
Military Aspects of the Peacekeeping Operation in Croatia

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Summary

At the invitation of the belligerent parties, the United Nations became an active participant in efforts to end the war in Croatia. To bring peace to Croatia, the UN Security Council expressed its readiness to send its military formations to Croatia and deploy them in the crisis areas. It must be said that the withdrawal of Yugoslav Army forces from Croatian territory was especially important for the Republic of Croatia, and this is one of the key points of the plan.

The UN forces came to Croatia in two stages, with related substages. The first stage meant getting to know the lie of the land, the deployment of headquarters and logistics and planning the deployment of UN units. The second stage of the peace activities began in the first week of April, simultaneously in all the protected zones. In this stage the peace operation could no longer easily be stopped, regardless of the frequent breaches of the cease fire. The implementation of the peace operation in fact started with the third stage, which was very important for its further course. The course of the peace operation according to an advance scenario, and its length, depended on the complete and successful implementation of this third stage. It is characterized by complete insight into the operative situation, the lie of the land and constant maintenance of connections and cooperation with the belligerent parties in the sector of activities. This is a stage in which the UNPROFOR should have worked completely independently within its mandate. The fifth stage meant extending or decreasing the UNPROFOR mandate, and the sixth stage was to have been the last, the end of the peace operation.

In each of the stages that have been completely or partly implemented, UNPROFOR met with different problems. UNPROFOR members were constantly in danger of losing their lives: because of mines, sudden ambushes and kidnapping. These and other challenges to the personal safety of peace-force members were geared at creating fear and trying to slow down the peace operation. The paramilitary formations in areas under UNPROFOR protection could not be disarmed in a one-year mandate, which was shown when hostilities were renewed at the beginning of 1993 in South Sector.

There are many ways and means to resolve hostilities peacefully, including the mediation of the United Nations Organization (UN) or international regional organizations. Peacekeeping forces are one of the more important ways of preventing the escalation of massive hostilities in a certain region. After the war in Croatia in 1991 and the beginning of 1992, the engagement of peacekeeping forces was greeted with great relief.

One of the key issues in the war against Croatia was the question of how it would end. There were many forecasts, ranging from those anticipating a great Croatian victory to those that foresaw Croatian defeat in a war against, at the beginning of aggression, the technically superior Serbian forces. Time showed that, in spite of many problems, the Croatian defence managed to halt the aggression and prevent new onslaughts by the Serbian army. As the war continued the Croatian forces would certainly have gained the upper hand on the battlefield, but the liberation of all occupied Croatian territories would certainly not have ended without great struggles and sacrifice.

It is not very probable that the desire of the hostile parties in this war to crush their enemy on the battlefield will come true. Therefore the UN, at their invitation, became actively involved in creating conditions for ending the war in Croatia. The UN Security Council decided to send international armed forces into Croatia and deploy them in the crisis areas to secure peace. According to the Peace Plan, these are "areas in which the Serbs are the majority or a significant minority population and where tension among the communities has led to armed conflict in the recent past. As has already been said, the special arrangements in these areas would have a temporary character and would not prejudice the outcome of political negotiations for reaching an overall resolution of the Yugoslav crisis."¹ The Peace Plan defined the following United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAs): Eastern Slavonia, Western Slavonia and "Krajina", which includes the municipality of Beli Manastir, the area of Osijek to the east of the town of Osijek, Vukovar, some villages in the easternmost area of Vinkovci, the municipalities of Grubišno Polje, Daruvar, Pakrac, the western part of the municipalities of Nova Gradiška, the eastern part of the municipality of Novska, Kostajnica, Petrinja, Dvor na Uni, Glina, Vrginmost, Vojnić, Slunj, Titova Korenica, Donji Lapac, Gračac, Obrovac, Benkovac and Knin.² The exact boundaries of the UNPAs were established by UN advance parties after consultation with local authorities, before the deployment of the forces began.

