

# The Yugoslav People's Army and the Fragmentation of a Nation

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*Nearly every day there are news reports about the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The author offers a historical perspective of Yugoslavia's army, tracing its history from Josip Tito to the fighting of today. He looks at how the army has reduced its size since 1948, when it ranked third in Europe. Finally, he discusses the recent fighting and the impact it has had on the army.*

**T**HE YUGOSLAV armed forces have played visible and important invisible roles in the deep and painful crisis in the now defunct multinational state of "Southern Slavs" and, finally, its breakdown. The role of the federal standing "Yugoslav People's Army" (YPA)—then the main component of the armed forces, became highly controversial. It was praised by many in the eastern part of the federal state, particularly in Serbia and Montenegro, and sharply criticized, condemned and rejected by many in the northwestern part (Slovenia and Croatia), as well as the large Albanian majority in Kosovo.

Amid growing societal polarization along political, ideological, national, religious, regional, cultural and civilization lines, the Yugoslav professional military found itself in a highly

unpleasant predicament—"damned if you do, damned if you don't." Their leadership allowed the YPA to be drawn into a struggle between opposing political forces, which were largely, but not exclusively, regionally and nationally based. Equally unwise and unlike most of their former or present East European "real socialist" colleagues, the Yugoslav professional military openly cast its lot with the lost political option—reviving Bolshevik Marxism and reestablishing "true socialism," Yugoslav communist style.

The professional military has, for decades, publicly condemned internal nationalism and chauvinism in the "Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." Many within the military have been intimately unhappy about the wave of Serbian nationalism that brought Slobodan

Milosevic to power in Serbia, the largest Yugoslav republic. Yet, the military leadership politically aligned itself with this communist and populist regional baron, viewed by many—including YPA officers—as the greatest individual menace to Yugoslavia’s existence. This political alliance has been based on ideological closeness and national-cultural affinity with over 70 percent of Yugoslav professional officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), as well as on converging economic and institutional interests. In June and July 1991, the percentage rose to about 90 percent. Its main objective had been to preserve, as much as possible, the existing federal institutions and large federal budgets. These institutions have served as one of the biggest sources of employment and income for the Serbs and their regional variation “Montenegrins” (who together constituted over 80 percent of all federal employees) and for Serbia. YPA had been, by far, the single largest and the most expensive federal institution, with its headquarters, like all other federal institutions, located in the Serbian and federal capital, Belgrade. Since 1919, the Yugoslav military-industrial complex had served as the most important instrument for transferring large sums of public funds from the northwest to the east, southeast and center of Yugoslavia. During the last decade, appropriations for YPA, expressed in percentage of net social product and of the total federal budget, had been sliding down—from about 7 and 70 percent to about 4 and 50 percent, respectively. In US dollar equivalent, it oscillated between \$2.2 and \$2.9 billion, due to high inflation and unstable exchange rates.

Since the foundation of the “people’s democratic” Yugoslavia in 1945, the YPA had constituted the strongest pillar of Marshal Josip Tito’s authoritarian one-party rule. Unlike, for example, in the neighboring Romania, the Yugoslav military institutions of repression (security service, prosecutors, courts, jails and even concentration camps) were more important for establishing and maintaining Tito’s regime than corresponding civilian institutions. In its internal life, YPA had truly reflected the basic fea-

tures of the regime and its strategy of integrating the multinational conglomerate—Tito’s personality cult; monopoly of power in the hands of the “League of Communists of Yugoslavia” (LCY), by origin an alien supranational ideology of

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Marxism-Leninism; centralist authoritarian political system behind the facade of a quasi-federation (copied from the Soviet Union); the goals of creating a “new socialist man” through pervasive indoctrination; and a new Yugoslavia through melting all her nations and ethnic groups into a single “Yugoslav nation.”

When Tito’s Yugoslavia started visibly disintegrating in the decade following his death in 1980, the Yugoslav professional military strenuously endeavored to stop and even to reverse this trend. These efforts were predicated largely, although not exclusively, by the military’s corporate interests, covered by and partly mixed with sincere and altruistic concerns for Yugoslavia’s survival in one piece. The military has had the obvious and understandable desire to preserve:

- The institution (YPA) itself and its privileged access to the federal treasury (as it used to be under Tito).
- Its wide internal autonomy; its system of extensive political surveillance over the entire state.
- The absence of effective oversight by any civilian institution.
- Its far-ranging control over the Yugoslav military-industrial complex.
- The YPA’s internal political-ideological setup and centralist unitarian orientation.

All these desires coincided, to a large extent, with the interests and preferences of Serbia's leadership under Milosevic. The presence in Serbia of most central military institutions and of YPA elite units (such as the Guards, the para-troop brigade in Nis, the main air force base with the most advanced aircraft in Yugoslav inventories—MiG 29s) and the largest factories for producing arms and military equipment, provided for extensive common interests in preserving the essentials of Tito's "real socialist" system. These have been the dominance of so-called social (in fact state) property, rule by the Communist Party (renamed in Serbia a "socialist" party), extensive state controls and interventions in economy, the ruling party's exclusive control over mass media, and so on.

