

Observation no: 200 – Bosnian Independence

Country-year: Yugoslavia 1991

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

The current regime in Yugoslavia was a communist regime that came into being at the end of World War II, and dissolved in 1992 during multiple wars of independence. Prior to the Bosnian War of Independence, the head of government was a rotating Presidency between the heads of the various Republics of Yugoslavia.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

Yugoslavia experienced a coup on 27 March 1941.¹ The coup ended the rule of monarchy in Yugoslavia under Prince Paul, and following an interim government in World War II, Yugoslavia emerged as a communist federation under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito in the postwar era.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No.

Following the death of Tito in 1980, the position of President of Yugoslavia was broken up into a collective presidency. The President of each socialist republic within Yugoslavia would together form a committee to collectively make federal policy. The Presidency had a chairman, and the position rotated every year.

Prior to the Bosnian War, however, Yugoslavia had begun to break up already, and only 4 out of 8 members were left in the Presidency – Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro.³ Among these, the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic was the dominant voice.

There is no evidence that Milosevic ever served in the military.

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

¹ Onslow, Sue. 2005. "Britain and the Belgrade Coup of 27 March 1941 Revisited." *Electronic Journal of International History*. (8): 359-270.

² "Prince Paul of Yugoslavia gets royal resting place at last." *Agence France-Presse* 6 Oct. 2012.

³ "Serb-Dominated Presidency OKs Peacekeepers in Croatia." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. December 31, 1991: A6.

Yes.

This is a case where the reality differs from official policy. Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic federal republic, and officially, Tito made a significant effort to make sure that the army reflected this multi-ethnic character – so that it could be the backbone of the Yugoslav state.⁴

In reality, however, the military and the officer corps were heavily Serbian, and got increasingly so with time. In fact, the majority of the officer corps of the army was Serbian.⁵ Some reports estimate that 60% of the officer corps was Serbian.⁶ In fact, Derdzinski (1998) suggests that the Yugoslav military followed a policy of “excluding certain ethnic national minorities and ethnic majorities, especially those among groups traditionally “hostile” to the Yugoslav state (Germans, Italians, Turks, Greeks, Hungarians and Albanians) as well as Gypsies.”⁷ Oberschall (2000) also reports strong anti-Muslim sentiments in the army and among senior officers as a result of Serbian nationalism.⁸

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

Yugoslavia was ruled by a communist regime, and the military was under the control of the Yugoslav communist party. In fact, Djilas (1993) argues that the “army was the most anti-democratic and reactionary of all Yugoslav communist institutions.”⁹ It disapproved of pro-market or pro-democracy reforms, and even unofficially approved of the coup attempt against reformist Soviet President Gorbachev.

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

The top leadership of the Yugoslav military were members of the Communist Party, and many of them were part of the leadership structure built by Tito himself.¹⁰ In fact,

⁴ Derdzinski, Jeoseph Leo. 1998. “Vojnik i Narod: The Soldier and the People. Civil-Military Relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Civil-Military Relations in Slovenia.” M.A Thesis, Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Echikson, William. “Ethnic Strains Test Yugoslav Army.” The Christian Science Monitor. July 10, 1991.

⁷ Derdzinski 1998, p 46.

⁸ Oberschall, Anthony. 2000. “The Manipulation of Ethnicity: From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and War in Yugoslavia.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 23(6) (November): 982-1001.

⁹ Djilas, Aleksa. 1993. “A Profile of Slobodan Milosevic.” *Foreign Affairs*. 72(3) (Summer): 81-96.

¹⁰ Binder, David. “Ethnic Conflict in Yugoslavia Tearing Apart Its Army, Too.” *New York Times*. October 1, 1991

Derdzinski (1998) reports that within the military, “over 98% of all commanding officers were members of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.”¹¹

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

Derdzinski (1998) argues that Yugoslav military and the Communist party were intimately connected. In fact, from the very beginning, communist political indoctrination was a key feature of military training.¹² Until the very end, the military remained the most staunchly communist element in Yugoslavia.

