

AGGRESSION OF THE YUGOSLAV PEOPLE'S ARMY ON THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA 1990-1992

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After the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) entered into a long political and economic crisis. The period saw increased Greater-Serbian nationalism directed against a state whose federal framework had been based on its 1974 Constitution. The engagement of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) in the resolution of the crisis showed that Greater-Serbian ideas deeply penetrated that institution. Serbs composed the largest share of the members of the JNA and for years it promoted an image of itself as the last defender of Tito's heritage. The JNA became "an important political factor" and a shield protecting the country's socialist system. It could not remain a peaceful observer of political changes in the SFRY.¹

The JNA, together with Territorial Defense forces (TO), constituted the armed forces of the SFRY.² The TO had been an organization of each of the SFRY's constituent republics. It had less arms than the JNA and had been designed primarily to control territory.³ The JNA and TO had been created to be fully equal and in war-time circumstances they had to complement each other in accordance with the national military strategy of "total national resistance." Like the JNA which came under the competency of the SFRY

Note: All documents, unless noted otherwise, are in the possession of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia.

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¹ The special status of the Yugoslav Army, known as the JNA since 1951, had stemmed from the Second World War. Its commander Josip Broz Tito had been Yugoslavia's most important political leader. After the War, "the special status of JNA had initially been measured by its the special bonds with [Tito], which had been continuously supplemented by gaining new areas of exclusiveness. Its revolutionary pedigree had been supplemented by its role as the guard of the purity of the idea of socialism and by its achievements. Its monopoly over the defence of the country against foreign aggression had been gradually extended, but had also been redirected to the internal defence of the party (ideological) values and aims of the order." Miroslav Hadžić, "Armijaska upotreba trauma," in *Srpska strana rata* (Beograd: Republika, 1996), p. 562.

² *Strategija općenarodne obrane i društvene samozaštite SFRJ* (Beograd: Savezni sekretarijat za narodnu obranu (in further text: SSNO), 1987), pp. 54-56.

³ *Strategija oružane borbe* (Beograd: SSNO, 1983), pp. 69, 109-110.

Presidency, in peace-time the TO came under the competency of republican and provincial leaderships which gained additional influence after Tito's death.⁴

In the mid-1980s, a new reorganisation of the JNA had been initiated under the "Jedinstvo" (Unity) Plan. With respect to land forces, the Plan dissolved the JNA's six armies and one separate corps which had oversight of various territories which, except for Croatia and Serbia, had been roughly equivalent to that of the republics. The Plan replaced them with military districts composed of corps. The reorganisation resulted in three military districts as well as a naval district and the Air Force (with anti-aircraft defense forces). The military leadership preceded their long-term goal to reorganise the JNA by convincing various federal bodies that establishing military district commands covering two or three republics would not deprive the republics and provinces of their rights and obligations in the country's defense and would allow the JNA to centralise its affairs in war- and peacetimes. The SFRY Presidency accepted the JNA's proposal as a result of which republican and provincial TO commands would in war-time become subordinate to military district commands while TO units would fall under control of corps.⁵

On 25 December 1998, the 5th Military District Command based in Zagreb began its operations under its peace-time structure (in times of war, the District would be known as the Command of the Northwest District). The District covered Slovenia, northwest Croatia, a part of Istria, Gorski Kotar, Lika, Kordun and Banovina. In 1988, the JNA established four corps in the District. Two of them, the 14th Corps with its headquarters in Ljubljana and the 31st Corps based in Maribor, had been located in Slovenia. The northern part of Istria and the Croatian Littoral (Hrvatsko Primorje) came under the oversight of the 13th Corps based in Rijeka. Northwestern Croatia came under the competence of the 32nd Corps whose headquarters had been located in Varaždin. A large part of Kordun came under the competence of the 6th Proletarian Infantry Division based in Karlovac, while Zagreb and its surrounding area constituted a special Command for the defense of the city of Zagreb.

The 5th Military District received air support from the 5th Corps of the Air Force and its anti-aircraft defense based in Zagreb. The 1st Military District and the Naval District divided the remainder of Croatia between them. The Belgrade-based 1st Military District covered Slavonia through its 17th Corps based in Tuzla. The new Naval District with its command in Split retained

⁴ Branko Mamula, *Slučaj Jugoslavija* (Podgorica: CID, 2000), pp. 49, 55.

⁵ *Razvoj oružanih snaga SFRJ 1945-1985*, volume 7/I, *Savezni sekretarijat za narodnu odbranu* (Beograd: VINC, 1990), pp. 375-376; B. Mamula, *Slučaj Jugoslavija*, pp. 59-68. The JNA's reorganisation of JNA had been followed by intensive preparation for war by its highest-ranking officers through the command-staff combat exercise "Romanija" 1987-1990 (which had been based on a scenario in which NATO attacked Yugoslavia). Davor Domazet-Lošo, *Hrvatska i veliko ratište* (Zagreb: Udruga sv. Jurja, 2002), pp. 56-61.

most of the prior structure and fleet, but contained a novelty in having attached to it the newly established 9th Corps. As a result, the Naval District had oversight of the Adriatic coast and part of northern Dalmatia which came under the zone of operations of the 9th Corps based in Knin. The 5th Naval Sector based in Pula had responsibility for the northern part, the 8th Naval Sector based in Šibenik had responsibility for the central part, and 9th Naval Sector based in Kumbor in Boka Kotorska had responsibility for the southern part of the Adriatic Coast.⁶

Major changes on the world's political scene following the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the end of the bipolar division of the world opened the door to democratic changes in the SFRY, especially in its western part. The parties that emerged on the political scene included the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) which won the first multiparty elections in the Socialist Republic of Croatia in April 1990. Like Slovenia, Croatia sought to transform Yugoslavia into a confederate state, which provoked strong opposition in the eastern part of the SFRY where Communists remained in power.⁷

The HDZ's electoral victory proved to be the signal for federal armed forces to interfere with Croatia's moves towards sovereignty. On 22 May 1990, only a few days before HDZ took power in Croatia, the JNA took control of the TO's weapons in Croatia and removed them to JNA depots.⁸ This occurred pursuant to an order issued by the Chief of the General Headquarters of the SFRY Armed Forces on 14th May 1990 "for the safe storage and safeguarding of the TO's weapons and ammunition."⁹ General Veljko Kadijević justified the action by claiming that control of the weapons came under the exclusive prerogatives of the JNA, and not of the republics that had no rights to them. He reassured the republics by saying that the possibility existed of returning the weapons if "good protective" conditions could be provided.¹⁰ Although a portion of local municipalities took steps to put such conditions into place, the JNA never returned the arms.¹¹

⁶ SSNO, Generalštab JNA, I. Uprava, DT. br. 374-184/87 of 10 November 1988, Naređenje; Komanda 5. armije, DT br. 7-1 of 23 January 1989., Izvještaj o borbenoj gotovosti za 1988. godinu; SSNO, Generalštab JNA, I. Uprava, DT. br. 68-1 of 16 December 1986, Naređenje; SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, I Uprava, SP. br. 532-1 of 14 March 1989, "Dogradnja i razvoj rukovođenja i komandovanja u oružanim snagama," "Ratna mornarica," *Razvoj oružanih snaga SFRJ 1945.-1985.* (Beograd: 1988); *Problemi oružane borbe na JPV u početnom i narednom periodu rata* (1987), pp. 263.

⁷ "Reforma i višestranački sistem," *Narodna armija* (Beograd), 24 May 1990, p. 8; Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1999), pp. 775-777.

⁸ Komanda 5. VO, Str. pov. br. 9/75-180 of 22 May 1990, Izvještaj o realizaciji zadataka vezanih za preuzimanje naoružanja i municije TO. The Report is stored at the archive of the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia.

⁹ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, Str. pov. br. 19-1 of 14 May 1990., Naređenje. Published in Davor Marijan, *Smrt oklopne brigade* (Zagreb-Sarajevo: Naklada ZORO, 2002), pp. 246-248.

¹⁰ B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, pp. 146-147.

¹¹ Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo obrane, Klasa 213-01/90-01/01, Ur. br. SP. 512-02-04-90-12 of 25 10. 1990., Zahtjev za vraćanje naoružanja i municije u skladišta TO DPZ.