Although Milosevic's Serbia had been, in many respects, YPA's natural ally in assuring its survival, this liaison further undermined the

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YPA's standing in many parts of Yugoslavia—notably in Kosovo, Slovenia, in most of Croatia, in several areas inhabited by Muslims and in Macedonia. The then federal defense minister, General of the Army Veljko Kadijevic's public endorsement of Serbian and Montenegrin communists (before and between two rounds of elections in December 1990) and his conspicuous greetings to the two elected communist presidents of republics (with no greetings to others) have exacerbated hostility toward YPA as an institution among many, mostly noncommunist parties (successful or victorious in four

republics out of six) and even in Serbia. By taking such a controversial and highly obtrusive political stance and by inflexibly refusing to seriously contemplate deep transformation of the federal army in line with momentous changes in society, the YPA leadership gravely endangered the YPA's very existence, particularly as an all-Yugoslav institution.

## **The Yugoslav Federal Army and its Political Nature**

Ranked in 1948 as the third largest regular land force on the European continent, the YPA, 42 years later, represented only a modest, medium to small size conventional standing army. Its total uniformed manpower, around 220,000 at Tito's death, has continued to decline to 170,000 by 1992. This reduction occurred mostly for the lack of funds, thanks to neo-détente and from 1991 on, reduced intakes of conscripts from the northwest.

The YPA consisted of three main arms, the land forces (which includes the infantry), constituting the largest and, for prospective cadets, the least attractive component. Geographic division of the state into YPA military districts (MDs) was used for many years to largely coincide with boundaries between federal units (six republics and two autonomous provinces). Some of YPA's practices (such as appointments of MD commanders) were geared to Yugoslavia's federal structure. The unitarian backlash in 1986–87 led to YPA's reorganization into three continental commands and one maritime regional command, with headquarters in Belgrade, Skopje, Zagreb and Split. This reorganization also repealed practically all concessions to territorial (regional) assignments and posting (except in YPA reserve units, around 500,000 strong in 1990).

Yugoslavia, fully self-sufficient in the production of small arms and standard ammunition, armed the YPA with the domestically produced family of light weapons based on Soviet licenses, such as Kalashnikovs, portable antiarmor rockets and some weapons and equipment of domestic design and production—light guns, armored vehicles, multiple rocket launchers,

and so forth. Yugoslav defense industry had also produced some training and combat aircraft (Galeb, Orao), missile boats and diesel submarines, combining typically domestic frames and hardware with crucial imported Western, Eastern or Eastern-licensed components such as jet engines, electronics, avionics and rockets.

However, the main systems of (conventional) heavy weapons have been either direct imports from the former Soviet Union, Soviet-licensed imports from former Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) members (Poland and Soviet Union-Socialist Federal Republic) or mostly or totally domestically produced weapons based on Soviet licenses—M-54/55, T-72, M-84 (an improved version of T-72) tanks, PT-76 heavy guns, *Split* and *Kotor* (improved Soviet *Koni*) frigates, missile and torpedo craft, most missiles in all three arms, MiG-21 and MiG-29 aircraft, Mi-8 and Ka-25 helicopters. The degree of YPA's technological dependence on Soviet weaponry and the Yugoslav military-industrial complex's reliance on its Soviet counterpart had been by far the highest among the European nonbloc states. Moreover, the Yugoslav military had greater access to the newest generations of Soviet weapons than most WTO armies. Yugoslavia thus obtained the T-72s and MiG-29s earlier than its WTO neighbors. Early deliveries, lower prices than in the West and payments through barter trade were used by the Soviets to preserve the connection. The rather warm, "comradely" relationships with the Yugoslav professional military (where Slavophile and Russophile sentiments survived the period of Soviet-Yugoslav hostility in 1948-54) and with the Yugoslav military industrial-complex had remained one of the few sources of Soviet influence in Yugoslavia.

YPA had in its armories a large, and in some categories (such as main battle tanks and combat aircraft) excessively large, holdings of relatively or plainly obsolete heavy weapons. The maintenance of this bulky and costly arsenal had exceeded Yugoslavia's economic power. Severe economic and budgetary difficulties led to reductions in exercises and to de facto lowering

of training standards. The combat value of the Yugoslav military arsenal had been considerably reduced by very low computerization of command, control and communications and still more by growing political and national tensions in the federal state.

