisions of the UN peace plan aimed at reaching peace in Croatia were emphasized in UN General Secretary's report of February 5, 1992. In his report he emphasizes that there are two major points in the plan: 1) “complete withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army from Croatia and demilitarization of the UNPA zones” and 2) “continued operation, on a temporary basis, of local authorities and police, but under UN supervision”.<sup>28</sup> Key elements of the peace plan for Croatia were also the following: 1) “UN forces will not withdraw until a universal political solution to the Yugoslav crisis is reached”, 2) “Arrival of peacekeeping forces is not prejudicial to the outcome of political processes - on the contrary, their goal is to stop the fighting and create circumstances for the beginning of political negotiations”, 3) “Respecting the existing local authorities and the maintenance of law and order in UNPA zones, the arrival of peace forces will not change the status quo”, 4) “In the transitional period UNPA zones will not comply with laws and institutions of the Republic of Croatia”, 5) “UN forces will protect the local people and guarantee their safety during and after UNPA demilitarization”.<sup>29</sup>

According to official data, at the very beginning of the peace operation, UNPROFOR staff included 13,240 military, 521 police and 542 civilians. Soldiers had 1100 vehicles at their disposal, police forces and civilian observers 345. There were 2 passenger and 2 transport planes, as well as 4 medium and 2 light helicopters. UN forces were armed with infantry

<sup>27</sup>Tatalović Siniša, Military Aspects of the Peacekeeping Operation in Croatia, *Croatian Political Science Review*, No. 2/1993, pp. 59-60.

<sup>28</sup>*Vjesnik*, February 6, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup>Tatalović Siniša, “Military Aspects of the Peacekeeping Operation in Croatia”, *Croatian Political Science Review*, No. 2/1993, p. 61.

weapons, armored vehicles and light tanks.<sup>30</sup> Their primary task was to ensure the implementation of the peace plan and a political solution to the crisis in the four areas under UN protection (E, W, N, S). In spite of all the efforts of the UN peace forces to provide a peaceful solution to the Croato-Serbian conflict in Croatia they failed, the exception being Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem.

#### *Operation Miljevac*

In the military action conducted on June 21, 1992, Serbian forces were moved further away from Šibenik and Vodice, and seven villages on the Miljevac plateau were liberated by the Croatian forces. Serbs suffered significant losses in this operation, primarily due to the surprise element. UN Security Council condemned this operation by issuing Resolution 762, requiring the withdrawal of Croatian forces. However, the resolution was not implemented, which is why political implications of this action were more significant than its military implications, since it tested the international community's stand on such actions.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Operation Maslenica and Action Peruča*

Croatian forces performed a limited action (under the codename "Operation Maslenica") with the aim to push the Serbian forces off key positions around Maslenica, Zemunik (airport) near Zadar and the Peruča Dam. The action started on January 22, 1993, but was stopped four days later, although all its goals had not been achieved. Croatian forces did not manage to move Serbs from the position from which they threatened Masleničko ždrilo (strait which is a vital link between Dalmatia and northern part of Croatia) and the coastal towns: Biograd, Zadar and Šibenik. Strange things happened in the course of the operation since neither side had a significant advantage. For example, Croatian tanks stopped before entering Benkovac, whereas Serbian forces for no obvious reason stopped a successful offensive on Novigrad, a small town providing control over Masleničko ždrilo. Both sides suffered relatively big losses in this operation.<sup>32</sup> Security Council and UNPROFOR responded immediately condemning this action as a one-sided act of the Croatian Army, interfering

<sup>30</sup>Siniša Tatalović, "UNPROFOR od Sarajeva do mira", *Vjesnik*, March 29, 1992, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup>For more details see: Javorović Božidar, *Velikosrpska naježda i obrana Hrvatske*, DEFIMI, Zagreb, 1995, pp. 236-238.

<sup>32</sup>According to an UNPROFOR report, Croatian losses included 60 dead and many wounded, with Serbian losses being estimated at 200 dead and many more wounded.

with their peace mission.<sup>33</sup> They required cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of the Croatian Army to the positions they had held prior to the action. However, Croatian Army not only refused to withdraw, but soon after that, on January 27-28 engaged in an operation for the liberation of the Peruća Dam and the surrounding area. Croatian attack on Maslenica and Peruća revealed a significant weakness in combat readiness and efficiency of the Serbian forces in Kninska krajina as well as the failure of UNPROFOR to stop Croatian military and police actions.