Organisational and structural changes in the 1st and 5th Military Districts as well as in the Naval District followed the seizure of the TO's weapons. In the 1st Military District, the JNA reclassified the 10th Motorised Brigade in Mostar and the 329th Armoured Brigade in Banja Luka from class "B" to class "A" status.¹² The Mostar Brigade contained two armoured battalions. In the Naval District, the "B" class 221st Motorised Brigade in Knin similarly went through restructuring, receiving an "A" class armoured and mechanised battalion.¹³

But the most important changes occurred in the 5th Military District. In late June 1990, the JNA dissolved the 6th Proletarian Infantry Division and the Command of the defense of the city of Zagreb. A wider Zagreb area including Kordun and Banovina became a part of the newly established 10th Corps based in Zagreb. The establishment of the 10th Corps had not been foreseen in the "Unity 2 and 3" Plans.¹⁴ The new Corps received units from the 13th and 32nd Corps as well as from the Command of the 5th Military District. With the creation of the 10th Corps, the JNA effectively separated itself from the TO of the city of Zagreb.

In addition, in the 5th Military District the JNA awarded class "A" status to the 265th Mechanised Brigade in Bjelovar and Koprivnica, the 13th Proletarian Motorised Brigade in Rijeka and Ilirska Bistrica, the 1st Armoured Brigade in Vrhnika (Slovenia), the 580th Composite Artillery Brigade in Karlovac, and the 288th Composite Counter-Armour Artillery Brigade in Virovitica and Križevci. With these changes, the reorganised units gained better fire and strike power as well as better off-road mobility.¹⁵ Developments that followed would show that, until the outbreak of open conflict in the summer of 1991, the majority of these units would participate in the creation of what JNA propaganda called "buffer zones" which the JNA used to obstruct the work of the legal bodies of Croatia's Interior Ministry.

The reclassification of certain units in the 5th Military District as a "A" class ones represented an attempt to surmount the JNA's dependence on manpower in areas where Croats constituted a majority of the population. Recruits from other parts of Yugoslavia manned these units. The preference for using armoured and mechanised compositions in the District had been

¹² "A" class units consisted of those which had an effectiveness rate of 60% to 100%, "B" class of 15% to 60% and "R" class of up to 15%. Such rates had been based on the wartime structure of the units. The personnel base of "A" class units consisted of soldiers providing regular military service. According to Yugoslav doctrine, such units could quickly reach combat formation and be ready for use.

¹³ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, I Uprava, Br. 1487-171/89 of 15 May 1990, Naređenje.

¹⁴ Komanda 5. vojne oblasti, DT Br. 2-14 of 24 January 1991, Izvještaj o realizaciji zadataka iz plana "JEDINSTVO-2 i 3", u 1990. godini.

¹⁵ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, I Uprava, Br. 1487-171/89 of 15 May 1990., Naređenje; Komanda 5. vojne oblasti, DT Br. 2-14 of 24 January 1991, Izvještaj o realizaciji zadataka iz plana "JEDINSTVO-2 i 3", u 1990. godini.

in keeping with the beneficial results such units brought to the JNA in its suppression of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in the early and late 1980s.¹⁶

Apart from the above changes, the JNA initiated the preparation of new plans concerning procedures in states of emergency. Yugoslav defense policy defined a state of emergency as a threat to the political and government system presented by joint activities of internal and external enemies.¹⁷ Such threats formed the basis for the imposition of a state of emergency which than had to be consented to by the republics and the SFRY Presidency. In the late 1980s, the JNA unsuccessfully sought to change these procedures to provide for centralised assessment and decision making concerning the elimination of state of emergency. According to the JNA, this should have been an exclusive power of the SFRY Presidency and not one shared with the republics.¹⁸

The JNA faced the issue of imposing a state of emergency in Croatia immediately after the HDZ attained power.¹⁹ In the summer 1990, the Command of the 5th Military District prepared plans of action against the new government.²⁰

The initial uprising of Croatia's Serbs in summer 1990 started the crisis in the Republic of Croatia. On 17 August, armed Serb civilians placed obstacles on roads just outside of Knin. The JNA's Air Force prevented a special unit of the Croatian Interior Ministry to intervene in Knin to suppress the disturbances. The SFRY Federal Secretariat for National Defense claimed that the Air Force's intervention had been required since the Croatian Ministry's helicopters carrying the special unit failed to provide prior notice and to obtain corridor clearance.²¹ This attack on Croatia's sovereignty received strong support from Serbs during rallies held in Bosanska Krajina and Serbia.²² Disturbances spread quickly through northern Dalmatia and Lika in villages with Serb majorities. An attempt then followed to spread unrest and

¹⁶ The then President of the Presidency of SFRY, Borisav Jović, confirms in his memoirs that he had been told on 8th June 1990 by the Minister of Defence, General Veljko Kadrijević, that they had "made the decision on establishing special motorised corps in the regions of Zagreb, Knin, Banjaluka and Herzegovina, which would be able, if needed, to function in the same way as in Kosovo." B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, p. 152.

¹⁷ *Strategija općenarodne obrane i društvene samozaštite SFRJ*, p. 133.

¹⁸ More detailed on that in Raif Dizdarević, *Od smrti Tita do smrti Jugoslavije* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 2000), pp. 401-405, and pp. 409-410.

¹⁹ The new Directive on the use of SFRY AF in the state of emergency was brought by the SFRY AF General Staff on 21st May 1990. Komanda 5. VO, DT broj 38-1 of 16 August 1990., Direktiva za upotrebu jedinica 5. VO u vanrednim prilikama.

²⁰ Davor Marijan, "Oružane snage SFRJ u izvanrednim prilikama," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 34 (2002), No. 2: 368-370.

²¹ "Armija ima zadatak da spreči bratoubilački rat," *Narodna armija*, 23 August 1990, p. 5; Two years later, the Government of the rebellious Croatia's Serbs passed the decision "Stating ... that the war in the area of the Republic of Srpska Krajina started" on 17 August 1990. Republika Srpska Krajina, Vlada, br. 04-3-270/92 of 28 July 1992, Odluka.

²² B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, pp. 178-179.

destabilise government institutions in the area of Petrinja (in Banovina), a region with a mixed population with a Croat majority but with Serb villages in marginal portions of the area. Local Serbs took large quantities of weapons and ammunition from several police stations.²³ The favourable deployment of the 9th Corps within the Knin area enabled the Serbs to organise their armed forces without any interruption and to spread disturbances to other parts of Croatia. Since Croatia's armed forces could not match those of the JNA, Croatia's leadership did not dare enter into a direct conflict with JNA. The amount of arms held by Croatia did not promise any success against the well-armed federal army.

The poorly equipped Croatians had to obtain arms in any possible way in order to be able to suppress the revolt which represented a political and an economic attack on the young Croatian state.

The JNA used the illegal acquisition of arms by Croatia as justification to overthrow the legally elected government. Based on a JNA report concerning the unauthorised organization of armed paramilitary units, the SFRY Presidency decided on 9 January 1991 to abolish them.²⁴ This decision clearly showed how unbridgeable differences had become. From the point of view of the Croatian Government, "paramilitary units" consisted of the rebel Serbs in Knin while the JNA considered the legally organised units within the Croatian Ministry of the Interior to come within the definition. After the failure to disarm, the JNA started an intensive media campaign in late January 1991 against Croatia. The campaign resulted in the arrest of several Croatian citizens and the Military Court in Zagreb brought charges against the Croatian Minister of Defense, General Martin Špegelj.²⁵