What are the main provisions of the UN Peace Plan for ending the war in Croatia? They were especially emphasized in the Secretary General's Report of 5 February 1992. The report mentions two basic provisions: (1) "withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army from the whole of Croatia and the demilitarization of the UNPAs" and (2) "the continuation of work, on a temporary basis, of existing municipality councils and police, under UN supervision". Another essential element of the report referred to the conditions to be honoured if the world organization was to send peacekeeping forces to Croatia: (1) "UN forces will not withdraw until an overall political resolution of the Yugoslav crisis is found" (which implies the continuation of the peace conference on Yugoslavia under the auspices of the European Community), (2) "The arrival of peacekeeping forces does not prejudice the outcome of political processes - on the contrary, it is their goal to end hostilities and create conditions for the beginning of political negotiations", (3) "In acknowledgement of existing local authorities and the maintenance of law and order in the UNPAs, the arrival of peacekeeping forces will not change the *status*

¹ UN Peace Operation Plan for Yugoslavia, Provision 8, from: *Međunarodna politika*, no. 1001, p. 10.

² The areas under UN protection are listed according to the UN Peace Operation Plan for Yugoslavia, provision 8., from: *Međunarodna politika*, no. 1001, p. 10.

quod", (4) "The UNPAs will temporarily, until a solution is found, not be subject to the laws and institutions of the Republic of Croatia", (5) "UN forces will protect the local population and guarantee its safety during and after UNPA demilitarization". At a speech to the Sabor (Parliament) of the Republic of Croatia concerning the plan, Mate Granić, vice-president of the Croatian government, said the following: "Considering conditions at that time (before the Republic of Croatia had been recognized, S.T.), I think the plan expressed in great measure the Republic of Croatia's desire for the Yugoslav Army to definitely withdraw from Croatian territory, for all irregular, volunteer and paramilitary formations that had come to Croatia during the war to depart, and the units of the so-called Serbian territorial defence to be demobilized and disarmed. Right from the start we were dissatisfied with formulations about the local police force, but we must understand that the peacekeeping forces are coming to establish a cessation of hostilities, bring peace and protect human rights, not to solve political problems".³ This attitude shows that a lot about the peace plan was unclear.

It must be admitted that Yugoslav Army withdrawal from Croatian territory was especially important for the Republic of Croatia (this was one of the key provisions of the plan) for three reasons at least. First, because this indirectly acknowledged the republican borders (withdrawal was to be into Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro). Second, its withdrawal automatically meant the liberation of areas to which peacekeeping forces were not to come (the municipalities of Dubrovnik, Sinj, Drniš, Biograd, Zadar). According to the peace plan "any YA unit in other parts of Croatia will be transferred into places outside that republic ... All Serbian territorial, para-military, irregular and volunteer units (except those that are to be disbanded and demobilized in the UNPAs) will in a similar manner withdraw from Croatia. This withdrawal will be verified by UN military observers".⁴ And third, the withdrawal from Croatia of the Yugoslav Army and all the newly-arrived armed volunteer units and the demobilization of the local territorial defence was to destroy the foundations on which local Serbian leaders built their rule. Unfortunately, in the implementation of the peacekeeping operation in 1992 and the beginning of 1993 this did not happen.

Besides the demobilization of local forces and the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army, the areas under UN protection were to have been demilitarized. There are two kinds of demilitarization: complete⁵ and partial⁶, but the UN peace plan for

³ Quotation from: Cvrtila Vlatko, "Kome će kacige sačuvati vlast" (Whose power will the helmets preserve), *Slobodna Hrvatska*, 21 February 1992, p. 4.

⁴ According to the UN Peace Operation Plan for Yugoslavia, provision 18, quoted from: *Medunarodna politika*, no. 1001, p. 11.

⁵ Complete demilitarization calls for the complete destruction of existing military facilities and no new military construction as long as an area is considered demilitarized. It prohibits any armed forces in the area, except a police force necessary for maintaining internal law and order. No military education is allowed in a demilitarized area, no military aircraft can fly over it, nor are any other military activities allowed.

⁶ Partial demilitarization prohibits new military construction and armed forces are limited (their number and deployment are established by international treaty). In partly demilitarized areas the members of armed forces in most cases retain only hand weapons, and all heavy weaponry is placed in special warehouses under the supervision of international or some other forces (not under the supervision of the forces the weapons belong to).

