

Elite

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

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Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia 1992–2001



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Elite • 146

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Consultant editor Martin Windrow

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Two elderly Bosnian TO privates photographed before 1992, in distinctive grey-blue uniforms introduced in Bosnia in the 1980s and worn until replacement by JNA olive-grey or camouflage uniforms. Note the red cloth star on the front of the sidecap, and a Bosnian flag on the left side – a red patch, with the old flag of Communist Yugoslavia at top left. (Unless specifically credited otherwise, all photos reproduced in this book are from the authors' collection)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

On 2 December 1945, President Tito proclaimed the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia as a one-party state, with Bosnia-Herzegovina as one of six constituent republics.¹ Islam was officially discouraged, but from 1968 Bosnian-Moslems were regarded as an ethnic group.²

By mid-1990 three communal parties had succeeded the Communist Party in Bosnia. Alija Izetbegovic's Bosnian-Moslem ('Bosniac') SDA wanted to preserve Bosnia; the Bosnian-Croat HDZBiH aimed, after Feb

1992, for secession and annexation to Croatia; and Radovan Karadzic's Bosnian-Serb SDS planned secession and annexation to Serbia.

The SDA won Bosnia's first free elections in December 1990, and on 20 December Izetbegovic took power as president, heading an SDA-SDS-HDZBiH coalition government. However, in September 1991 Karadzic declared Bosnian-Serb autonomy, obtained Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) intervention to 'protect' the Bosnian-Serbs, and from mid-1991 began to smuggle in weapons from Serbia. Izetbegovic had no wish to remain in a Serbian-dominated rump Yugoslavia following the independence of Croatia, and called a national referendum which recommended independence. President Izetbegovic proclaimed the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina on 3 March 1992.

In spring 1991 Bosnia had a population of 4,354,911, of whom 44 per cent were Bosnian-Moslems,

¹ For a brief introduction to the historical background of the South Slav lands pre-1945, see Elite 138, *The Yugoslav Wars (1): Slovenia & Croatia 1991-95*.

For the sake of brevity, Bosnia-Herzegovina will be referred to simply as 'Bosnia' hereafter in this text.

² Note that throughout this text, distinct communities within a republic or province are described by this order of words, e.g. 'Bosnian-Moslems' meaning Moslems living in Bosnia.



31 per cent Bosnian-Serbs, 17 per cent Bosnian-Croats, and 8 per cent other minorities. Of Bosnia's 109 districts, 28 had a majority of Bosnian-Moslems, 31 of Bosnian-Serbs, 14 of Bosnian-Croats, and 36 districts had no majority. Formerly Bosnia spoke Serbo-Croat, but now split into separate entities speaking three languages: Serbian (Cyrillic alphabet), Croatian, and Bosnian (Latin alphabet).

The Serbian Autonomous Regions (SAOs) were established from September 1991, and on 9 January 1992 united into the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, later Republic of Srpska (*Republika Srpska*). The Bosnian-Croats established two regions in western Herzegovina and Posavina in November 1991, and by April 1992 united them in the Community of Herceg Bosna (28 August 1993, 'Republic'). The Bosnian-Moslem Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina under Izetbegovic was therefore restricted to central Bosnia (with four Bosnian-Croat enclaves) and the Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde enclaves.

BOSNIAN PRESIDENCY

Territorial Defence Force

In 1988 the Yugoslav Army had placed the Bosnian provincial Territorial Defence Force under 1 Military District (Belgrade), and reduced its strength by two-thirds to 86,362 in Dec 1991. This Bosnian *Teritorijalna odbrana* (TO), commanded by Bosnian-Serb generals, comprised nine regions. Each region (*okrug*) controlled about 12 districts (totalling 109), with a light artillery battery, a pontoon engineer company, sometimes an AA battalion, and two to six 1,800-strong TO brigades (26 in total); each brigade had four company- or battalion-sized detachments (*odred*).

Bosnian-Moslem capacity to defend themselves was weakened by Izetbegovic's vain attempts to retain good relations with the JNA, and he naively gave control of the TO to the Bosnian-Serb SDS in the coalition government. On 19 Dec 1990 the SDA, alarmed by the SDS's secessionist attitudes, discussed forming a military organization; and in Mar 1991 Sefer Halilovic formed the Patriotic League (*Patriotska liga* – PL) as an independent Bosnian army, with the same territorial organization as the TO. The PL received training at Croatian Special Police centres, and by Mar 1992 claimed 98,000 trained troops – more than the shrinking TO – organized in 9 regions and 103 (out of 109) districts.