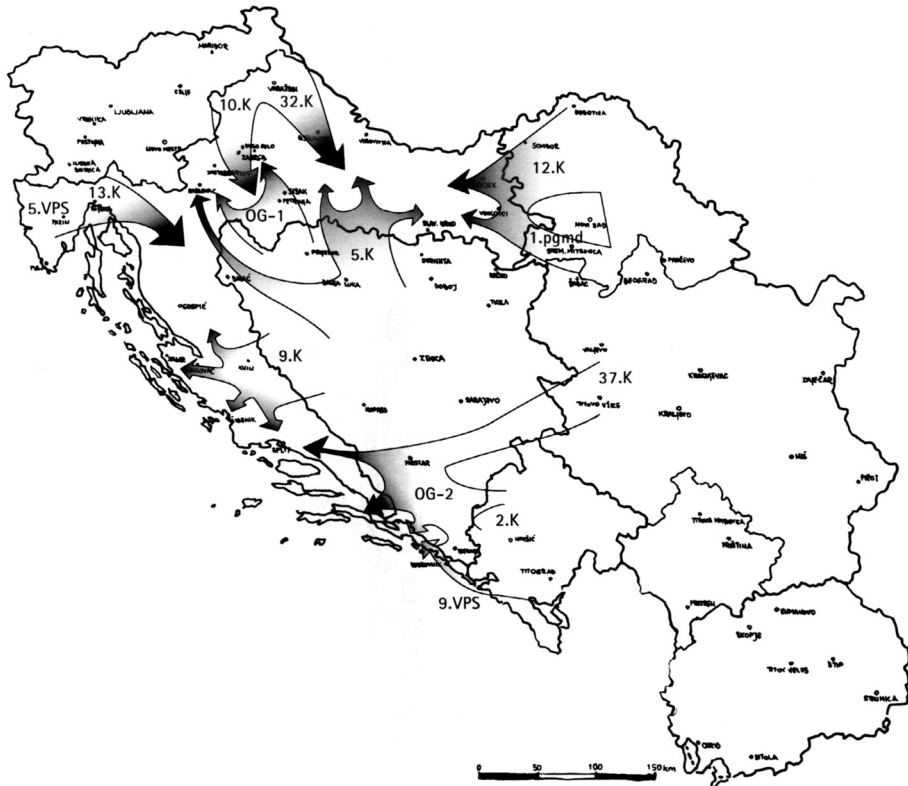
An attack by insurgent Serbs on the police station in Pakrac on 1 March 1991 and the disarmament of its Croat police officers intensified tensions in Croatia. A day later, a special unit of the Croatian Interior Ministry crushed the insurgents in town. Without SFRY Presidency authorization, the President of the SFRY Presidency, Borisav Jović, ordered the JNA to engage in Pakrac. JNA forces from Bjelovar, Virovitica and Zagreb went to Pakrac and the 32nd Corps set up its forward command post in the town. The Chief of Staff of the 5th Military District, Lieutenant-General Dobrašin Praščević, stated in Pakrac that the JNA came to prevent "inter-ethnic conflict, by acting preventively: to show the people and assure them that they will not be left at the mercy of special police officers, and for them [the police] to see, 'in the flesh,' our determination not to allow [destruction] and bloodshed."²⁶

²³ "Vojska je prigrllila narod," *Narodna armija*, 11 October 1990, pp. 4-5; "Otuđeno oružje," *Narodna armija*, 11 October 1990, p. 15.

²⁴ "Rasformirati sve neregularne oružane sastave," *Narodna armija*, 17 January 1991, p. 4; "Naredba Predsjedništva SFRJ," *Narodna armija*, 26 January 1991, p. 8; Veljko Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, (Beograd: Politika, 1993), p. 111.

²⁵ "Istina o naoružavanju terorističkih formacija HDZ u Hrvatskoj (2)," *Narodna armija*, 28 February 1991.

²⁶ "Narod zaštićen od nasilja," *Narodna armija*, 7 March 1991, p. 4; B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, pp. 281-282.



The JNA aggressive plan against Croatia from September to October 1991.

The way in which JNA acted in Pakrac served as a “formula” for its conduct in the following several months. In its press and pronouncements, it labeled its actions as involving the creation of “buffer zones,” though the actual purpose of such “zones” had been to keep tensions elevated, to obstruct the work of Croatian security authorities and to secure existing Serbian territorial gains.

Events in Pakrac triggered a request of the Supreme Command Staff to the SFRY Presidency session held between 12 and 15 March 1991 to declare a state of emergency in the country and to suspend all legal “acts which are contrary to the Constitution of SFRY and federal laws.” By a four to four vote, the Presidency of SFRY refused to grant the request. Only Montenegro and Serbia together with the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo voted in favor of the demand.²⁷ The root of all these problems lied with the new multiparty system in which non-communist parties had won in Croatia and Slovenia. The JNA’s leaders, acting as the long arm of the Serbian political leadership, saw as the only solution the return to the old

²⁷ V. Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, p. 113; B. Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, pp. 286-295.

system.²⁸ The JNA thus took another step away from its Constitutional obligations and one step closer to its transformation into the armed force of the Serb nation, both within and outside Serbia. This led to the JNA's active role in the armament and training of insurgent Serbs in Croatia.²⁹

Another serious incident occurred in late March 1991 when Serb militia groups placed barricades in Plitvice on the Slunj - Titova Korenica road. A Croatian special police unit intervened successfully but the arrival of armoured JNA units from the 1st and 5th Military Districts prevented its advance after setting up a "buffer zone" between the conflicted parties.³⁰ This "buffer zone" began to spread after the Naval District and the 5th Military District closed all access roads to Kninska Krajina and a part of Lika, thus further hindering the activities of Croatian Interior Ministry forces.³¹

By May 1991, events moved with increasing speed. On 2 May in Borovo Selo near Vukovar, Serb forces ambushed and killed twelve Croatian police officers marking the beginning of an armed uprising in eastern Slavonia.³² Disturbances spread around Vinkovci and Osijek, where the villages of Mirkovci and Tenja, protected by JNA "buffer zones," became strong centres of the revolt. Tensions escalated and on 6 May the Supreme Command Staff ordered the JNA to be on alert and mobilised a portion of its combat units.³³

In the first days of May, three new JNA battalions had been introduced into Croatia's crisis areas - an armoured battalion in Petrinja and mechanised battalions in each of Vinkovci and Vukovar.³⁴ The JNA failed in its attempt to bring an armoured battalion from Mostar to Split so that it instead relocated the battalion to the Kupres area.³⁵ The JNA also occupied two bridges on the Danube which came under the guard of its land forces and river flotilla.³⁶ Those moves established the preconditions for the introduction of additional JNA forces in to Croatia.

²⁸ After that session, in which the Greater-Serbian option did not succeed to take over the power in the country legally, JNA inclined toward the opposite option, which meant, as admitted by General Kadijević himself, "the protection and defence of the Serbian nation outside Serbia and gathering of JNA within the borders of the future Yugoslavia". V. Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, pp. 113-114.

²⁹ Komanda 18. korpusa, Pov. br. 7-397/8 of 26 August 1994, GŠ SVK, Predlog; Srpska Vojska Krajine, Generalštab, Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, S.P. br. 321-99 of 16 10. 1994, GŠ Republike Srpske, Zahtjev.

³⁰ "Armija vraća mir," *Narodna armija*, 4 Apr. 1991, pp. 4-5; "Ratni put popločan pobjedama", *Srpska vojska*, 9 May 1994, p. 14.

³¹ Komanda 9. korpusa, DT- 1-4 of 5 April 1991, Zapovest za odbranu Op. br. 1.

³² Komanda 5. korpusa RV i PVO, Organ bezbednosti, SP. Br. 20-524 of 24 May 1991, Izjava vodnika Srđana Mitrovića iz VP 7660/7 Lučko.

³³ "Podići borbenu gotovost JNA", *Narodna armija*, 9 May 1991, p. 5.

³⁴ Komanda 5. Vojne oblasti of 12 5. 1991, Izvješće sa obilaska i kontrole 622. mtbr i 4. okbr; Hrvatski informativni centar (in further text: HIC): Komanda 17. korpusa, DT. br. 11/1-93 of 14 May 1991, Naređenje.

³⁵ "Ljudi i tehnika odolijevaju svim iskušenjima," *Narodna armija*, 23 May 1991, pp. 15-16.

The short war in Slovenia started on the morning of 27 June 1991 when the JNA sought to occupy the Slovenian border and set up federal police and customs forces on the frontier.³⁷ The conflict spread quickly but ended without major clashes and led to the withdrawal of the JNA from Slovenia. For Croatia, this withdrawal meant that the JNA's technical potential would be redeployed to neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.³⁸

During the conflict in Slovenia, the 1st Military District's armoured and mechanised units had been deployed on the "so-called administrative border" between Croatia and Serbia. This operational development had been planned as a clear demonstration of force to show the disproportionate quantity and quality of weaponry of the JNA in comparison to Croatian armed forces. Moreover, the JNA made a further show of its intentions through its takeover of the bridges spanning the Danube separating Croatia and Serbia. The capture of the bridges sent a message that the Danube could not act as great natural obstacle keeping Serbian tanks away from Croatia.