#### *Action "Medački džep" (Medak pocket)*

The action was started on September 9, 1993 by Croatian forces consisting of two Croatian Army brigades and special police units, which attacked Medački džep near Gospić, which was defended by the Medak battalion of the Lički corps. Due to the superiority of the Croatian forces, the action was completed in only five hours, and the Serbian side suffered great losses, particularly among civilians. Due to civilian casualties the UN Security Council and UNPROFOR responded immediately, accusing the Croatian forces of committing war crimes. The response of the Croatian side to these accusations can be seen in a field report which says: "One of the women (called grandmother Danica), although at a very old age, was firing from a machine gun; another woman killed herself with a hand grenade. The other three women attempted to escape through the rugged terrain of the Medak pocket. (...) During the lightning action, fight was carried on for every house which served as a stronghold of the paramilitary forces, and it is possible that some women who were engaged in the logistics, were in the fighting zone and thus got killed in the crossfire or by hand grenades."<sup>34</sup>

#### *Stage of final liberation of Croatia from May 1, 1995*

##### *Operation Flash*

In the operation "Flash", Croatian forces were supposed to liberate the occupied area of Western Slavonia between Okučani and Novska (25 km) and in the depth of 37 km to Pakrac. About 15,000 people used to live in this area, most of whom were Serbs, who had about 3000 soldiers organized according to the territorial principle within the 18th Corps of the

<sup>33</sup>See: Ekwall-Uebelhart Barbara and Raevsky Andrei, *Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*, UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Geneva, 1996, pp. 38-39.

<sup>34</sup>*Vjesnik*, November 3, 1993, quoted from: Žunec Ozren, "Hrvatska u sukobu niskog intenziteta", *Erasmus*, No. 7/1994, p. 55.

“Army of the Republic of Serbian Krajina”. The area of Western Slavonia was under the supervision of the UN peacekeeping forces which had deployed three battalions, civilian police and observers, totalling 3100 people.<sup>35</sup> This operation had been long and thoroughly prepared by the Croatian side. It was preceded by the agreement reached with the Serbian side about opening the Zagreb-Belgrade motorway.<sup>36</sup> The implementation of the agreement, which allowed the use of the motorway, enabled the Croatian side to get hold of important intelligence information on the enemy forces and prepare the psychological and propaganda aspect of the operation. After an incident that occurred on the motorway and was caused by a Croatian, local Serbs responded attacking a civilian vehicle, thus providing the Croatian side with a pretext for the attack. On the night of April 30, and May 1, 1995 Croatians concentrated their military and police forces west of Novska, east of Okučani near Nova Gradiška and north of Pakrac with 30,000 men.

After the Croatian Ministry of Defense notified the UN forces command at 2.30 a.m., at 5.30 a.m. a fierce artillery attack was launched on Serbian positions. This was followed by an attack launched by Croatian armored and mechanized units and supported by Croatian airforce along the line between Okučani and Novska and the line towards Pakrac and Jasenovac. Unprepared for defense, Serbian forces were soon demoralized and ceased to resist, which is why the Croatian forces accomplished their chief operation goals in only 24 hours: they regained control over the motorway between Novska and Nova Gradiška, liberated Jasenovac and encircled Serbian forces near Pakrac.<sup>37</sup> Continuing the operation, on May 2, 1995 Croatian forces liberated the entire area and started searching through the woody land around Pakrac for groups of Serbian fighters who refused to surrender. Establishment of Croatian civilian authorities started as early as May 3, 1995.

Data on casualties in this operation show that Croatian forces had several dozens of dead, while the Serbian side had far more casualties, particularly among civilians and that they ranged from 300 to 400 dead. Most casualties were killed under strong artillery fire of the Croatian forces and during the joint withdrawal of Serbian soldiers and civilians towards Bosnia-Herzegovina.

<sup>35</sup>Argentinean battalion was based in Daruvar, Jordanian battalion in Novska and Nepali battalion in Nova Gradiška.

<sup>36</sup>This agreement was part of an overall agreement on economic issues, which was signed by representatives of the Republic of Croatia and Croatian rebel Serbs on December 2, 1994, see: *Večernji list*, December 3, 1994, pp. 2-3.

<sup>37</sup>In the area around Pakrac 5000 civilians and about 1000 soldiers of the 18th Corps of the Krajina Army were caught in encirclement. About 7000 civilians and 2000 soldiers crossed the Sava bridges at Jasenovac and between Stara Gradiška and Bosanska Gradiška into Bosnia-Herzegovina.