Further, Oberschall (2000) also reports growing anti-Muslim sentiment within the Yugoslav army in the late 1980s, when the military was becoming increasingly Serbian nationalist, which included senior army leaders.¹³ He cites news reports that Yugoslav military barracks had maps that colored in green areas of the world that Muslims supposedly planned to conquer for themselves. In another interview, a Yugoslav general pointed out a green line on a map of Europe called “the Green Transversal,” and claimed that Muslims planned to cut the Christian world in half along this line.¹⁴

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

Slobodan Milosevic rose to power in late 1980s in Serbia through strong, ethno-nationalist rhetoric.¹⁵ When non-Serb minorities in Yugoslavia protested, particularly Albanians in Kosovo, the Yugoslav “answered their [protests] by sending reinforcements, including federal paramilitary police to Kosovo.”¹⁶ Further, between 1990 and 1991, the republics of Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav military was used in both of these cases to try and stop the successful secession of Croatia and Slovenia from the republic of Yugoslavia.¹⁷

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

¹¹Derdzinski, Jeoseph Leo. 1998. “Vojnik i Narod: The Soldier and the People. Civil-Military Relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Civil-Military Relations in Slovenia.” M.A Thesis, Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

¹² Derdzinski, 1998, p 8-9

¹³ Oberschall 2000, p 991.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Djilas, Aleksa. 1993. “A Profile of Slobodan Milosevic.” *Foreign Affairs*. 72(3) (Summer): 81-96.

¹⁶ Magas, Branka. 1993. *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking Yugoslavia's Break-Up 1980-92*. London: Verso, p 161.

¹⁷ Binder, David. “Ethnic Conflict in Yugoslavia Tearing Apart Its Army, Too.” *New York Times*. October 1, 1991

No.

I cannot find any evidence that the military actually became involved in governing the whole or part of the country. It was always strictly under the command of civilian, communist leadership.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

According to data on military and paramilitary organizations by Pilster and Bohmelt (2012), Yugoslavia had a variety of paramilitary organizations. In fact, the number of soldiers in paramilitary groups far outnumbered regular armed forces – in the late 1980s, there were several hundred thousand paramilitary troops, while the regular armed forces was less than one hundred thousand.¹⁸

Prior to the Bosnian war for Independence, there were three primary paramilitary groups – the Frontier Guards, the military police and the Civil Defense forces.¹⁹

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

The regular military, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) was the most staunchly communist and conservative actor within Yugoslavia.²⁰ Internal surveillance in Yugoslavia was focused primarily towards potential spies for the USSR (and to a lesser extent, the West), and towards nationalist groups.²¹

There is no evidence to suggest that there existed a separate apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military. In fact, since 1974, the JNA itself was in charge of the state entire civilian security apparatus.²²

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

Yes.

¹⁸ Pilster, Ulrich, and Tobias Böhmelt. 2012. "Do Democracies Engage Less in Coup-Proofing? On the Relationship Between Regime Type and Civil-Military Relations." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8(4) (January): 355–372

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Derdzinski, Jeoseph Leo. 1998. "Vojnik i Narod: The Soldier and the People. Civil-Military Relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Civil-Military Relations in Slovenia." M.A Thesis, Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

²¹ Fleming, Louis B. "Yugoslavia Steps Up Citizen Surveillance." *Los Angeles Times*. February 25, 1980: B5

²² Derdzinski 1998, p 31

Djilas (1993) suggests that after coming to power, Milosevic consolidated his power over the armed forces by “retiring about one hundred generals and admirals, though never, of course, openly.”²³ In other words, there is some evidence that unofficially, those of the officer corps that were not in line with Milosevic’s strong pro-Serbian nationalist policies were purged out of the military.

That said, the purge was never an overt phenomena. Djilas suggest that “He [Milosevic] has asked for no resignations nor in any way directly involved himself with the military.”²⁴

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

As many as 98,000 members of the military, including the officer corps, were members of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and met along with other party members regularly at the Party Congresses. In these meetings, they were free to air their demands and grievances.²⁵ In fact, the military’s clout increased over time within the Communist Party’s central committees.²⁶

²³ Djilas 1993, p 92.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Derdzinski 1998, p 31-32, 53

²⁶ Derdzinski 1998, p 31-32