At the border near Šid, the JNA deployed two brigades: the 1st Proletarian Guards Mechanised Brigade from Belgrade and the 453rd Mechanised Brigade from Sremska Mitrovica. The 36th Mechanised Brigade from Subotica took over Baranja and the bridge between Bezdan and Betina, while the bridge and the wider area around Bogojevo came under the control of the 51st Mechanised Brigade from Pančevo. A unit from the 12th Corps captured the bridge on the Danube between Ilok and Bačka Palanka. In Osijek, a part of the 12th Proletarian Mechanised Brigade barricaded itself in its barracks, while another part took control of the roads leading out of the city, portraying their actions as an exercise.³⁹

Along with preparing for war, the JNA also modified its command structure. During the conflict in Slovenia, numerous personnel changes occurred in the 5th Military District. A Serb, General Života Avramović, the commander of 3rd Military District, replaced General Konarad Kolšek, a Slovene. Another Serb, Colonel Ljubomir Bajić, replaced Slovene Major-General Marjan Rožič as the commander of the 5th Air Force Corps and its anti-aircraft defense forces.⁴⁰ Such changes represented a clear expression of distrust toward non-Serb personnel. As a result, leading positions in the 5th Military District became filled by members of the same ethnic group which had normally dominated the officers corps. According to a statement of the Command of the 5th Military District in Slovenia and Croatia, 57% of its officers consisted of Serbs, followed

³⁶ "Odjekuje neka druga pjesma", *Narodna armija*, 7 August 1991, p. 11; "Opstajavaju vojnički mostovi", *Narodna armija*, 20 June 1991, p. 23; Marko Malović, *Ostajemo u Iloku*, second edition, (Zagreb: Tiskara Impress, 2000), p. 27.

³⁷ "Nametanje rata", *Narodna armija*, 6 July 1991, p. 3.

³⁸ "Izraz političke realnosti", *Narodna armija*, 20 July 1991, p. 4; SVA MORH: SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, I Uprava, Br. 51-1 of 25 July 1991, Naređenje.

³⁹ D. Marijan, *Smrt oklopne brigade*, p. 160.

⁴⁰ "Nova postavljena", *Narodna armija*, 6 July 1991, p. 4.

by Croats with 12%, Slovenes with 6%, Montenegrins with 5%, Yugoslavs with 4% and other ethnicities with 16%.⁴¹

The war began without any official declaration. Serb populated villages, such as Tenja outside of Osijek, Mirkovci near Vinkovci and Borovo Selo near Vukovar, became support bases for rebel Serbs, Chetniks and the JNA. Beginning in July, Chetnik groups and rebel Serb units, using heavy weaponry, began their military campaign in Croatia and to ethnically cleanse everyone not Serbian. Despite the numerical superiority of Croatian forces, the armored and mechanized forces of the JNA thwarted every attempt by Croatia to overcome the rebels and their allies from Serbia, such as near Mirkovci and Tenja on 5-7 July 1991. The JNA openly sided with the Chetniks. In some cases, the JNA even designated zones which would be under its "protection," as in the case of the village of Mirkovci, and then tried to expand the zone over areas held by Croatian forces.⁴²

On 11 July, rebel Serbs mobilised their staffs and military units.⁴³ Protected by the JNA, they could further develop their military organisation. They had initially established their military structure immediately after events in Knin in August 1990. The process of building on this initial start turned out to be slow and rather inefficient due to conflicts among rebel leaders. These disputes centered in Knin where several paramilitary formations had been established by mid-1991. Apart from the police and the TO forces the rebels' inherited (or, more accurately, forcibly separated from Croatia), smaller groups had also been established among rebel Serbs, ranging from Captain Dragan's special forces to armed units of various political parties whose manpower came mostly from Serbia.⁴⁴

In late July, the Serbian Autonomous Region (*Srpska autonomna oblast*) (SAO) Krajina, into which territory controlled by the rebel Serbs had been organized, established regional TO headquarters for Kordun and Banovina.⁴⁵ At a session held on 1 August 1991, its Government determined that the SAO's armed forces would consist of the TO under the command Milan Babić, the head of the SAO Krajina Government and its Minister of Defense. A decision of the SAO's Ministry of Internal Affairs passed in August concerning the organisation of the defense system provided that the headquarters of the Krajina TO would oversee the municipal TOs for each of Knin, Benkovac, Obrovac, Gračac, Donji Lapac, Titova Korenica and the zonal TOs for Kordun and Banija. The SAO appointed its Interior Minister, Mile Martić, as TO Deputy Commander and as a member of the TO staff for

⁴¹ "Napadnuto je sve jugoslovensko," *Narodna armija*, 6 July 1991, p. 6.

⁴² Komanda Garnizona Vinkovci, Pov. br. 42-1 of 26 July 1991, Obavijest.

⁴³ SAO Krajina, Predsjednik Vlade/Ministar obrane, Br. 142-91-3 of 11 July 1991, Naređenje.

⁴⁴ Komanda 5. korpusa RV i PVO, Organ bezbednosti, SP. Br. 6-369 of 14 May 1991, Zapažanja o stanju na terenu SO Vukovar.

⁴⁵ Order SAO Krajina, Vlada, Br. 157/91-1 of 26 July 1991, Naređenje.

police units.⁴⁶ By 20 August 1991, the structure of the TO operational zones for SAO Krajina had been completed. The 1st Operational Zone took up northern Dalmatia, the 2nd Operational Zone took up Kordun, and the 3rd Operational Zone encompassed the area of Banovina.⁴⁷

The combat value of these forces remained rather modest, although by the end of September 1991 they had more heavy weaponry than the Croatian Army and Police forces. These various groups had no ability to carry out larger operations and only the JNA's imposition of "buffer zones" prevented their total rout and military defeat by Croatian forces.

Following the establishment of the rebel Serbs' armed forces, they began attacks aimed at the "cleansing" of the Croat population. After eastern Slavonia, they opened another crisis area in late July in the Banovina area where the rebel Serbs' TO from the municipality of Dvor na Uni, organised into the 1st Dvor unit, took part in the "fight for the complete liberation of the municipality."⁴⁸ Two Croat villages came under attack, Zamlača and Struga, while a mechanised unit of 329th Armoured Brigade waited nearby.⁴⁹ Further north, an armed battalion of the 51st Mechanised Brigade attacked the Glina police station, thus contributing to the cleansing of Croats from Banovina.⁵⁰ The main body of the 51st Mechanised Brigade in eastern Slavonia did not remain aloof. After an attack of Serb paramilitary groups on the Dalj police station on 1 August, the Brigade, backed by air support, openly engaged in combat on the rebel and Chetnik side. The attack resulted in the deaths of several dozen Croats and the expulsion of hundreds more from the villages of Dalj, Aljmaš and Erdut. The main body of the Brigade went westwards, to the Serb populated village of Bijelo Brdo and entrenched itself there.⁵¹ After Erdut, Dalj and Aljmaš had been "cleansed," the communication systems of parts of the 12th and 17th Corps joined together "with the aim of keeping surveillance over paramilitary formations," as they called Croatian forces, as well as undertaking "joint actions against them."⁵² By the end of August, the 36th Mechanised Brigade, reinforced by Chetniks and other local Serb paramilitary groups, occupied Baranja.⁵³

⁴⁶ SAO Krajina, Vlada, Predsjednik, Br. 179/91-1 of 8 August 1991, Naređenje

⁴⁷ SAO Krajina, Vlada, Predsjednik, Str. pov. br. 189/91-1 of 20 August 1991, Naređenje.

⁴⁸ "Prvi pješadijski bataljun," *Bilten* 33. *pješadijske brigade* (Dvor na Uni), December 1994, p. 3.

⁴⁹ SAO Krajina, Opština Dvor, Štab TO, Drugi bataljun, Zaključak of 12 September 1991; Izvješće pomoćnika načelnika Štaba za ONP 329. oklopne brigade.

⁵⁰ "Principijelno ponašanje armije," *Narodna armija*, 31 July 1991, p. 6.

⁵¹ Vojni sud Osijek, Kir-36/92 of 6. March 1992, Saslušanje I.K., zapovjednika voda u 51. mehaniziranoj brigadi JNA; "Razoružanje ili rat," *Narodna armija*, 22 August 1991, p. 13; "Rat - surova škola taktike," *Narodna armija*, 19 March 1992, p. 24.

⁵² HIC: Komanda 17. korpusa, Str.pov.br. 11/1566-2 of 4 August 1991, Naređenje.

⁵³ "Šeksovi jastrebovi nisko lete," *Narodna armija*, 7 September 1991, p. 23; "Duž linije što spaja i razdvaja," *Narodna armija*, 9 October 1991, pp. 11-12.