UN forces did not respond to the Croatian attack, but only withdrew from their positions. Nevertheless, the response of UN followed, condemning the Croatian action. However, due to Serbian retribution on May 3-4, 1995, when rockets were launched on Zagreb, resulting in civilian casualties, the international community soon accepted the new situation condemning Serbian attacks on Zagreb.

### *Operation Storm*

Making use of the favorable military and political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, when the Western forces were outraged by Serbian occupation of the protection zones of Žepa and Srebrenica and the threats Bihać was facing due to actions of Serbian forces from “Krajina”, Croatia was engaged in intensive preparation for the liberation of the occupied areas. Encouraged by its success in Western Slavonia, the well-organized and armed Croatian Army displays its power at the military parade in Zagreb on May 30 in order to make the Serbian side accept serious political negotiations. In spite of this, the Serbian side refuses political negotiations on the status of “Krajina” within Croatia, as well as the offer made by the international community, which was contained in the “Z-4” plan.<sup>38</sup> The contents of the “Z-4” plan were strongly criticized by some Krajina high-ranking officials, one of whom says: “Not a single provision of this plan contradicts Croatian goals, which were set in the 19th century and whose achievement was drastically attempted in World War II. This is about creating an ethnically clean Croatian state by all means. This Croatian goal cannot be obstructed by the establishment of Serbian autonomy in the areas of Krajina with a population which has become scarce - both through genocide in World War II and by planned migrations in former Yugoslavia. It is unprofessional to present such an autonomy as an opportunity for sweeping authorities and rights of Serbian people”.<sup>39</sup>

When the Croatian President returned from Brijuni and the last diplomatic efforts in Geneva failed, it was clear that the decision was made to attack “Krajina”. By concentrating substantial forces around the occupied areas, Croatia aimed to create circumstances for fast penetrations deep into the enemy’s lines, crushing them and liberating the entire Krajina

<sup>38</sup>After extensive consultations this plan was devised by the ambassadors of the USA, the Russian Federation, Great Britain and France accredited to Zagreb. The plan included a high level of autonomy for Krajina Serbs. Although accepted by the Croatian side as a starting point for negotiations, Croatian negotiators felt it would allow the Serbs to have a “state within the state”. Serbian leadership in Knin refused to negotiate this plan.

<sup>39</sup>Jarčević Slobodan, “Plan Z-4 neprihvatljiv za RSK”, *Međunarodna politika*, No. 1032/1995, p. 10.

area in a relatively short period of time.<sup>40</sup> Apart from the regular Croatian Army units, additional 70,000 soldiers were mobilized for the attack as well as 50,000 reserves. A total of 200,000 members of the Croatian Army (active and reserve) made up 25 fully equipped brigades.<sup>41</sup> These forces supported by special police forces confronted Serbian forces of 37,000 soldiers from "Krajina" and about 12,000 soldiers from Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium.<sup>42</sup>

The attack on Serbian positions was launched on August 4 at 5 a.m. by fierce artillery onslaughts after the Croatian side had notified UNPROFOR one hour before. Serbian military targets along the 600 km long frontline were attacked as well as their liaison system and command centers. As soon as the operation (named "Storm") started, Croatian media broadcasted the message of the Croatian President to Serbian citizens which, among others, contained the following: "Since all efforts made by the Croatian government and the international community for a peaceful reintegration of the occupied Croatian territories have failed, including yesterday's negotiations in Geneva, Croatia is forced to undertake military and police measures for regaining control of the above mentioned territories. (...) We are appealing to Croatian citizens of Serbian nationality, who have not been actively involved in the rebellion, to stay in their homes and accept Croatian authorities without fearing for their lives or property. Their civil rights are guaranteed and elections for local self-government under the Croatian Constitution and Constitutional Law will be held under international supervision..."<sup>43</sup> Apart from this, Serbian irregulars were invited to surrender and lay down arms, being guaranteed amnesty, and Serbian leadership in Knin was invited to capitulate.

In the morning of August 4, Croatian forces made forays in 30 directions gaining control over a huge area, fully or partly encircling Serbian strongholds. Croatian airforce destroyed the enemy relay system Čelavac and commands of one corps and one brigade. During the first day of the operation units of the Croatian Army made forays of 5 to 15 kilometers.