Yugoslavia did not specify which kind of demilitarization would be implemented. Some elements, however, allow us to conclude that demilitarization was to be partial, because the plan called for the withdrawal of armed forces and their demobilization, not for the destruction of military facilities and fortifications (which were used by the UN forces to stay in).

Avoiding any decision about the final solution, the world organization perceived demilitarization as a process to end hostilities and effect Yugoslav Army withdrawal from the territory of the Republic of Croatia. This did not mean that those areas would remain permanently demilitarized, which would be unfavourable for Croatia because they are its frontiers and strategically important for its defence, and places where it should have military forces.

According to official data, at the beginning of the peacekeeping operation the United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) included a total of 13.240 military personnel, 521 police and 542 civilian employees. The military had 1.100 vehicles at their disposal, the police force and civilian observers 345 vehicles. UNPROFOR also had 2 passenger and 2 transport aircraft, 4 medium and 2 light helicopters. The UN forces had infantry weapons, armoured vehicles and light tanks.⁷ Their basic task was to ensure in the four areas under UN protection (E, W, N, S) the implementation of the peace plan and a political resolution of the crisis. The UNPROFOR headquarters were in Sarajevo. General Satish Nambiar of India was appointed commander-in-chief, General Philip Morillon of France his second-in-command, Brigadier General Louis McKenzie of Canada was chief-of-staff, and Cedrick Thornberry of Ireland was director of the civilian part of the operation. Colonel John Wilson of Australia was head of the military observers, Frederick Eckhardt was the mission's spokesman and Dimitrios Suros of Greece was the commander-in-chief's aide for administrative affairs. After one year most of these officials for various reasons relinquished their positions to others.

The operation engaged people from 29 UN member states. The peacekeeping forces comprised 12 infantry battalions, one each from Argentina, Canada, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Denmark, France, Jordan, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Poland and Russia. Only Belgium and Luxembourg formed a joint battalion of mixed national composition.

Canada provided an engineer battalion, Finland a construction battalion, a Dutch battalion was in charge of signals, Norwegian units controlled traffic. A logistics battalion came from France, Great Britain sent a field hospital, the headquarters were protected by a company from Sweden. UNPROFOR's main logistics supply base was to have been in Banja Luka. The sector commands were in Zagreb, on Pleso Airport, and in Belgrade, in the Federal Executive Council building.

The UN police force was to ensure law and order in the protected areas together with the local police. Civilian observers had the task of supervising the return of displaced persons and refugees and protecting human rights in areas under UN protection.

⁷ Siniša Tatalović, "UNPROFOR od Sarajeva do mira", (UNPROFOR from Sarajevo to peace), *Vjesnik*, 29 March 1992, p. 11.

The three UNPAs were divided into four zones. The first E (east) zone - eastern Slavonia; the second W (west) zone - western Slavonia; the third N (north) zone - so-called northern Krajina and the fourth S (south) zone - so-called southern Krajina. Their commands were located in Dalj, Daruvar, Topusko and Knin. Each zone had one brigade composed of three infantry battalions. The battalions were ethnically homogeneous and divided into companies and platoons. Control points were set up in all the zones under UN protection to control traffic and people entering and exiting the zone, and within the zones themselves. Local police, whose ethnic composition should have corresponded with the ethnic composition of the population as shown by the 1991 census, were to have worked together with the UN police. Most troops came to the region called Krajina, battalions from France, Denmark, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Kenya and Nepal. The French were deployed in the region of Knin and in the Zadar hinterland, although they had wanted to come to the Baranja area. Battalions from Canada, Jordan, Argentina and Nepal were deployed in western Slavonia, battalions from Belgium/Luxembourg and Russia in eastern Slavonia.

All these battalions were ethnically homogeneous. For example, the Argentinean battalion comprised only Argentineans and covered a particular area. This did not mean, however, that the Argentinean member of the UNPROFOR command could not be posted to a completely different zone, to a completely different area under UN protection. He could have commanded a zone where there were no Argentinean units, at all. The command was thus multinational, the battalions uni-national. The battalions were divided into companies, the companies into platoons, so that a certain part of the crisis area was covered by units of one participant UN state.