In western Slavonia, on 13th August, local Serbs proclaimed the SAO of Western Slavonia and joined it to the SAO Krajina. Their paramilitary units attacked a unit of the Croatian Police and National Guard Corps (ZNG) in Okučani on 16th August.⁵⁴ On 16th August, the combat unit of the 265th Mechanised Brigade arrived from Bjelovar. A part of the 329th Armoured Brigade entered Okučani from Bosnia and Herzegovina and attacked troops of the ZNG and Croatian Police units.⁵⁵ The JNA's leaders rejected Croat accusations that this action had been an act of aggression by it, arguing that the engagement of forces of the 1st Military District and units of the Banja Luka Corps had been necessary "in order to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts in its zone of responsibility."⁵⁶

Conscripts from Croatia and Slovenia no longer served in the JNA and questions arose in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina concerning conscription after the draft class of June 1990 had been discharged. As a result, JNA forces in Croatia and Slovenia found themselves in a difficult situation. Compulsory military service in the western part of Yugoslavia had been totally disrupted and the JNA lacked new soldiers to replace those who had fulfilled their one-year military service requirement. In some regions, the JNA could not replace former soldiers in sufficient numbers. The JNA no longer had at its disposal a sufficient number of soldiers to maintain the "buffer zones" and to garrison its barracks.

After a three-day session the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia adopted a resolution on 3rd August which requested that the JNA withdraw to its barracks and leave the territory of the Republic within a reasonable period of time as part of the process of separating Croatia from Yugoslavia.⁵⁷ As the JNA turned a deaf ear to the Parliament's resolution and went on with its aggression, Croatian forces started applying pressure on JNA barracks in early September.

The JNA's military leaders rejected an order given to them by the new Croat President of the Presidency of SFRY, Stipe Mesić, on 11th September to withdraw JNA forces into its barracks within 48 hours. The JNA claimed Mesić's order to be unlawful. The JNA also denied that that the rebel Serb's TO forces acted "under the command and within JNA."⁵⁸

The blockade of the JNA's barracks forced the JNA to speed up its plans as a risk existed that the Croats would get hold of heavy weaponry and modern equipment. The Supreme Command Staff of the SFRY armed forces threat-

⁵⁴ *Kronologija rata: agresija na Hrvatsku i Bosnu i Hercegovinu 1989.-1998.*, (Zagreb: HIC-Slovo, 1998), p. 84.

⁵⁵ "Čovek kriznih žarišta," *Narodna armija*, 22 December 1991, p. 26; "Ratni put popločan pobjedama," *Srpska vojska*, 9 May 1994, p. 14.

⁵⁶ "Ponovljene ratne slike," *Narodna armija*, 22 August 1991, p. 12.

⁵⁷ "Teror nad istinom," *Narodna armija*, 7 August 1991, p. 5.

⁵⁸ "Neovlašćeno i samovoljno izdavanje naređenja," *Narodna armija*, 14 September 1991, p. 6.

ened that they would destroy one vital facility in the city home to any JNA facility or barracks which the Croats seized. The threat also served as “a warning to the civilian population to withdraw in due time from those towns.”⁵⁹ By that time, the JNA had already begun to engage in strategic offensive operations. The commencement of these operations had been followed by a decision by the Serbian members of the SFRY Presidency to “take on certain competencies of the SFRY Assembly which cannot meet.” That decision called for all actions of the SFRY Presidency to be decided “by a majority vote of the SFRY Presidency members present” at meetings of that body. The Vice-President of the Presidency, Dr. Branko Kostić, who practically usurped the role of President, said afterwards that “the Presidency of SFRY will not use military force to impose its will on any nation in Yugoslavia.”⁶⁰ At the same time, however, the JNA continued to use a majority of its forces to impose the will of the political and military leaders of the largest ethnic group in the SFRY, the Serbs, on the second largest, the Croats.

The JNA’s major military operations began in mid-September. The JNA planned, in co-operation with rebel Serbs, to defeat the Croatian army and complete the withdrawal of its remaining forces from Slovenia.⁶¹ Its operational blueprint anticipated the use of fifteen to eighteen armoured, mechanised and infantry Army brigades in addition to the JNA forces already engaged in Croatia. As General Veljko Kadijević admitted, the JNA’s plans “consisted of the following basic components: - totally blocking Croatia from air and from sea and directly linking the attacks of the JNA’s main forces as closely as possible to the liberation of Serb areas in Croatia and JNA barracks deeper in Croatian territory. To that end, the JNA would criss-cross Croatia in the directions of Gradiška-Virovitica; Bihać-Karlovac-Zagreb; Knin-Zadar; and Mostar-Split. Through the use of its strongest group of armoured and mechanised forces, [the JNA would] liberate eastern Slavonia and then quickly continue operations westward, meeting [its] forces in western Slavonia, and proceed towards Zagreb and Varaždin or towards the Slovenian border. At the same time, using strong forces from the area of Herceg Novi-Trebinje, [the JNA would] block Dubrovnik from land and reach the Neretva River valley, and thus join forces heading in the direction of Mostar-Split. [Thereafter,] the JNA would secure and hold the border of Srpska Krajina in Croatia, remove remaining JNA units from Slovenia and then withdraw the JNA from Croatia. The mobilisation, preparation of . . . units, as well as bringing them to planned routes of deployment would take ten to fifteen days, depending on the units’ level of combat preparedness and [their] distance from the routes of deployment.”⁶² In the first days of the operation, Kadijević openly said that “the Army at this moment does

⁵⁹ “Poslednje upozorenje,” *Narodna armija*, 2 October 1991, p. 7.

⁶⁰ “Neposredna ratna opasnost uslovljava rad,” *Narodna armija*, 5 October 1991, p. 3.

⁶¹ V. Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, p. 134.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

not want anything more than to establish control over crisis areas, protect the Serb population from persecution and destruction, and free JNA members and their families.” He emphasised that “the defeat the Ustasha forces” remained the precondition to achieve these goals.⁶³

In its operation, the JNA planned to have its forces intersect with one another and force Croatia’s unconditional surrender and acceptance of any Serb demands. However, the poor response of reservists in the 1st and 3rd Military Districts put the JNA’s extensive designs into question.⁶⁴ The JNA tried to find a way out of its problem by taking on volunteers, for which it issued a special instruction. According to that document, volunteers had the same rights as military personnel and conscripts. Every volunteer had to complete an application form by which he became obliged to obey “federal laws and other acts, as well as orders regulating the relations, life and work in the Yugoslav People’s Army.”⁶⁵ In this manner, the JNA brought into its fold various Serbian party paramilitary groups. The common aim, the creation of a Greater Serbia, erased all the ideological and political differences between them and the JNA.

The rebel Serbs obtained large-scale personnel reinforcements to carry out their war against Croatia. On 20 September, the JNA sent many of its senior and junior officers to take over the leadership of local Serb TO units.⁶⁶ In late September, the structure of the Serb TO units finally became settled. The authorities split the area of northern Dalmatia and Lika into two zones: the first for Dalmatia, which came under direct command of headquarters of the TO of the SAO Krajina, while the second became an operational zone for Lika. The areas of Kordun and Banovina became joined into one, third operational zone.⁶⁷ The other armed component, the militia, on 9 October came under the command of TO commanders during combat actions.⁶⁸

The JNA’s attack focused on eastern Slavonia. The armoured and mechanised group in eastern Slavonia and Srijem consisted of the main body of the 12th Corps and the 1st Proletarian Guards Mechanised Division, reinforced by units from the 24th and 37th Corps. Having occupied Baranja, the 12th Corps directed its main force against Vukovar, while the remainder of its troops attacked Osijek. The battle for Vukovar became the most difficult task for the units of the 1st Military District and the attack unexpectedly became prolonged. Vukovar became less and less a military problem

⁶³ “U Hrvatskoj je na djelu neonacizam,” *Narodna armija*, 5 October 1991, p. 5.

⁶⁴ B. Jović, *Posljednji dani SFRJ*, pp. 385-386; Ofelija Backović, Miloš Vasić, and Aleksandar Vasović, “Ko to rado ide u vojnike - mobilizacijska kriza - analitički pregled medijskog izvještavanja,” *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini 1991-1995*, (Zagreb-Sarajevo: Jesenski i Turk-Dani, 1999), pp. 355-356.

⁶⁵ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, III Uprava, Pov. br. 2391-1 of 13 September 1991, Uputstvo o prijemu dobrovoljaca u JNA.

⁶⁶ Naređenje br. 24-175 načelnika Personalne uprave SSNO of 20 September 1991.