<sup>40</sup>Although being warned by its friends that the resistance of the Serbian forces would be fierce, and that the operation was likely to succeed only if completed in a short time, the decision to attack was based on intelligence estimates that SR Yugoslavia would not get involved in the conflict. American intelligence estimated that Croatian operation would be a success only if completed within seven to ten days with estimated Croatian losses of 1000 dead and put out of action. See: Višnar, Fran, "Naše žrtve cijena su vječne slobode", *Vjesnik*, August 13, 1995, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup>Croatian forces had about 350 armored and mechanized devices, 2000 artillery pieces and 40-45 rocket systems.

<sup>42</sup>Serbian forces had about 250 armored and mechanized devices, 250 artillery pieces and 20-25 rocket systems.

<sup>43</sup>*Vjesnik*, August 5, 1995, pp. 1-2.

At the end of the first day of the operation the spokesman of the Ministry of Defense said at the press conference that 80% of all planned combat tasks had been accomplished. By creating a favorable tactical and operational basis for the continuation of combative activities, the second stage of the operation started. This stage included the introduction of new soldiers into combat, further fast advancement deep into the battlefield thus intercepting Serbian defense at all levels, from operational to tactical. The advancement of the Croatian forces on the second day of the operation was facilitated by panic and breakdown of Serbian forces. Realizing that Yugoslavia was not going to get involved in the conflict and with Bosnian Serbs being unable to join them, Serbian commanders withdrew their units from positions. They were joined by civilians, who fled these areas in huge numbers. One of the reasons for this was Croatian propaganda that was broadcasted on Serbian radio stations "Petrova gora", "Korenica" and "Knin" as "Serbian radio program", thus spreading misinformation. Knin<sup>44</sup> was liberated on the second day of the operation, which meant the end of organized Serbian resistance in the sector "South". Having entered Knin, Croatian forces were supposed to join the forces of the 5th Corps of the Bosnian Army, which they did on the same day. Unlike the fast successes in the south of "Krajina", fierce battles were fought in its northern part, where Serbian forces put up fierce resistance not allowing passage to the Croatian forces in directions Karlovac-Vojnić and Sisak-Petrinja. However, due to fierce Croatian attacks on the third and fourth day of the operation and fearing full encirclement, the Serbian forces in the area of Kordun and Banija started withdrawing towards Bosnia-Herzegovina. Some Serbian units and civilians managed to withdraw, while others failed, remaining encircled. Upon negotiations on surrender, these soldiers and civilians were allowed to leave for Serbia taking the motorway Zagreb-Belgrade.<sup>45</sup>

To the surprise of many, Croatia managed to complete the operation "Storm" in only four days, achieving all the set goals with minimal casualties. Serbian side was completely defeated, which led to an exodus unprecedented in this area. In only four days 120,000 Serbs left the area liberated by Croatian forces. The invitation of the Croatian President was accepted by only about 5000 Serbs, largely old people. The operation was followed by expressions of satisfaction on the Croatian side, but also by devastation of the liberated area through looting of the abandoned prop-

<sup>44</sup>The defense of Knin was less likely to be successful after the successfully completed operation "Summer '95", when joint HVO and Croatian forces reached the hinterland of Knin from the Bosnian side.

<sup>45</sup>Passing through some Croatian villages on their way to Serbia, the convoy of Serbian refugees was attacked and stoned by Croatian civilians, which is why the American ambassador to Croatia joined it as an act of solidarity.

erty, setting fire to houses, and a few killings of Serbian civilians.<sup>46</sup> In response to this the international community required the Croatian government to stop such activities, which are discreditable for a civilized and democratic state.

*Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium*

There was another conflict of Croatian and Serbian forces on the division line in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium, which occurred at the same time as the operation "Storm". However, on this battleground neither side launched an offensive - it was an exchange of infantry and artillery fire. Assessing the likeliness of this battleground to trigger an all-out Croato-Serbian war, the international community led by the United States took energetic steps to prevent the conflict from escalating in this area, first by negotiating a cease-fire, which was followed by the Erdut agreement<sup>47</sup>, which was, politically speaking, the first step in the process of peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium into the constitutional and legal system of the Republic of Croatia. According to the Erdut agreement, the area controlled by Serbs was to be demilitarized, and under international supervision in a two-year transitional period conditions allowing implementation of local elections in this area were to be created, which would be a prerequisite for the integration of this area into the Republic of Croatia. The first year of the UN mandate for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium has shown that the process of peaceful reintegration of this region has significantly advanced in all areas including that of security.