On 1 Nov 1991 the JNA, Bosnian-Serb and Serbian paramilitary militias began attacking Bosnian-Moslem and Bosnian-Croat towns and villages including Sarajevo, and on 3 Mar 1992 fighting started in Bosanski Brod. On 4 Apr Izetbegovic ordered general mobilization; and on 8 Apr he transformed the Sarajevo TO command into the GHQ of the *Teritorijalna odbrana Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* (TORBiH), appointing the Bosnian-Moslem Col Hasan Efendic as commander. Colonel Stjepan Siber, a Bosnian-Croat, became chief-of-staff, and Col Jovan Divjak, a Bosnian-Serb, his deputy. Seven out of nine TO Regional HQs joined the TORBiH (Banja Luka and Doboje refused), bringing in 73 districts with Moslem and Bosnian-Croat majorities; 36 with Bosnian-Serb majorities refused. The TORBiH was formally established on 15 Apr, when all Patriotic League units joined the force.



Brigadni general Atif Dudakovic, ABiH 5 Corps commander, 1994, wearing a green beret, and the first pattern breast rank badge without gold edging (see chart on page 56, item 5). The beret badge is the same coat-of-arms on crossed swords as in the rank insignia, in a gold wreath. General Dudakovic's successful defence of the Bihac Pocket in north-west Bosnia from April 1992 to October 1995 was an impressive achievement; he later commanded the Bosnian Federation Armed Forces.



In April 1992 the TORBiH's 75,000 strength included about 7,500 Bosnian-Serbs and 7,500 Bosnian-Croats, while about 30 per cent of the officers were Bosnian-Serbs or Bosnian-Croats. The Bosnian Presidency forces were reorganized into four regions (Bihac, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica) and two tactical groups (TGs) controlling TO, PL and newly formed units. There were soon 26 brigades (named after districts), plus a Special Forces unit, a number of independent battalions and detachments, and military police, armoured and mixed artillery battalions – a hastily organized and woefully under-armed force. A brigade (*brigada*) had an establishment of 1,500 but often only a true strength of about 500, short of all kinds of weapons and with minimal artillery, armour, signals or engineer equipment. The 1st and 2nd TGs were formed in unsuccessful attempts to lift the siege of Sarajevo.

On 20 May 1992 the TORBiH, PL, other militias and the Bosnian-Croat HVO and HOS were officially united as the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Oruzane snage Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* – OSRBiH). On 23 May Col Efendic was replaced as commander by Sefer Halilovic.

Bosnian Army

On 20 May 1992 the TORBiH was renamed *Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* – ARBiH, usually abbreviated ABiH); and in Nov 1993, Halilovic was replaced in command by Rasim Delic. The ABiH, now 80,000 strong, was reorganized on 18 Aug 1992 into a more conventional structure. Initially four corps were established: 1 Corps (Sarajevo); 2 (Tuzla), in northern Bosnia; 3 (Zenica) & 4 (Mostar), in Herzegovina; plus the East Bosnian Operational Group in the vulnerable eastern enclave of Gorazde. 5 (Bihac) Corps was established on 21 Oct 1992 from the Una-Sana OPG (*Operativna grupa* – Operational Group), to defend the NW Bosnian enclave; while 7 (Travnik) Corps was formed on 7 Apr 1994 with brigades from 3 Corps, to advance north-westwards through southern Bosnia. 6 (Konjic) Corps was formed in June 1993 from 4 Corps' Northern Herzegovina OPG, to occupy northern Herzegovina from the HVO and eventually reach the Adriatic coast; it had little success, however, and was disbanded on 27 Feb 1994.

Each corps (*Korpus*) controlled a number of brigades, independent battalions and companies. Brigades were designated as infantry, mountain, motorized or light, and given new three-digit numbers, the first indicating the corps. The larger 1–3 Corps comprised 15 OPGs, each with 3–7 brigades. From Aug 1992 to Dec 1994 about 105 ABiH brigades were formed or re-formed in the 1-527 series: 48 infantry or undesignated, 41 mountain, 10 motorized and 6 light – but not all existed at the same time. There were also single commando and reconnaissance, MP and artillery brigades; and various independent units included the Delta SF Unit, four commando detachments, six



Men of 5 Coy, 2 Bn, 502 Mountain Bde of 5 Corps, ABiH, holding a trench in the Bihac Pocket, 1993. They are poorly equipped, wearing a mixture of different camouflage and civilian clothing items typical of the Bosnian Army before 1995; but the confidence and determination in their faces is evident.