⁶⁷ VRH: SAO Krajina, Vlada, Predsjednik, Pov. 1/1-91 of 5 10. 1991, Obavijest.

⁶⁸ VRH: SAO Krajina, Vlada, Predsjednik, Br. 2/1-91 of 9 10. 1991, Naređenje.

and turned into a demonstration of the type of war JNA conducted for the Serbian cause. Logic dictated that the JNA should simply have blocked the town with small forces and bypassed it, but obviously the JNA did not have that idea in mind.

In its campaign to move forward into the central part of Croatia, the JNA did not want to leave any "unstable" situation behind. The forces of Operational Group "North," under the command of Major-General Andrija Biorčević, and Operational Group "South," under the command of Colonel Milo Mrkšić, captured Vukovar on 19 November 1991. The overall operation itself came under the command of General Života Panić, commander of the 1st Military District.⁶⁹ Serbian journalists described the capture of the city as follows: "The liberators, JNA and TO units, and volunteer forces, took [the city] house by house, saving the lives of their own men and citizens, showing ingenuity in fighting in populated areas, and reaffirming their humaneness and bravery."⁷⁰ They also claimed that "Vukovar [did not become] an occupied town. It is a town liberated from the darkest neo-fascism and Ustasha ideology. Therefore, one should not ask if destruction could have been avoided. As long as neo-fascism persisted and remained stubborn, that much more force had been required for its destruction. No other choice existed."⁷¹

Apart from capturing Vukovar, the JNA in eastern Slavonia threatened Vinkovci, Županja and Osijek. The 1st Proletarian Guards Mechanised Division captured the majority of villages in the municipality of Vukovar. The commander of the Division, Major-General Dragoljub Arandelović, boasted that his forces had "cleansed and gotten a strong hold of the area between the Danube and the Bosut Rivers, and that public authorities had begun to be established in these areas."⁷² His expression of truthfulness clearly stated the essence of JNA's task: to ethnically cleanse Croatian lands of Croats and other non-Serb ethnic groups and to establish Serbian organs of power. The 1st Proletarian Guards Mechanised Division carried out the most characteristic example of the JNA's goals when it oversaw the ethnic cleansing of the town of Ilok under the terms of a 14 October 1991 "agreement" reached in Šid.⁷³

The 5th Corps from Banja Luka tried to occupy western Slavonia. The Corps had been engaged previously due to the mass uprising of the local Serb population. The Corps obtained reinforcements for its great planned attacks from JNA forces stationed in Serbia and Macedonia and two brigades of the TO of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had drawn on reservists from

⁶⁹ SSNO, Kabinet saveznog sekretara, Br. 1023-2 of 21 November 1991, Pohvala načelnika Štaba Vrhovne komande.

⁷⁰ "Oslobođen Vukovar," *Narodna armija*, 20 November 1991, p. 3.

⁷¹ "Žrtvovani zarad separatizma," *Narodna armija*, 23 November 1991, p. 15.

⁷² "Kao nekad, pod razvijenom ratnom zastavom," *Narodna armija*, 2 October 1991, p. 4.

⁷³ "Sporazum između predstavnika grada Iloka i Jugoslavenske narodne armije" of 14 10. 1991; "Kao nekad, pod razvijenom ratnom zastavom," *Narodna armija* of 2 October 1991, p. 4.

Bosanska Krajina. The Corps failed in its plan to penetrate towards Bjelovar and Varaždin in an attempt to join with forces of the 32nd Corps based there and in Virovitica. Had it succeeded, the battle for Slavonia would have ended to the advantage of the Serbs. After the surrender of the 32nd Corps, the forces of the 5th Corps tried to extend their territorial hold around Okučani, Jasenovac and Hrvatska Kostajnica. In late October, Croatian forces stopped the Corps, and in early November, they started to gradually push it back towards Okučani and the Sava River; the Sarajevo truce put an end to their offensive.⁷⁴

The 5th Military District Command conceived offensive operation in central Croatia so that several operational groups would concentrate in a number of directions: (1) the 1st Operational Group consisting of elements of the 10th Corps, the rebel Serbs' TO and reinforcements from Serbia would reach the Kupa River along a line stretching from Petrinja to Karlovac and enable the withdrawal of forces surrounded in the barracks in Karlovac and Zagreb; (2) a tactical group added from the 5th Corps would "cleanse" the area from Plitvice via Slunj all the way to Karlovac; (3) the main body of the 10th Corps, with the elements of units from the 5th Military District headquarters but without forces from the 1st Operational Group, would withdraw via Velika Gorica towards Petrinja, and then further towards Dvor na Uni and Bosanski Novi; (4) apart from defending the JNA's barracks in Rijeka and Delnice, the 13th Corps had the task to carry out an organised penetration in the general direction of Rijeka-Delnice-Vrbovsko-Slunj-Plitvice; and (5) elements of the 32nd Corps in Bjelovar and Koprivnica would penetrate in the direction Bjelovar-Grubišno Polje-Daruvar and join the forces of the 5th Corps, would act behind the lines and become a part of its forces. These offensive activities would be supported by heavy artillery and the Air Force which had the task to strike vital targets in Zagreb.⁷⁵ Orders to the 5th Military District clearly shows the JNA's intention to withdraw its forces from ethnically unfavourable surroundings into areas with a Serb majority, while, at the same time, to reach the outer edges of areas with a Serb majority and simultaneously "cleansing" away the Croat population in the hinterland.

The extensive plans of the 5th Military District command failed, first of all because of the surrender of the 32nd Corps and the blockade of the main body of the forces of the 10th and 13th Corps and, second of all, because of the feeble response of reservists in Serbia but also in Bosanska Krajina. The 1st Operational Group reached the Kupa River and the outskirts of Karlovac, which had been an easy task thanks to the favourable ethnic composition of the local population. However, attempts to reach Sisak, Mošćenica, Komarevo and Sunja failed so that in November the front line became stable.⁷⁶ In the

⁷⁴ V. Kadrijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, pp. 138-139; D. Marijan, *Smrt oklopne brigade*, pp. 61-63.

⁷⁵ Božidar Javorović, *Narodna zaštita grada Zagreba u Domovinskom ratu*, (Zagreb: Defimi, 1999), p. 72; Komanda 1. OG, Str. pov. br. 100-233 of 19 10. 1991, Naredenje.

⁷⁶ Iskustva u dosadašnjim b/d 1. OG.

central and southeastern part of the 5th Military District, combat activities continued until the end of 1991. As the main body of the 13th Corps in Istria and Gorski Kotar became encircled and cut off from other JNA forces, the 9th Corps took over combat activities for the southern part of Lika, while, with respect to the rest of Lika and a part of Kordun, the 3rd Operational Group became organised under the direct command of the 5th Military District.

By mid-November, the JNA, with the support of local Serb units, occupied Slunj and expelled all Croats from the town, thus completing their control over a compact area with a new Serb majority.⁷⁷

In the area of northern Dalmatian, the 9th Corps, assisted by local Serb forces, engaged in combat activities until late spring. Thanks to the favourable location of its main body, the Corps had sufficient time to complete its operational evolution. It represented one of the few JNA operational formations which did not have serious problems with manpower, as it had been built up in due time, with men partly from its own area and from Montenegro. The vast majority of the Corps' men consisted of several thousand reservists from Serbia, mostly Šumadija. In late August the Corps "cleared" the villages of Kijevo and Kruševo creating favourable conditions for spreading its aggression against Croatian towns along the coast. By 1992, the Corps had engaged in ruthless attacks to "clear" the hinterland of Šibenik and Zadar.⁷⁸

The SFRY Navy contributed to the war effort by imposing a naval blockade of Croatia's Adriatic ports on 17 September 1991 and by providing fire support for the JNA naval sector and army units, focusing on the cities of Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, Šibenik and Ploče.⁷⁹ Apart from the Navy, two JNA operational groups became active in southern Croatia. The 37th Corps from Serbia received the task to operate in the direction of Mostar-Split. Parts of its forces occupied areas of eastern and central Herzegovina in September.⁸⁰ But, due to the feeble response of reservists, it had been forced to limit its task to secure the airport in Mostar and intimidate the non-Serb population in the area. East of the 37th Corps, the forces of the 2nd Corps and the 9th Naval Sector in the Boka Kotarska became active, with the 472nd Motorised Brigade of the latter entrusted with the task of cutting off Dubrovnik "from the rest of the territory of the Republic of Croatia"⁸¹ The