The Yugoslav armed forces officially drew their origin from the "Partisan Detachments and the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia." This force was established under Broz's, alias Tito's, leadership in 1941, on the territory of the then defeated and dismembered Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The official "Day of the Armed Forces" had been 22 December—the day when

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in 1941 the Central Committee of the LCY presumably formed the "First Proletarian Brigade." (In fact, the brigade was established on 21 December—Joseph Stalin's birthday.) The unit was intended to serve as the model for other partisan units and, since 1944, for the entire "Yugoslav Army" (renamed in 1952 as the "Yugoslav People's Army"). It emulated the Soviet Red Army, using red stars and red banners as symbols; strived to become Marxist-Leninist and indeed became antipluralist in spirit, atheist and closely intertwined with the Communist Party (through a system of political officers and party cells down to platoons); has been plebeian by social origin of its personnel, all-Yugoslav by national origin of its soldiers and, since 1945, practiced extraterritorial enlistment and posting.

Many of these characteristics have remained

intact for four and a half decades, as Tito, during his long rule, took particular care to conserve and insulate "his army," not only from nationalist but also liberal (and in his views corrupting)

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influences emanating from civilian society and the "bourgeois West." The percentage of Communist Party members among YPA officers was already high in 1945 and 45 years later, stood at over 96 percent. The federal army had represented, for decades, the largest agency for recruiting new party members (from among conscripts and cadets) and for regular and organized political indoctrination of the Yugoslav male population on behalf of LCY.

"The Organization of LCY in YPA," over 100,000 strong, enjoyed a fully autonomous status within the ruling party and, in fact, became a communist military subparty with an ideology and some practices distinct from its other (civilian) parts. Unlike other "socialist" East European states, the ruling Communist Party (and civilian political police) had lost, since the early 1950s, its institutionalized control over the professional military. Moreover, the LCY central bodies had been used by professional military personnel ("seconded" to work in the party) to oversee key civilian institutions and to protect in them the military's own corporate interests. Tito's personal control over YPA could not substitute for the LCY's loss. Consequently, behind the facade of Tito's relatively benign and partly liberalized dictatorial rule (but particularly authoritarian in the military sphere) since the

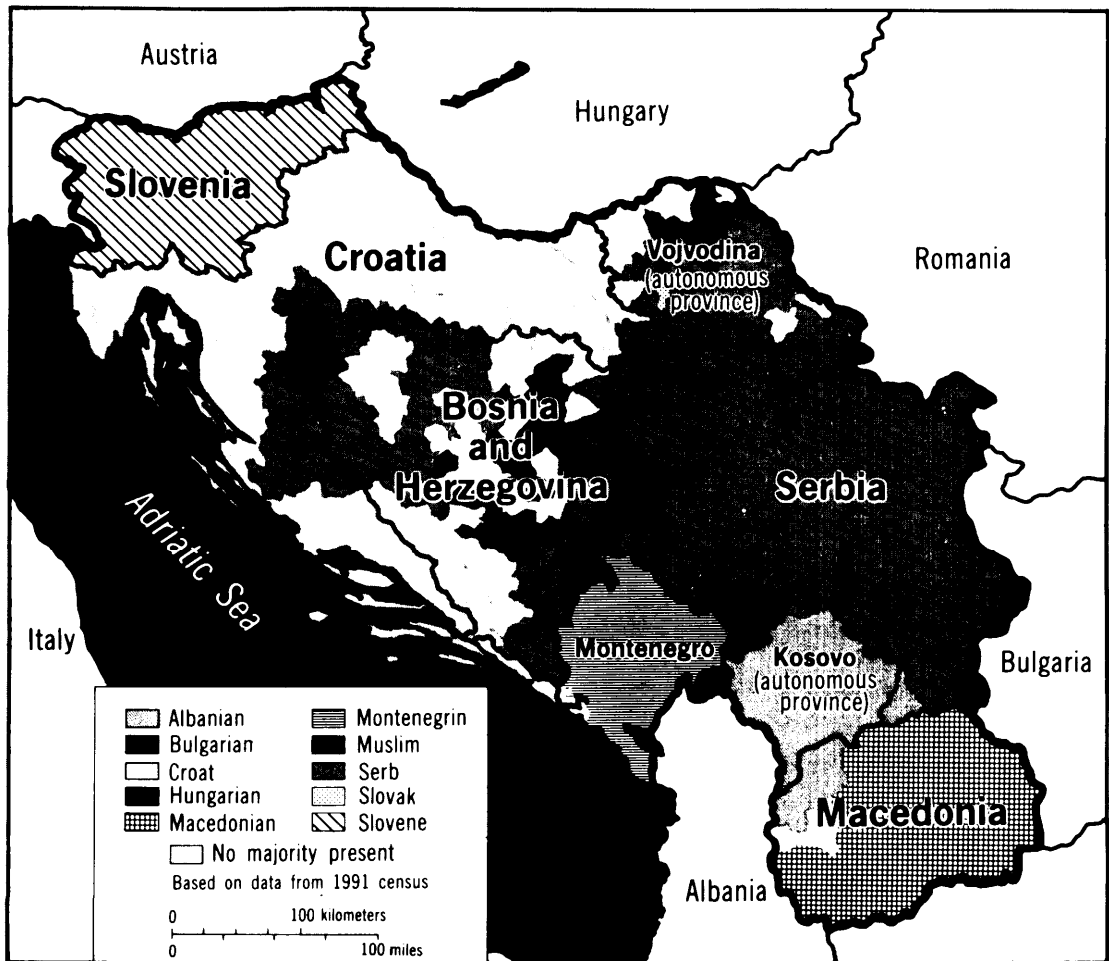
1960s, the Yugoslav professional military had obtained an autonomous and privileged position in the state.