Corps HQ MP battalions, a mixed artillery battalion and an independent armoured company. Eight Bosnian-Croat HVO units were permanently incorporated into the ABiH. The 'Black Swans' (*Crni labudovi*) Islamic PL unit, formed in Apr 1992 in Konjic under 4 Corps (later 1 Corps), eventually numbered 800 men; it earned a reputation for battlefield bravery, but also for attacks on Bosnian-Serb and Bosnian-Croat civilians.

Table 1: Battle Order of Bosnia-Herzegovina Territorial Defence Force, May–Aug 1992

GHQ, Sarajevo (Sefer Halilovic)	Regional TO HQ Bihac /Una-Sana Operational Group – NW Bosnia
Special Units	1 & 2 Bihac Bdes; 1 Cazin Bde, 101 Bde (Velika Kladusa), 105 Bde (Buzim), 111 Bde (Bosanska Krupa), Special Duties Det (Bihac), 1 Bihac Armd Bn, 14 ind dets
Regional TO HQ Sarajevo	1 Tactical Group (Konjic) – W Herzegovina
1 Sanjak Bde, 1 Dobrinja Bde, 1 Stup Bde, 1 Drina Valley Bde, 1 Ilidza Bde, 11 Inf Bde 'Dragon of Bosnia', 12 Inf Bde 'Hadzi Lojo', 13 New Sarajevo Bde; 14 Pofalic-Veselic Inf Bde, 15 Novi Grad Inf Bde, 'Isa Beg Isakovic' Bde, Sarajevo District MP Bn, ind dets & bns	111 Bde (Konjic)
Regional TO HQ Tuzla – N Bosnia	2 Tactical Group (Hadzici-Trnovo) – Sarajevo
1–3 Tuzla Bdes, 1 Lukavac Bde, ind dets & bns	'Nijaz Kulenović' Rgt, 'Igman' Combined Det & 'Igman' Mix Arty Bn (Hadzici)
Regional TO HQ Zenica – Central Bosnia	
1 & 2 Zenica Bdes, 1 & 7 Bosnian Krajina Bdes, ind dets & bns	
Abbreviations for this and all other Tables: AA = Anti-aircraft, AF = Air Force, Armd = Armoured, AT = Anti-tank, Arty = Artillery, Bn = Battalion, Cdo = Commando, Coy = Company, Det = Detachment, Div = Division, Eng = Engineer, Gds = Guards, HDB = Home Defence Bn, Hoptr = Helicopter, HDR = Home Defence Rgt, Ind = Independent, Inf = Infantry, Lt =	Light, Log = Logistics, MP = Military Police, Mech = Mechanized, Miss = Missile, Mix = Mixed, Mos = Moslem, Mot = Motorized, MT = Motor Transport, Mtn = Mountain, OPG = Operational Group, OZ = Operational Zone, Pont = Pontoon, Prot = Protection, Recon = Reconnaissance, Rgt = Regiment, Sig = Signal, Sqdn = Squadron, TG = Tactical Group

Between 17 Aug 1992 and 23 Feb 1994, relations between the HVO and local ABiH forces varied widely: the Croats co-operated with ABiH 1, 2 & 5 Corps, but there were constant territorial disputes with 3, 4 & 6 Corps, leading to a destructive 'war within a war'. The US-brokered Washington Agreement of 18 Mar 1994 finally regularized relations, establishing the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and creating a permanent Moslem-Croat alliance which prevented a Bosnian-Serb military victory. By June 1994 the ABiH was the numerically strongest armed force, with 110,000 men and 100,000 reserves, against 80,000 in the Bosnian-Serb VRS and 50,000 in the Bosnian-Croat HVO.

In Jan 1995 the ABiH, now expanded to 150,000–200,000, was reorganized. The OPGs in 1, 2, 3 & 7 Corps were redesignated as divisions, each *divizija* comprising 3–6 brigades; however, 4 and 5 Corps retained their brigades. It was a much improved fighting force, but the UN arms embargo left it critically short of equipment, with only 40 tanks, 30 APCs, and small arms for only 50,000 men. The ABiH gained victories in operations in 1995, but was heavily reliant on HVO units. Bosnian-Moslem efforts helped achieve the Dayton Agreement of 14 Dec 1995, but never the clear military victories their sacrifices deserved. After Dayton the ABiH and HVO merged as the Bosnian Federal Army (*Vojaska Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine*).