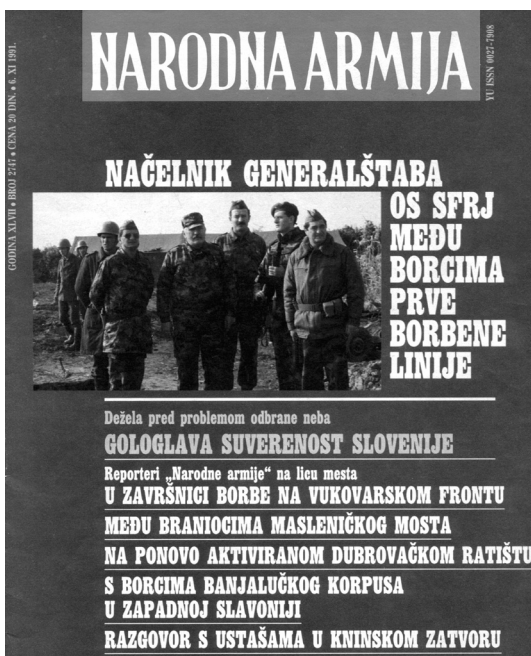
⁷⁷ Komanda 5. vojne oblasti, Str. pov. br. 09/75-1034 of 10 November 1991, Komandi TG-2, Naređenje; Načelnik štaba II. OZ of 10 March 1992, Informacija o nekim problemima TO u Lici.

⁷⁸ Komanda Vojnopomorske oblasti, Str. pov. br. 167-1/47-4153 of 21 September 1991, Naređenje; "Snažni udari armije," *Narodna armija*, 9th October 1991, p. 35; V. Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, p. 139; Komanda 9. K, Str. pov. br. 747-1 of 2 December 1991, Referat Štabu Vrhovne komande.

⁷⁹ Komanda Vojnopomorske oblasti, Str.pov.br. 167-1/47-911 of 20 September 1991, Zapovest za uporabu snaga VPO; "Mrtvo slovo primirja," *Narodna armija*, 21 September 1991, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Komanda 9. korpusa of 23 September 1991, Naređenje za pregrupiranje Op. br. 14.

⁸¹ Komanda Vojnopomorske oblasti, Str. pov. br. 167-1/47-4153 of 21. September 1991, Naređenje.



High officers of the JNA on the Vukovar battlefield in November 1991. Among them are war Criminals General Blagoje Adžić (Fourth from the right) and colonel Veselin Šljivančanin (third from the Right). Front page of the JNA weekly magazine Narodna armija from 6 November 1991.

Operation Group for Southern Herzegovina and Dalmatia, known as the 2nd Operation Group, coordinated their activities against Dubrovnik.⁸² Assaults on Dubrovnik began on 24 September. That these military actions became nothing less than overt Greater-Serbian aggression became clearly illustrated by the JNA's involvement in the burning of the Croat village of Ravno in eastern Herzegovina, all of whose inhabitants had been expelled by the JNA. By 5th October, Prevlaka had been "cleansed" and pressure on Dubrovnik followed it had been cut off from the remainder of Croatia and shelled several times.⁸³

The great operation designed by JNA General Staff did not succeed as expected. Croatian forces stopped JNA army forces in November. Some moves, such as the attempted assassination of Croatia's President on 7th October 1991 by a JNA Air Force attack on his offices, did not turn out as planned.⁸⁴ A stalemate arose after the JNA's goals had been only partially realized. Such a state of affairs in the long term became unfavourable to Greater-Serbian interests. The JNA had to accept its limited successes in the

⁸² "Istina je pobila sve barijere," *Narodna armija*, 9 January 1992, p. 14.

⁸³ Smail Čekić, *Agresija na Bosnu i genocid nad Bošnjacima 1991-1993*. (Sarajevo: Ljiljan, 1994), p. 171; Trpimir Macan, *Posljednja opsada Dubrovnika* (Dubrovnik: Matica Hrvatska, 2001).

⁸⁴ *Kronologija rata: agresija na Hrvatsku i Bosnu i Hercegovinu 1989.-1998.*, p. 100.

hope that UN peacekeeping forces coming to the war zone would secure its territorial gains.

Under pressure from the international community, a compromise had been reached through a 22 November 1991 agreement on the relocation of remaining JNA forces of the 5th Military District from the territory of Croatia and leaving the Croatian side with weapons taken from the TO.⁸⁵ By 30 December 1991, the relocation process had been completed.⁸⁶ After signing of an agreement on an unconditional ceasefire in Sarajevo on 2 January 1992 between representatives of the Republic of Croatia and the JNA, combat activities declined significantly. The arrival and deployment of UN peacekeeping units thereafter began along the demarcation line.⁸⁷

At the very end of 1991, on 30 December, a new restructuring of the JNA took place which dissolved the 5th Military District. The JNA instead established the 2nd Military District based in Sarajevo. It included the 10th Corps of the former 5th Military District, as well as the 4th, 5th and 7th Corps from the 1st Military District and the 9th Corps from the former Naval District. Three operational groups entered the 10th Corps: the 6th in Lika, the 7th in Banovina and the 8th in Kordun which had been created in the reorganisation of the 1st and 3rd Operational Groups. JNA armed forces in eastern Herzegovina and Montenegro, which had been orientated towards the south of Croatia, became part of the structure of the 4th Military District.⁸⁸

The initial few months of 1992 represented a short period during which the JNA had two tasks: it had to withdraw from the territory of the Republic of Croatia while protecting its territorial gains against Croatian armed forces. This required the reorganisation of the armed forces of the rebel Serbs from a militia into an army and the creation of border units and police brigades.⁸⁹ On 27 February 1992 an order of the Head of the General Staff of SFRY Armed Forces created a new military structure in the area temporarily taken by JNA from the Croatian Republic. Pursuant to it, the TO General Headquarters of the Republic of Srpska Krajina (RSK) had been organized to oversee six TO zonal Headquarters with subordinate brigades.⁹⁰ In mid-March, the General Staff of the SFRY Armed Forces sent to the RSK's TO Headquarters an "Instruction for the work of Territorial Defense headquarters and units in the preparation and execution of demobilisation and remobilization," which included basic guidelines for demobilisation and mobilisation activities in "in the period after the withdrawal of JNA units from

⁸⁵ Sporazum između ovlaštenih predstavnika Vlade Republike Hrvatske i JNA, Zagreb, 22 November 1991.

⁸⁶ "Izmještanje do kraja izvršeno," *Narodna armija*, 4 Apr. 1992, 4

⁸⁷ Komanda 8. OG, Str. pov. br. 2-254 of 16 March 1992, Naređenje.

⁸⁸ "Obrazovane četiri vojne oblasti," *Narodna armija*, 4 January 1992, 4; Komanda 2. vojne oblasti, DT. br. 1-2 of 5 January 1992, Naređenje

⁸⁹ Komanda 8. OG, Str. pov. br. 2-302 of 31 March 1992, Redovni borbeni izvještaj.

⁹⁰ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, III uprava, D.T. br. 892-2 of 2 March 1992, Naređenje.

the territory of Krajina.⁹¹ In accordance with an order given by the Head of the General Staff of the SFRY Armed Forces on 24 March 1992, the TO of RSK became subject to numerous organisational changes. A rear-echelon base had been established in Knin, while howitzer artillery battalions, mixed counter-armour divisions, light artillery anti-aircraft batteries and rear-echelon bases had been located in each of the TO zones.⁹²

Apart from the organisation of the local Serb paramilitary force, the Administration of Special Militia Units had been established at this time under the RSK Ministry of Defense. The Administration became charged with militia brigades which had to be established in Knin, Korenica, Vojnić, Petrinja, Okučani, Vukovar, Beli Manastir and Benkovac.⁹³ On 22 April, the JNA sent a large number of officers with ranks ranging from captain 1st class to colonel to the RSK. The Commander of the TO General Headquarters of the RSK had determine to determine their deployments. In this manner, an experienced command structure consisting of active officers received the task to create the conditions for the efficient operations of the rebel Serbs' armed force.⁹⁴ By the end of April, the JNA managed to do what the leaders of the rebel Serbs could not do since August 1990. Three separate areas, or the SAOs, as their creators called them, joined into the RSK, as the first of two Serb states outside Serbia.