The symbiotic relationship between the ruling party and the army, as well as the results of several decades of indoctrination in the ranks, had potent consequences when Tito's one-party system started crumbling. The YPA leadership first stonewalled and then openly criticized the trends of "de-Titoization," liberalization and pluralization in Yugoslav politics, on the grounds that they would bring the restoration of capitalism and interethnic strife. The YPA leadership rightly perceived that the undoing of the Titoist order would bring, in its wing, Yugoslavia's disintegration and YPA's dismantling—at the least, the way both were set up in 1944–45. However, the Yugoslav military had refused to admit that the seeds of instability and self-destruction were in the very political and ideological foundations on the Titoist order and that Yugoslavia's long-term stability could have been achieved only on a different, pluralist democratic basis.

## **The Military and the Former Yugoslavia's Multination Setup**

The political and ideological polarization in Yugoslavia had acquired, to a great extent, national and cultural colorations. Due to ex-Yugoslavia's heterogeneity and varying regional exposure to Western liberal political influences, the process of political pluralization had proceeded unevenly, progressing geographically largely from the northwest toward the southeast. In the northwest of ex-Yugoslavia, it coalesced also with anti-Belgrade sentiments, fueled by some national, language and economic grievances. The process of democratization had indeed destabilized the federal state, the old constitutional order and YPA's relations with two of the three "founding nations" of the former Yugoslavia (first with the Slovenes and then the Croats). It then contributed to further spoiling the relations between these two nations and the Serbs.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had been one of the rare states with legal



provisions for a balanced regional recruitment into professional military ranks, and it was unique in having this principle elevated to a constitutional obligation of the armed forces:

"As regards the composition of the officer corps and the promotion to senior commanding and directing posts in the Yugoslav People's Army, the principle of the most proportional representation of the Republics and Autonomous Provinces shall be applied." (Article 242, Federal Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1974.)

YPA was thus mandated to come as close to proportional composition (and not representation) as possible, primarily in its upper (general officer) echelons. In the former Yugoslavia, the proportionality by republics and prov-

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inces differed considerably from proportional composition by national origin, such as in the largest Yugoslav nation—the Serbs lived in significant numbers in three republics and two

autonomous provinces. In practice, this rule had been only very imperfectly applied to the recognized "Yugoslav" Slavic nations only, with preferential treatment given to only nominal "nationals," officers of mixed origin and to cross-nationally married.

Due to biased personnel policies and objective circumstances—very uneven levels of economic development, large differentials between

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regions in prevailing prices and wages, uneven rates of unemployment and public prestige of military occupations, especially in Serbia and Montenegro—the Yugoslav military had only partly implemented the above-mentioned constitutional provision, despite considerable effort and expense. The least skewed composition has been maintained in the (greatly inflated) general officer ranks, while in officer and still more so in NCO ranks, the Serbs, Montenegrins and the "Yugoslavs" (usually nationally mixed, mostly Serbian speakers) had been strongly overrepresented. Among active YPA generals in 1989, these three groups accounted for 70 percent (or 103); among colonels, 81 percent (of which the Serbs with the akin Montenegrins made up 76 percent); among lieutenant colonels, 77 percent, and so on. Underrepresented in the entire military professional corps had been the Croats, Slovenes, non-Slavic "nationalities" (national minorities) of ethnical Albanians, Hungarians and Romanians, as well as the Gypsies (Roms) and the Vlahs, officially unrecognized even as "nationalities." This distribution

could be seen from the following table:

Article 243 of the Federal Constitution stipulated that "the equality of languages and alphabets of nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia shall be ensured in the Armed Forces . . . In matters of command and military training in YPA, one of the languages of the nations of Yugoslavia may be used, and in parts of the country—the languages of the nations and nationalities." However, in practice, YPA had for decades grossly violated the principle of equality of the languages and alphabets. The exceptional allowance was transformed into the rule, as Serbian was made the only YPA language, not only for command and training but for the entire system of administration, education, for communication within YPA, as well as between YPA, civilian authorities, mass media and other subjects. The only concession to the Catholic northwest has been in the uniform use by YPA of Latin script (this, however, has violated the equality of the Cyrillic alphabet, used by three groups—Serbs, Macedonians and Montenegrins). The YPA command prevented the use of languages other than Serbian, even in nationally homogenous or almost homogenous units with different mother tongues (such as YPA

