

Contemporary Battlefield Assessment - Bosnia and Herzegovina

A Study of Urban Conflict and Multinational Operations

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Abstract: In July 2015, MAJ Jackson led a research trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) with four Defense and Strategic Studies (DSS) majors: Cadet Joshua Crafton ('17), Cadet Patrick McCallion ('16), Cadet David Stanford ('17), and Cadet Samuel Ruppert ('17). This was the first contemporary battlefield assessment conducted through the Modern War Institute (MWI) and focused on military operations in densely populated urban environments as well the complexity of multinational operations. A significant finding from this trip is that no force had an effective approach to urban warfare – they lacked the warfighting concepts to move beyond positional warfare and assert military control over either Sarajevo or Mostar. A second finding was that there is a significant difference between two organized militaries fighting in an urban environment and hybrid warfare in an urban environment. Another interesting note about the defense of cities was the importance of having an organizational framework during the initial formation of hybrid defense forces from the local population. Perhaps our most significant finding with reference to multinational operations was that the U.S. Army should increase opportunities to work in multinational efforts, not only to strengthen ties with other nations, but also as way for U.S. Army officers to develop experience working in a multinational environment.

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1. Introduction

In July 2015, MAJ Michael Jackson led a research trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) with four cadets majoring in Defense and Strategic Studies (DSS): Cadet Joshua Crafton ('17), Cadet Patrick McCallion ('16), Cadet David Stanford ('17), and Cadet Samuel Ruppert ('17). This was the first contemporary battlefield assessment conducted through the Modern War Institute (MWI) and focused on military operations in densely populated urban environments as well the complexity of multinational operations. The trip started with a week of academic preparation at West Point including selected readings, documentaries, and engagements covering the historical context of the Bosnian War, the conflict itself, and background on specific areas the team would be visiting. The academic preparation week culminated in New York City where the team visited the Joint Staff Mission to the United Nations and General (retired) David Petraeus.

After the week of academic preparation at West Point, the group traveled throughout BiH for two weeks, including engagements in Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Banja Luka, and Srebrenica. To



Bosnia-Herzegovina Map:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html>

better understand the tactical realities of protracted urban conflict, the group conducted guided walking tours detailing the Siege of Sarajevo and the Battle of Mostar and met with a retired general of the BiH Forces and a still serving colonel of the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS), each of whom recounted personal experiences from the conflict. To understand the evolution of the multinational operations, the group met with representatives from the U.S. Embassy, the U.N. Office of the High Representative, European Forces (EUFOR) Command, and the NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo. The group also visited Srebrenica as well as the International Criminal

Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP).

The Balkan conflicts during the early-and-mid-1990s were incredibly complex and brutal; however, they are relatively understudied by U.S. military professionals. After World War II,



1993 map of the former Yugoslavia. (Central Intelligence Agency)
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/breakup-yugoslavia>

Marshall Josip Broz Tito came to power in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, consisting of six socialist republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia. After Tito's death in 1980, ethnic tensions among the Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (Bosnian-Muslims) increased as ethnic minorities pursued ultra-nationalist policies that culminated in calls for independence from the largely Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia and Yugoslav National Army (JNA). In the north,

Slovenia was the first to declare independence in 1990 and then militarily defeat the JNA during the Ten-Day War of 1991. Slovenia's war for independence was relatively quick and decisive largely because of its heterogeneous population. The conflicts in Croatia and BiH would be much longer, more costly, and much less decisive. This research trip was an opportunity to study a portion of that conflict in and around Sarajevo and Mostar as well as the international community's response.

2. Preparation

To prepare for the trip, the group spent July 6-14 at West Point conducting group and individual study. The preparatory study focused on four learning objectives:

1. Providing historic context for the conflict.
2. Providing a baseline understanding of the conflict with a focus on the areas the team would visit in country.
3. Providing a framework and associated doctrine for multinational operations.
4. Providing an understanding of the evolution of the multinational operations in BiH.

Appendix A: Preparation Week Schedule outlines the schedule and associated resources the team used during the week of preparation.

In addition to the preparation in Appendix A, MAJ Jackson also spoke with General (retired) Shinseki about his experiences as the NATO Stabilization Force in BiH in 1997 and 1998. During that discussion, two significant themes emerged. The first was that in the mid-1990s, the Army generally saw the UN Peacekeeping Mission in BiH as a distraction from its core mission and it was not considered a desirable operational experience for Army general officers. He disagreed with that perspective and described working closely with General Reimer (then the Chief of Staff of the Army) to get the right general officers over there, including generals David Petraeus, John Abizaid, and George Casey. When we spoke with General (retired) Petraeus, he reinforced that point, indicating that his experiences in BiH helped prepare him for his future roles in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the Army had not prepared him for BiH. He emphasized that the Army is great at preparing units, but has not always been as good at preparing its general officers. Interestingly, when we spoke with the Joint Staff J5 U.S. Mission to the United Nations (UN), they indicated that while the UN is currently involved in peacekeeping operations around the world, there are currently no American general officers supporting any of those on-going missions.

The second significant theme that emerged from the discussion with General (retired) Shinseki was the importance of using existing military structures to maintain order and prevent the escalation of violence. In many ways, BiH in the mid-1990s was very similar to Iraq in the early 2000s, but after the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement the conflict in BiH never escalated.