All the infantry battalions were from countries with a relatively long military tradition. The Russian battalion comprised the most elite paratrooper units of the former Soviet army, whose combat readiness had been tested in the Afghanistan war. The Nepalese are traditionally good soldiers and members of the Gurkha tribe have for years been recruited for special British units. They are trained to fight under exceptionally harsh conditions and in rugged mountain terrain. The Jordanese and Kenyan armies are modelled on the British army and until gaining independence all their military training was supervised by British military experts. They retained this tradition. Members of the West-European forces are in most cases professional soldiers with military training according to NATO standards.

All the UN troops were under orders from the headquarters in Sarajevo and New York. They did not come to the UNPAs as representatives of their countries nor were they to act as such, as people often thought. Therefore, any fear that a certain group within the UNPROFOR would act on their own was unfounded, although there were individual cases that demonstrated the opposite. The UN forces were not allowed to act to the detriment of either side in the conflict.

The decision to locate UNPROFOR Headquarters in Sarajevo and the logistics base in Banja Luka indicated that the peacekeeping forces could very quickly and easily be transformed into protection forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This happened in April 1992, but it did not stop the escalation of bloody war.

Roughly speaking, the UN operation in Croatia was planned in six phases with the corresponding subphases.⁸ The first phase covered investigating and

⁸ Siniša Tatalović, "Šest ključnih faza operacije UNPROFOR" (Six key phases in the UNPROFOR operation), *Vjesnik*, 5. April 1992, p. 10.

reconnoitering the terrain, deploying the commands and logistics and planning the deployment of UN troops. This meant organizing command on the local and regional (state) levels and organizing the UNPROFOR headquarters in Sarajevo. In this phase the localities in which the UN troops were to stay were cleared of mines. This phase, or prephase, included the peace mission's political and operative-administrative preparations. It was the most critical phase, because the launching itself of the peacekeeping mission depended on it.

The second phase of the peacekeeping operation began in the first week of April 1992, simultaneously in all the protected zones. This means that, starting from 5 April, four battalions arrived each week, one to each of the four zones. All the forces were to have been deployed by 25 April. However, this did not happen and the whole operation was several days late, which caused initial unease among the Croatian public. In this phase it would have been difficult to stop the peacekeeping operation, regardless of the frequent breaches of the cease-fire. As this was still a preparatory phase, UNPROFOR did not undertake any specific activities in the field. The civilian population continued to be killed and wounded on the temporarily occupied areas of Croatia and a picture of UNPROFOR inefficiency began to be formed. In this phase of the peacekeeping operation the political leaderships of each of the hostile parties tried to win for themselves a better position than that held by their enemy. They both tried to show themselves in as good a light as possible to the UNPROFOR representatives and tried to discredit the enemy, trying to gain the initial emotional bias of the peacekeeping forces. Because of the destroyed towns and villages and hundreds of thousands of outcasts, which the UNPROFOR members saw every day, especially after the beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia had an important advantage in this respect.

The operative implementation of the peacekeeping operation began with the third phase, which was very important for its further course. Its complete and successful execution governed not only the course of the peacekeeping operation according to an advance scenario, but also its length. The most important task in this phase was to discover, in cooperation with the parties in the conflict, the critical points and areas susceptible to excesses, diversions, terrorism and even a renewal of hostilities. It was important to concentrate greater peacekeeping forces on these points and areas and accelerate the implementation of their mandate. In this phase the peacekeeping troops adapted to the area in which they had been deployed. They had come for the first time into a completely unknown region and a certain amount of time was necessary for them to adapt to the situation in the field, the climate, population and customs. To a certain extent their motivation to carry out the tasks set before them depended on their successful adaptation. In this phase UNPROFOR was expected to achieve the first results. They were to clear the mine fields, open up communications in the UNPAs, reduce breaches of the cease-fire as much as possible, or completely eliminate them, and thus create the basic preconditions for the displaced and banished to return to their homes. Unfortunately, little of this has been achieved in the year-long peace operation.⁹

⁹ This can be seen from the statement made by the UNPROFOR commander on leaving that position. He said that after UNPROFOR's year-long stay in Croatia the situation was to a certain extent worse than it had been before the peacekeeping forces had arrived. From: *Vjesnik*, 22 February 1993.