**Professional Officer and NCO Corps (1981)  
and Recruits (1989) as Percentage of Population**

Yugoslav Nations and Nationalities	Percent in Population	Percent in Military	Military as Percentage of Population	Percent Among Recruits
Montenegrins	2.5	6.2	248	2.48
Croats	22.1	12.6	57	18.52
Macedonians	5.8	6.3	108	6.11
Muslims	8.4	2.4	28	12
Slovenes	8.2	2.8	34	7
Serbs	39.7	80.0	151	31
Albanians	6.4	.6	9	9
Hungarians	2.3	.7	30	1
Nationally undecided "Yugoslavs"	1.3	6.7	515	7
Others	3.3	1.6	48	6

Sources: Podružbanje varnosti in obrambe, 1983–84, FK ZSMS (Ljubljana), 18; and Response by the Federal Executive Council in the SFRY Assembly on 2 February 1990. Discrepancies between columns 1 and 4 are probably due to differences in procedures of reporting between civilian statistical offices and YPA, as well as demographic and administrative changes between 1981 and 1989.

reserves). It had angrily rejected in principle all proposals to allow the formation of active nationally homogenous units, even where it would make sense in terms of group cohesion and military efficiency. Criticisms and protests against the unitarian and assimilationist language practice had for decades been stigmatized as "nationalist" and suppressed.

The YPA language policy had been closely related to the system of extraterritorial recruitment and posting, as well as to its practice in promotion to higher ranks. The entire system was designed to weaken and, if possible, to uproot national and regional identity and to cultivate presumably supranational "all-Yugoslav" orientation among the military professionals. For this purpose, the mandated regional quotas had been, in fact, manipulated. Extraterritorial posting, national uprooting and official communication exclusively in the Serbian language had led to frequent and at least partial assimilation of non-Serbs, mostly into a "Serboslav" culture.

One of the controversial questions in the difficult relations between the YPA leadership and the two northwestern republics (formerly parts of Austro-Hungary) concerned the double structure of the Yugoslav armed forces and the existence of the armed forces' second component, the Territorial Defense Force (TDF). The TDF is similar in some respects to the National Guard in United States and the former Austro-Hungarian *Landwehr/Honved*.

The excessive scare caused by the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 brought Tito to abolish YPA's 23-year-old monopoly and to agree to establishing the TDF. Unlike YPA, this mostly lightly armed militia force was based in six republics and two autonomous provinces. It had been organized and financed by them and had used corresponding national languages for command and in administration. There had been no general staff of TDF, while the TDF commandants in republics and provinces used to be appointed by the commander in chief (Tito, and since 1980 the SFR Presidium—collective presidency) with each republic's consent. Commanding TDF generals

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were often by origin from the republic in question, but only after many tours of duty elsewhere and thoroughly "Yugoslavized." The total TDF manpower had been about four to five times larger than that of the active YPA, while the sum total of its yearly funding had been about 12 times lower. In many respects, TDF depended heavily on YPA's schools, logistics, warehouses, armories, and so on, and bought older YPA weapons. Many TDF professionals were YPA officers (active "on loan" or retired). The YPA leadership, ever since 1969, had done its best to maintain this very uneven relationship and effectively (if not formally) monitor or control the TDF.

### **The Federal Army and Yugoslavia's Disintegration**

Political and national tensions in the federal state inevitably negatively affected also the relationship between the two components of the armed forces and between the federal standing army and the police in at least two republics. In spite of the military leadership's strenuous efforts, tensions between national groups started spilling over into YPA's ranks.

As disintegration of the Titoist order dramatically accelerated in late 1989 and early 1990, the military leadership tried to exploit the period of confusion caused by transition from a single-party to a multiparty system. It wanted to achieve its long sought institutional goal—to prevent the appearance of any conceivable rival forces, or to assimilate those already existing (by



making them auxiliary components of YPA). The goal of fully submitting TDF was already at hand in most republics, particularly in Serbia and Montenegro (in Kosovo, TDF was, in fact, dismantled after the Albanian national unrest

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in 1981). In spring 1990, the YPA leadership moved to accomplish its strategic goal in Slovenia and Croatia as well. It wanted to preempt the expected victory of nationalist, noncommunist and anticommunist parties and possibly deprive them of their own armed force. This preemptive mini-coup was to be carried out from 17 April to 15 May 1990. The action consisted of YPA's secretly prescribing TDF a new doctrine (that contained clearly unconstitutional elements) and of totally disarming the entire TDF.