Handover of the zones of responsibility to United Nations Protective Force (UNPROFOR) started in mid-May 1992, after which militias remained the only armed units in the territory of the so-called Krajina, while the remaining armed forces had been demobilised and reduced to activities at their headquarters.⁹⁵ This marked the end of the "official" phase of JNA actions in Croatia. Its members, as citizens of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (consisting of Serbia and Montenegro), withdrew from occupied areas of the Republic of Croatia. Pursuant to an order of its General Staff, the JNA had to withdraw its materiel and technical means and manpower from the territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina no later than 19 May 1992. Those units, which could not transfer all of their equipment, had to hand it over to units designated by the Command of the 2nd Military District.⁹⁶

The Serbian war against the Republic of Croatia primarily represented a war for the territory of and against the Croatian people. The aim of the war can be reduced to three words - ethnically cleansed territory, and, to achieve that goal all possible means had been permitted.

One can see the outlines of three phases in the war. The first phase lasted between mid May-1990 and the beginning of March 1991. In that peri-

⁹¹ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, III uprava, Str. pov. br. 1116-1 of 12 March 1992, Uputstvo.

⁹² SSNO, Str. pov. br. 1349-1 of 24 March 1992, Naređenje.

⁹³ SSNO, Generalštab OS SFRJ, III uprava, Str. pov. br. 1943-2 of 28 April 1992, Naređenje.

⁹⁴ Naređenje br. 2-77 načelnika Personalne uprave SSNO of 22 April 1992.

⁹⁵ RSK, Glavni štab Teritorijalne obrane, Str. pov. br. 303/92 of 7 May 1992, Naređenje.

⁹⁶ SSNO, GŠ OS SFRJ, Operativni centar, Br. 53-3 of 11 May 1992, Naređenje.

od, JNA forces supported the beginning of the rebellion and prepared for the next phase. General Kadijević defined the aim of the JNA at the time as the protection of Serbs in Croatia “from attacks of Croatian armed formations” and to enable them to “consolidate their military self-organisation for defense; at the same time, prepare the JNA for war against Croatia when Croatia starts it against the JNA.”⁹⁷ His stated goals twisted undeniable facts. No attacks occurred on Serbs. What actually happened had been an armed uprising of militant segments of the Serb population against the legitimate authorities of the Republic of Croatia.

The second phase lasted from early March till the beginning of July 1991. During that phase, Serb rebels tried to extend their parastate to areas which did not have a favourable ethnic status for the Serbs but which contained “enough” Serbs to allow them to claim their right to yet another “centuries-old” Serbian land. From that moment, JNA units became the unquestionable protector of rebel Serb forces. The JNA soon took on another, even more important task - the role of a participant in the same effort as a result of which the JNA took part in actions in Pakrac, Plitvice and eastern Slavonia during which the initial victims had been killed. During this period, the JNA demonstrated the experience it had gained from the long-standing activities of the 52nd Corps units in Kosovo. In this phase, ethnic cleansing began, carried out by local rebel Serbs. Self-proclaimed TO undertook the task through threats and intimidation, after which they moved on to a much more open methods – the massacre of those deemed “unsuitable.” That very formula of open genocide proved to be most efficient in achieving the basic Serb aim - ethnically cleansing the population of Croats and other non-Serbs. The formula proved suitable for the JNA as well, which continued to present itself as a neutral factor, whose basic task had been to create, as they called it, “buffer zones.” It always appeared in the right place at the right time to ensure the success of the rebels and to halt attempts of Croatian forces whenever things went wrong for the Serbs.

The beginning of July saw the start of the third phase of JNA actions against Croatia. Gradual and increased engagement, combining support to the rebels and the entry of newly arrived Serb groups, characterised this phase. In mid-September, the JNA launched an offensive against Croatia with the intention to pull its units out from areas which did not fall within the proposed borders of Greater Serbia, while simultaneously attempting to install themselves on Greater Serbia’s imaginary borders. The reservists’ poor response from the first condemned this plan to failure so that the JNA instead carried out a reduced variant of the plan. During this period, the pretence of “preventing interethnic conflicts” became discarded and the purpose of JNA engagement became fully revealed. The claim to be fighting to unblock barracks lost any sense when it came to Dubrovnik and Vukovar because “no blocked barracks, or Serb population that needed protection”

⁹⁷ V. Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada*, p. 127.

could be found there, as Lord Carrington noted.⁹⁸ The real nature of the war carried out by the JNA in the campaign against Dubrovnik and Vukovar had been uncovered.

Translated by Ida Jurković

Die Jugoslawische Volksarmee in der Agression gegen die Republik Kroatien 1990-1992

Zusammenfassung

Nach dem Tod von Josip Broz Tito im Jahre 1980 geriet die Sozialistische Föderative Republik Jugoslawien (SFRJ) in eine Krise. Diese Jahre waren geprägt von den Geschehnissen in Kosovo 1981 und 1989, von langwierigen Wirtschaftskrisen und dem Erwachen des großserbischen Nationalismus, der sich gegen den in der Verfassung von 1974 angestrebten und verabschiedeten Föderalstaat richtete. Die Einbeziehung der Jugoslawischen Volksarmee (JNA) machte es offensichtlich, dass die Vorstellung von einem Großserbien tief in dieser sich selbst als Verteidiger von Titos Erbe verstehenden Institution verwurzelt war, in der die Serben die Mehrheit bildeten. Gegen Ende der 1980-er Jahre war laut dem Plan "Jedinstvo" ("Einheit") die Restrukturierung der JNA abgeschlossen und hatte die Zentralisierung der Armee zum Ergebnis. Dieses geschah auf Kosten der als Element der Republikanarmee dienenden Territorialabwehr, und zugunsten der Jugoslawischen Volksarmee, die zuvor vom legalen Gesichtspunkt her gleichgestellt waren. Auf diese Weise konnten Oberhäupter des Militärs die politischen Mächte in Serbien und Montenegro offen unterstützen, die im Unterschied zu den restlichen Republiken einen zentralistischen Staat anstrebten. Da ein Ende der bipolaren Spaltungen in der Welt in Sicht war, hatte diese Option der JNA keine reale Basis in der Form von Bedrohungen von Außen.

Nach dem Sieg der demokratischen Kräfte in Kroatien und den daraus folgenden Veränderungen in der Regierung, entrüstete die Jugoslawische Volksarmee sogleich die Kroatische Territorialabwehr. Zur gleichen Zeit war die Umverteilung der Truppen in der Zagreber Region abgeschlossen und der 10. Armeekorps aufgebaut, dessen Aufgabe es war, Unruhen in der Stadt durch die in den 80-er Jahren in Kosowo eingesetzten Taktik zu vermeiden.

Die Struktur der Truppen in bewaffneten und mobilisierten Einheiten in Kroatien und dessen Umfeld wurde bereits zu Friedenszeiten gestärkt, vorrangig in Gebieten in denen Kroaten die Mehrzahl der Bevölkerung bildeten. Auf diese Weise wurde die Abhängigkeit vom Personal reduziert, und, hinsichtlich der Stärke dieser mobilisierten Einheiten erwartet, dass diese den Brennpunkt des bewaffneten Konfliktes in Kroatien darstellen werden.

Nach der Rebellion der serbischen Minderheit in Kroatien im August 1990, stellte sich die JNA unverzüglich an deren Seite. Bis Juli 1991 nahm die Armee an der Rebellion durch das Institut der "Pufferzone" teil, welche scheinbar die zwei

⁹⁸ Henry Wynaendts, *U žrvnju*, Jugoslovenska hronika jul 1991-avgust 1992 (Beograd: Radio B-92, 1996), p. 99.

Konfliktseiten auseinanderhielt, während deren wirkliches Ziel war, der kroatischen Regierung bei der flächendeckenden Implementierung der Verfassung Steine in den Weg zu legen. Die den Rebellen seitens der JNA gebotene Unterstützung offenbarte seit Juli 1991 die allmähliche Gewaltanwendung gegenüber den Streitkräften der kroatischen Regierung. Gegen Ende September begann die Jugoslawische Volksarmee mit der Implementierung strategischer Pläne, die auf die Zerspaltung des Landes und den Rücktritt der kroatischen Regierung hinausliefen. Danach sollte durch großangelegte Angriffe Kontrolle über diejenigen Gebiete gewonnen werden, die planmäßig zum Großserbien gehören sollten. Nach dem Mißerfolg dieser Operationen, gab sich die Jugoslawische Volksarmee mit Regionen zufrieden, in denen die Serben die Mehrheit bildeten. Vor ihrem Rückzug am Anfang des Jahres 1992, organisierte die JNA Streitkräfte unter den rebellierenden kroatischen Serben.