The letter which the Croatian government addressed to the UN Security Council on the finalization of the peaceful reintegration of the area under UN transitional administration (UNTAES)<sup>48</sup> was supported by the Council, which suggests that the process of peaceful reintegration is likely to be successfully completed by the summer of 1997. Local elections which will be held on March 16, 1997 will certainly facilitate this. As a result,

<sup>46</sup>Croatian people and the international community were regularly informed about these incidents by the Croatian Helsinki Committee and numerous international organizations for the protection of human rights operating in Croatia. These incidents were also included in several resolutions and statements made by the President of the UN Security Council.

<sup>47</sup>Erdut Agreement was signed on November 16, 1995 by Hrvoje Šarinić for the Croatian side and Milan Milanović for the Serbian side. The Agreement, including 14 items, was also signed by Thorvald Stoltenberg and Peter Galbraith.

<sup>48</sup>The text of the letter in which the Croatian governments confirms the minority rights for the Serbian community as guaranteed by the Constitution and other laws was published in *Večernji list*, January 16, 1997, p. 2.

the Republic of Croatia will be able to establish control over its entire territory reaching its internationally recognized borders. This act will represent the actual end of the six-year Croato-Serbian war on the territory of Croatia.

### *Consequences of the Croato-Serbian conflict and war in Croatia*

The consequences of the Croato-Serbian conflict and war in Croatia are manifold - they are spiritual, material and political. Every war results in casualties and human suffering. The war in Croatia was a case in point. At its early stage people were largely victims of individual or group acts of violence, but as the war progressed most casualties resulted from military actions or explosive devices and mines that had not been cleared. According to the Croatian Office for Casualties of War, in the 1991-1993 period, a total of 6900 people were killed on the Croatian side, 31.10% being civilians. There were 26,394 wounded, out of which 28.40% were civilians. As many as 14,806 people were reported missing.<sup>49</sup> Due to war operations in 1994 and 1995, the number of casualties is larger, particularly taking into account casualties on the Serbian side, for which there are yet no reliable data.

All wars are accompanied by a certain number of refugees and displaced persons. The war in Croatia was marked by a huge number of refugees and displaced persons due to the type of conflict in both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. They fled their homes due to the policy of ethnic cleansing or media generated fear and were largely directed towards their countries of origin; Croatians fled to Croatia, Serbs to Serbia. Some of them fled to other countries. At the peak of the refugee crisis, Croatia provided shelter for 240,501 people from Croatia and 248,089 people from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Upon operations "Flash" and "Storm" the majority of refugees and displaced persons found permanent residence, either by returning to their homes or by being allotted property belonging to Serbian refugees. Estimates are that, unlike Croatian refugees and displaced persons, 400,000 Serbs who fled their homes during the war in Croatia are not very likely to return to Croatia.

Modern wars are characterized by increasing material and economic damages occurring both directly, in the course of war operations, and indirectly, as their result throughout a longer period of time. The war in Croatia caused huge damages, both direct and indirect, which cannot be

<sup>49</sup>Source: Croatian Office for Victims of War, quoted from: Javorović Božidar, *Velikosrpska najezda i obrana Hrvatske*, DEFIMI, Zagreb, pp. 255-283.

fully estimated yet. By the end of 1993 accumulated war damages amounted to \$US 22 billion.<sup>50</sup>

Consequences of the war in Croatia with the longest lasting effects are political ones. After this war nothing has remained the same in Croatia. Croatia has realized its political goals earlier and with fewer casualties than the most optimistic ones expected. Apart from international recognition and control of almost its entire state territory, Croatia has built a respectable armed force and the Serbian share in its population has been reduced to 3%. However, the war in Croatia has significantly slowed down the development of democratic processes, which was reflected in the difficulties Croatia has been facing regarding its entrance to European integration processes. The Serbian side in this war is the loser in all respects. Serbian rebels in Croatia and their policy have led not only to the exodus of Serbs from Croatia, but also to putting Serbs who have remained in Croatia in a socially difficult position. Acting on orders resulting from the global Serbian policy instead of representing their own interests and coordinating them with Croatian interests, the leadership of rebel Serbs in Croatia became an instrument of global national policy. With the breakdown of Serbian national policy and the abandonment of its goal to create a large national state, Croatian Serbs became victim of that policy. Rebel Serbs became aware of its consequences and their difficult position when it was too late for any change. Serbs in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium are an exception to this, being given a second chance owing to the efforts of the international community.

<sup>50</sup>Javorović Božidar, op. cit., p. 291.