

The Overall Military and Political Situation After the Sarajevo Ceasefire Agreement

On January 3rd 1992 and the Sarajevo Ceasefire Plan⁴⁵ the war in Croatia ended and the UN forces (UNPROFOR)⁴⁶ deployment was agreed upon. At the very beginning of their commitment, in four UN protected zones (UNPA East, West, North and South)⁴⁷ – Serbia and Montenegro, the JNA and local Serbs started another war of aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina⁴⁸, so the UN mandate was extended to the new warring zone⁴⁹.

Clouded by the latest wars' more fierce and more dangerous manner, an uncertain ceasefire was holding in Croatia. The sovereign Croatian state was slowly constituting itself, the new parliamentary and democratic society was forming, the economy was transforming itself from a planned to a market one, the state gained its international attributes⁵⁰, and renewed its economic and financial strength. At the same time Serb artillery from: Serbia proper, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the occupied territories of Croatia, continued to shell Croatian cities while Serb rebels evicted and/or killed the remaining Croats⁵¹ on the occupied territories. UN deployment had not prevented Serb forces from continuing to expel the non-Serb population and the continuous shelling of Croatian cities. It became clear that UNPROFOR did not have the mandate, intent or manpower to be of any efficacy; the least of which was the integration of the occupied territories back into the Croatian state. Ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs and efforts to constitute the Serb para-state were in a full swing on the occupied territories. There was two-fold development: Croatia insisted on UN mandate implementation⁵², the recognition of its full sovereignty and the return of all national territories under its constitutional and legal system – while rebel Serbs, fully supported by Belgrade, tried to transform the occupied

territory into a “sovereign state” which would, after its unification with the Republika Srpska of Bosnia be annexed to the “mother-state of Serbia”⁵³.

That artificial “state”, the so-called Republika Srpska Krajina (RSK) blocked the Croatian state’s critical needs – its communica-



Picture 2: Military operation “Miljevački Plato”

tion with southern Croatia, water, electricity and oil supplies, the return of the refugees and the reconstruction of the country. Croatia was forced, her diplomatic efforts abiding (which at first was misunderstood and repelled by the international community)⁵⁴ to undertake small-scale military operations on the Miljevac Plateau⁵⁵, Maslenica⁵⁶ and the Peruča dam⁵⁷. While the state’s administration, diplomacy, economy, military and police were formed, and under economic pressure and an arms embargo, Croatia had with difficulties approached its goal – full sovereignty and its national territories’ liberation. Croatia was faced with Serb terror and without leniency, which during the Maslenica operation was felt by the UN forces. Serbs had forcibly entered ammunition depots and took heavy artillery that had been locked away⁵⁸. Croatia had to combine diplomatic and military means



Picture 3: Military operation “Maslenica”

and use patient and wise political and diplomatic steps to regain the confidence of the international community: the EU, UN, OESS⁵⁹ and choose when it would undertake military actions. In such a way Croatia came closer to its goal. By never publicly admitting it's strategy, which Serb rebels ironically called “a mice bite strategy,”⁶⁰ Croatia made its strategic, economic, internal and external position stronger. Undertaking limited military/police actions in the so-called “Pink Zones” which the UN itself recognized as unquestionable parts of Croatia's territory⁶¹, the areas important for communication and power supply were returned under its sovereignty. At the same time, Serb artillery and rocket

threats were pushed away from Croat civilian targets, weakening the strategy of the Serbs⁶². Security was returned to larger cities along the coast and to Croatia's interior which up until that time was threatened by even smaller calibre enemy artillery.

The unification of the two Serbian "states" and "armies" – the Republika Srpska army and the army of the Serbian Republic of Krajina and the constant military and logistical support from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia⁶³ – posed a great political and military threat.

Control of Croatia's borders and stopping rebel Serb troop reinforcements from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal



Picture 4: "Peruća Dam" military operation

Republic of Yugoslavia, was imperative for Croatia. The UNPROFOR mandate sub-divided into three separate mandates: one for Croatia, one for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia⁶⁴ was also vital for Croatia. The signing of the Erdut Agreement⁶⁵ and its implementation⁶⁶, the vivid activities of international negotiators for the former Yugoslavia (Vance/Owen/Stoltenberg⁶⁷), a number of meetings that followed in Geneva, Vienna, London, New York, Tuđman's peace proposal on September 22nd 1993 as disclosed in the UN⁶⁸ and the passing of the 871 UN Resolution in 1993 – all mark Croatia's vivid political and diplomatic activities toward both

Serb rebels, international mediators and world powers in the year of 1993. In that year, several UN Resolutions unequivocally confirmed Croatia's sovereignty on its entire territory. In that year as well some limited but important military victories had been achieved which showed the growth and the ability of the Croatian armed forces to (combined with political means) realize Croatian national interests. The Republic of Croatia has shown decisiveness to persevere in its sovereign and democratic defence principles; principles Serb rebels and the FRY (Serbia and Montenegro) questioned.