The fourth phase of the peacekeeping operation should have started after all the obstacles on any level had been removed that could hinder the successful implementation of the peace mission. It would have been characterized by complete insight into the operative situation and constant communication and cooperation with the confronted parties within the zone or sector of responsibility. In this phase UNPROFOR was to have acted completely independently within its mandate, according to an organization approved by the Security Council and elaborated in detail by the peace mission's commander-in-chief. He was to establish the work regime of UNPROFOR commands, the rotation and rest of the troops and many other questions. UNPROFOR was now to have started to function as an independent autonomous organization capable of eliminating all external (negative) influences. In this phase of the peacekeeping operation various developments could have been expected, from the optimistic one that everything would run according to earlier agreements of both sides in the conflict and UNPROFOR, to the pessimistic in which not only breaches of the cease-fire were possible, but a wider renewal of hostilities. There was fear that an unfavourable (apocalyptic) course of development in this phase might result from long-lasting and unproductive political negotiations which would exhaust the patience of the soldiers and the belief that the crisis could be peacefully resolved. Unfortunately, greatly aided by events in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this is exactly what happened.

In that phase, besides demilitarization of the areas under UN protection, there should have been a mass return of refugees and displaced people into their homes and the establishment of a legal order guaranteeing maximum protection of civil and human rights, especially those of members of minority ethnic communities in those areas. The fifth phase of the peacekeeping operation depended on the success of the fourth.

The fifth phase meant the expansion or diminishment of the UNPROFOR mandate. If the results of the preceding phase were modest and the existing mandate difficult to realize, the UN Security Council would expand the UNPROFOR mandate and increase the number of troops. The number of troops were increased to 25.000 because of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the UNPROFOR mandate was temporarily expanded after the renewal of hostilities in the Zadar hinterland.¹⁰

The sixth phase was to have been the last and was conceived as the concluding part of the peacekeeping operation. There were various, more or less successful, ways in which the peacekeeping operation in former Yugoslavia could end. The most successful end would be for its activities to enable political dialogue and diplomatic procedures between the hostile parties, which would have brought to a political resolution of the problem and the establishment of a lasting and stable peace. The worst, but also possible, end of the peace mission would be if UNPROFOR, because of a badly planned or implemented mandate, became part of the war instead of a force for ending it, and thus additionally complicated and worsened the situation. Today another possibility has opened up. The peacekeeping mission will end if the Republic of Croatia revokes agreement for further UNPROFOR presence on its territory, if it estimates that UNPROFOR

¹⁰ This was done by Security Council Resolution 803. Resolution 815 prolonged the UNPROFOR mandate by three months to allow the continuation of political negotiations.

activities are not in its interest and it can solve existing problems by itself. This step would certainly result in a negative international attitude and would probably produce undesired consequences for Croatia.

If the peacekeeping operation ends in an abrupt and unplanned manner, regardless of the possible reason, the sixth phase will be the gradual and planned withdrawal of UNPROFOR.

In each of the phases that have already been completely or partially implemented UNPROFOR was confronted with different problems. The personal safety of UNPROFOR members was constantly threatened by mines, unexpected ambushes, cross-fire in cases of conflict, terrorist activities, threats and abduction. These and other threats to the personal safety of peacekeeping force members had the purpose of generating fear and slowing down the peacekeeping operation. The problem of disarming paramilitary formations in the UNPAs could not be solved in a one-year mandate, which was demonstrated by the renewal of hostilities in the Southern Sector at the beginning of 1993. This was to have been expected because experience, from Lebanon for example, shows this problem to be almost insoluble even with the support of local political elites. To disarm the paramilitary units and the armed Serbian population will be one of the most difficult problems facing UNPROFOR in case of a new extended mandate.

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Fig. 1 PEACEKEEPING FORCES ORGANIZATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