The military leadership often denied YPA's intent to stage a coup or be engaged in any other unconstitutional action. Widespread speculation about an "imminent military coup" in Yugoslavia also failed to materialize in a traditional form. Yet, one found in the former Yugoslavia several elements generally conducive to overt, unconstitutional military intervention—a deep economic, social, political and moral crisis; a plain collapse of the federal government and of the constitutional order at the federal level; sharp clashes and unbridled hostility among civilian elites; the army's institutional

insecurity; and numerous open appeals by various groups (mostly from Serbian-inhabited areas) for YPA to intervene.

However, one could state even more reasons that have mitigated against a military coup—YPA's extremely limited ability to rule the state and to lead it out of the crisis; negative experiences in other countries (including Greece and Poland); Yugoslavia's high external dependence and the West's open pressure against such a possibility; and YPA's Marxist ideology. Very importantly, the multinational composition of YPA's rank and file had played a strong restraining role, as any large-scale political move clearly and openly against legal authorities in the republics could and, in at least two cases, did undermine YPA's internal cohesion. Moreover, as long as the centralists and the Serbian block had controlled major federal institutions, there was also no need for any YPA action without a legal and constitutional cover.

The Yugoslav professional military had always considered itself, even in pre-1941 Yugoslavia, as one of the most important, if not the most important integrative factor in the state. It is a cruel irony that YPA's behavior had opposite and highly divisive effects. YPA's evident interest in preserving intact the key central structures and itself had worked as a powerful obstacle to saving the Yugoslav community of nations by radically transforming it—as long as all nations were still willing to maintain the Yugoslav framework. By December 1991, this chance went down the drain, due to YPA's inflexible posture and actions. YPA had become widely perceived in the more economically and socially developed northwest as a centralist, essentially Serbian and neo-Bolshevik threat to budding democracy and to national freedoms. Many YPA officers felt that this characterization was unfounded and unjust. But this perception had been an empirical fact to which the YPA leadership certainly greatly contributed. YPA's direct and indirect threats, contrary to the generals' intentions, did not only deter but greatly strengthened the popular desires in Slovenia and Croatia to leave the disjointed Balkan state and

Wide World Photos



A convoy of YPA tanks blocked short of their destination in Slovenia by roadblocks and civilians in Croatia, 8 May 1991.

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to join orderly, democratic and prosperous Europe. YPA's military attack against Slovenia in June 1991, and subsequently its war in Croatia, dispelled the pretenses of the YPA's leadership.

On the other hand, YPA's capacity to act as an interethnic peacekeeping force had been seriously limited by the lack of corresponding doctrine, organization, equipment and training. Above all, it was due to YPA's highly partial national and political profile, as all important conflicts inside Yugoslavia involved the Serbs, while most parties governing in four out of six republics were noncommunist.

On national grounds alone, YPA's involvement as super police had been less objectionable in cases of mass political unrest, disorders and violence within the Serbian community, since it happened after peaceful but prohibited demon-

strations staged by the opposition parties in Belgrade on 9 March 1991. However, soon after the YPA's show of tanks in the streets of Belgrade, Yugoslavia came dangerously close to a military coup, probably the closest since 1941.<sup>2</sup> During these tense days in mid-March 1991, a body previously unknown to the public and called the "Staff of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces of Yugoslavia" issued its first public statement.<sup>3</sup> This proclamation was a clear indication that the Yugoslav professional military got rid of effective control by any civilian institution and started openly functioning as a fully autonomous political entity.

YPA's institutional emancipation was facilitated by two periods of vacancy at the position of the head of state. During the second period, on 25 July 1991, two northwestern republics, Slovenia and Croatia, declared their independence.

Acting in the vacuum of power, the Federal Executive Council (cabinet) issued, with the prime minister's signature, an order that authorized the lightly armed YPA border guards to be

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***To the blockading of YPA barracks by Croatian forces (which caused no casualties on the YPA side), the YPA command retaliated improperly and out of all proportion by taking entire cities and the entire Dalmatian coast as hostages, indiscriminately attacking purely civilian targets, inflicting thousands of civilian casualties and colossal economic damage.***

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called to assist the federal police inspectors and federal customs officials in imposing federal police controls (a new development contrary to the previously existing legal order), in reestablishing federal customs controls and effectively closing most international border crossings from and to Slovenia, including three airports. The cabinet's order finally gave YPA the long-sought quasi-legal pretext for implementing its long-range political intentions and for "saving Yugoslavia," if necessary, by naked military force.

However, the legal cover given to YPA by the cabinet was insufficient, not only on constitutional but also on operational grounds. Repeating some of its tactics used in Kosovo and partly imitating the Soviet military's moves in Lithuania, the YPA command sent into action about 115 tanks, 32 self-propelled guns, 82 armored personnel carriers and 24 helicopters, and it ordered intimidating low-level flights by combat aircraft. This ill-conceived, badly prepared and executed, clearly political super-police action by the much better armed YPA ended in its humiliation and a political defeat for the federal government. On the political side, the conflict brought results that were diametrically opposite to the probable intentions of YPA's command—Slovenia's drive toward independ-

ence became irreversible and its international standing has greatly increased. The humiliated federal government was obliged to accept the internationalization of the Yugoslav crisis, as well as the European Economic Community's direct patronage and a strong say in Yugoslavia's internal matters (the latter had always been an anathema for the Yugoslav military).

YPA's untenable position in Slovenia, the real threat of spreading disintegration in combat units and the escalation of armed conflicts in Croatia led the YPA high command to accept a Serbian proposal to vacate Slovenia altogether (despite considerable reservations among the military professionals). Following YPA's initial pullout from Slovenia (the last YPA unit left on 25 October 1991), armed hostilities in Croatia picked up in intensity and ferocity. Accompanied by mass criminal activities and terrorism, by mid-August 1991 they reached the proportions of a full-fledged war. This was fought mostly in the spaces between the Serbian-inhabited enclaves and areas with strong Croatian majorities, as well as towns, road and rail junctions and inside and between the Serbian enclaves. The object of these hostilities was firm control of a third of the Republic of Croatia's territory, including parts with clear Croatian majorities.

YPA had for some months claimed and ostensibly maintained the posture of an interposition force, presumably controlling the clashes between the adversaries and separating them. Its mission used to be officially defined as prevention of mass interethnic violence, the preservation of Yugoslavia, protecting the YPA personnel and the unarmed Serbian people in Croatia. Many local and key regional YPA commanders, with YPA high command's approval, had extensively cooperated with the well-armed Serbian rebels, shielding them from Croatian counterattacks, supplying them with weapons (including mortars and light guns), ammunition, intelligence and often with food. YPA ground units, navy and air force elements have often attacked areas in which there were no previous hostilities, practically no Serbs and

Soldier, British Ministry of Defence

A UN armored personnel carrier of the British 1st Cheshire Battalion Group is halted by one of the many factions involved in the Bosnia fighting, circa January 1993.



***[The YPA] unconditionally agreed to the stationing of about 14,000 UN "peacekeeping" personnel in and around the conflict areas. A pullback of regular federal units and demobilization of TDF units in the Serbian Krajinas were important conditions in the deal made by Cyrus Vance. However, the federal army started immediately circumventing this provision by reassigning its personnel into the TDF and police and by additional arming.***

no YPA barracks to defend.

By 15 November 1991, warfare in Croatia involved about 200,000 armed personnel on all sides. Altogether, 14 cease-fire agreements, negotiated mostly under EEC's pressure, were gravely violated, with each side accusing the other of wrongdoing. The 15th agreement, signed in early January 1992, finally worked. By the time the war temporarily came to a halt, it had caused about 20,000 deaths (mostly among civilians), over 700,000 refugees (over 150,000 in Hungary, Slovenia and elsewhere in Europe) and direct material damage estimated at well over \$20 billion. During this war the YPA central and regional commands carried out,

from the military standpoint, senseless destruction of many Croatian industrial plants, farms, hotels, over 200,000 civilian housing units, bridges, highways, ports, merchant ships, pleasure and fishing boats, thousands of motor vehicles, entire villages, about 400 historic cultural monuments and about 200 churches. YPA executed thousands of attacks with rockets, mines, artillery, tanks, warplanes and warships against many cities, from Vukovar (almost entirely destroyed) and Osijek in East Slavonia to Zadar, Sibenik, Split and Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian coast. To the blockading of YPA barracks by Croatian forces (which caused no casualties on the YPA side), the YPA command

retaliated improperly and out of all proportion by taking entire cities and the entire Dalmatian coast as hostages, indiscriminately attacking purely civilian targets, inflicting thousands of civilian casualties and colossal economic damage. In the process, the YPA commands and many units committed war crimes punishable under the statute of the Nuremberg tribunal and greatly contributed to making this armed conflict a dirty war on all sides, at least since September 1991.

The initial protection and abetting of the Serbian rebels and terrorists in the Knin "Krajina," since August 1990, had by 1991 grown into full-fledged combat cooperation with and support to the Serbian "Territorials" and irregulars

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also in other areas of Croatia. Instead of the officially declared policy of "interposition and calming down armed conflicts between (other) parties," YPA took quite a different line.<sup>4</sup> The YPA units, still with red stars on their head-dresses, helmets and tanks, let Serbian irregulars commit massacres of captured war prisoners, wounded soldiers, civilians and even children.<sup>5</sup> Since July 1991, the YPA had, with its arms and ammunition, fully participated in the policy of eviction and physical extermination of Croats (particularly able-bodied men) from the areas under its operational control. YPA's bombardments and shellings of many sites—mostly Croatian villages and towns outside YPA's operational control—had obviously pursued the

same goal. The aim was to scare off as many Croats as possible, amputate large chunks of the Croatian territory and enable the Serbian irregulars to "cleanse" these areas of the remaining Croats. Kadijevic rationalized this policy of revenge, destruction and genocide by declaring that YPA's war aim was to militarily defeat the "fascist Ustase" (meaning the Croatian armed forces and police). Only then, according to Kadijevic, would a "peaceful resolution" of the Yugoslav conflict become possible. YPA's actions were, however, at a gross variance with this radical goal and were marked by considerable indecision.

By early January 1992, the federal military command fell back on the official goal of "protecting the Serbs in Croatia" and unconditionally agreed to the stationing of about 14,000 UN "peacekeeping" personnel in and around the conflict areas. A pullback of regular federal units and demobilization of TDF units in the Serbian Krajinas were important conditions in the deal made by Cyrus Vance. However, the federal army started immediately circumventing this provision by reassigning its personnel into the TDF and police and by additional arming.

On 26 March 1992, the federal troops completed their withdrawal from Macedonia (in addition to the already vacated Slovenia and about two-thirds of Croatia). The military leadership learned something from the previous events and, unlike in Slovenia and Croatia, did not try to forcefully resist Macedonia's separation from the rump-Yugoslavia, topple the Macedonian government or punish that republic by vast destruction. As a result, the former federal army's evacuation from Macedonia occurred peacefully, honorably and with all its weapons.

These withdrawals, however, led to the over-congestion of arms and military manpower in Bosnia and Herzegovina and significantly contributed to an explosion of violence in that republic in late March-early April 1992. The federal army also supplied the Serbian "Territorials" and irregulars with artillery, infantry weapons and ammunition. These forces, together with Serbian irregulars from Bosnia and Serbia proper,

attacked and occupied several strategically important towns and road junctions (Kupres, Zvornik and Visegrad), shelled and bombarded villages, townships and other purely civilian targets in Herzegovina and became directly embroiled in hostilities against Croatian and Croatian-Muslim units and caused death and destruction in areas inhabited predominantly by Muslims and Croats. According to the highest estimates, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina caused up to 200,000 dead, \$200 billion in damage and over 2 million refugees.

By spring 1992, the federal army had lost almost all of its Yugoslav character but continued with the pretenses. Its leadership has refused to admit the failure of decades-long policies of unitarianism and feigned supranationalism. Out of about 70,000 professional personnel, close to 30,000 deserted, resigned, were retired or discharged. Virtually all recruits from non-Serbian areas refused to report or left its ranks. Although less disciplined and combat effective than before 1991, the "Army of Yugoslavia" became much more nationally and culturally homogeneous. The army dropped the ideologically laden attribute "People's" from its official name, replaced red stars with new round blue, red and white symbols (the colors of the Yugoslav flag) and tried to mend its relationship, long marked by hostility, with the Serbian Orthodox Church. It was done in an unconvincing attempt to hide its continuing ideological preferences and close alliance with the ruling (refurbished communist) parties in Serbia and Montenegro. This alliance continues in spite of some differences of inter-

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ests and the dissatisfaction in a significant segment of the Serbian public.

The armed hostilities in 1991 sealed the fate of the second Yugoslavia and its federal army. Unable to bring itself in line with the new political realities, to maintain its legitimacy as an all-Yugoslav force or, alternatively, to suppress centrifugal tendencies and to salvage "real socialist" Yugoslavia by force, YPA inevitably followed the fate of the German Democratic Republic's *Nationale Volksarmee* (on the political-ideological side) and that of the Austro-Hungarian army (on the national side). Having tried for too long to preserve both communism and (centralist) Yugoslavia, the YPA command lost the battle on both accounts. When the top brass dropped one objective (communism), it became too late for the other. In the process, the military embroiled the disintegrating multinational conglomerate in a bloody trial of war, the sixth Balkan war of this century. **MR**

## NOTES

1. These percentages and figures were calculated by Lieutenant Colonel Teodor Gersak, retired, and published in "Nacionalna struktura poklicnega starsinskega kadra JLA," *Obramba* (Ljubljana), No. 4, 1991, 56-59. They were based on the data published by Slaven Letica in the Zagreb weekly *Danas*, No. 468, 5 February 1991, and which probably were taken from a secret federal document.

2. The second half of 1948—spring 1949 seemed to have been the period of the anti-Tito coup conspiracy that was prepared by a group of pro-Stalin and Russophile generals of Montenegrin origin. The group included Tito's wartime

Chief of Supreme Staff, General Arsa Jovanovic, and Major General Pero Popovoda.

3. *Narodna armija*, 21 March 1991, 5-7. N.B. The federal constitution does not provide for this body. Apparently, according to secret regulations, it could exist in wartime and emergencies. The defense minister is the chief of this staff.

4. Colonel General Blagoje Adzic still claimed this policy in his interview in "oslobodjenje" (Sarajevo), on 23 August 1991, a quite different record notwithstanding.

5. *Amnesty International Newsletter*, November 1991, Vol. XXI, No. 11, 1.

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