General (retired) Shinseki asserted that a large part of that was what he called strategic leveraging - keeping the belligerent militaries in place and using them to maintain order while the international community built a police force. He was clear that they treated Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) generals as generals even though they knew many were war criminals and/or part of organized crime mafias. The balance was removing the worst of them as they could while getting as much goodness out of the forces as possible. General (retired) Petraeus identified maintaining that balance as one of his challenges as well and while he did explicitly discuss it, that experience likely influenced his recommendation to not disband the Iraq military in 2003. This presents the U.S. and the international community with a dilemma – to what extent can or should we knowingly partner with or tacitly use corrupt or even criminal institutions when they are the most effective means for maintaining peace.

Beyond the very insightful discussion, General (retired) Shinseki also put the group in contact with his former interpreter, Dr. Leila Dizdarevic. Leila is a Bosniak who grew-up in Mostar and lived in Sarajevo during the entire siege before interpreting for multiple NATO commanders. She is currently a licensed medical doctor still in BiH. She accompanied our group for the entire trip, serving as an interpreter when necessary and consistently providing insights and context to help us understand our experiences.

3. Country Visit

3.1 Day 1: The U.S. Embassy, the OHR, the ICTY, and the ICMP

Our time in BiH began on Thursday, July 16, 2015 at the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo. While there, we met with the Regional Security Officer, a team from the Political Section, and a representative from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In discussions with the Political Section of the Embassy, we learned the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995) was effective at ending the war, but was never intended to be a long term solution for BiH and has established a complicated system and largely ineffective government structure. The Dayton Peace Agreement established two entities, the Republika Srpska and the Federation with five total Presidents (tri-president at the national level, President of the Republika Srpska, and President of the Federation) as well as the Office of the High Representative (OHR) with considerable authorities, such as removing individuals from political office. The roles and relationships of the OHR, U.S. Ambassador, Commanders, and the BiH Tri-Presidents have changed over time and there is currently a debate in the international community on the future of the OHR and the conditions for ending the OHR mission. In fact, President Dodik (Republika Srpska) has recently challenged the legitimacy of the national court system because of OHR oversight. Perhaps the greatest challenge to BiH is its limited capability to develop national policy because of the enduring fragmented governance structure from the Dayton Peace Agreement.

After our visit to the US Embassy, we walked to the Office of the Higher Representative (OHR). The OHR reinforced many of the points from the Embassy regarding the dysfunction of



While in Sarajevo, the group met with individuals of the OHR to discuss the complexities and evolution of multi-national operations in BiH. From left to right, Cadet Sam Ruppert, Cadet Dave Stanford, Cadet Josh Crafton, Cadet Pat McCallion, MAJ Mike Jackson, and Dr. Leila Dizdarevic.

the current structure of the BiH government. The OHR explained that the first 10 years under the Dayton Peace agreement were very successful, but since 2006 BiH has faced many challenges. In 2006 there was a deliberate transition as the United Nations attempted to try and empower the European Union and the domestic BiH government to take on many of the responsibilities that previously fell to the OHR.

For example in 2009 domestic agencies took over process for prosecuting war crimes without international support. That decision has led to President Dodik's challenge of the BiH court system mentioned above. While the individuals we spoke with believe that most of the people in BiH recognize the current system is no longer productive and instead promotes blackmail and ethnic divide, there is still a lack of political will to change the system. This is primarily because many fear that with change will come the outbreaks of civil unrest being used for ethnic agendas. There is currently no change agent to promote cross-ethnic reconciliation and that has been one of the biggest disappointments of last 20 years.

Following our meeting with the OHR, we moved to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The ICTY is first international tribunal since WWII and has the jurisdiction over genocide and crimes against humanity. The individual we spoke with explained that the ICTY will be shut down in the next two years as the BiH national courts have taken responsibility for war crimes, but will also be replaced by Mechanisms for International Tribunals with oversight capacity. Interestingly, the ICTY has never had law enforcement capability and therefore has always been closely aligned with international military forces for security.

We ended our first day with the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) which was established in 1996 at the request of President Clinton to find, excavate, autopsy, and identify human remains. With a staff of approximately 150 and a donor funded annual budget of \$7-8 million, ICMP uses family provided DNA to match DNA samples from recovered remains. The lab conducts blind matching, meaning the technicians do not know the sample source to ensure ethnicity is not an issue during the identification process, however the historic trends in matching are 85% Bosniak, 10% Croats, and 5% Serbs. Work by the ICMP has been instrumental in supporting the ICTY in war crime trials. The individual we spoke with described in detail the challenges of identifying remains from mass grave with multiple deposits from the systematic genocide of villages across the country. In many cases, remains from one person will be found in multiple secondary grave sites after being moved. It was also very disturbing to think about the wide spread support required to move the remains from the original mass grave to the secondary and sometimes tertiary sites. In many cases, not only was the Bosnian Serb forces involved in the move, but local police would block roads and local fire department would hose

off roads to wash away the evidence. The motivation for extreme measures to hide evidence included avoiding individual indictment (high ranking people covering their tracks), countering the claims of genocide, and moving the remains to areas where they can claim that the people were combat casualties – i.e. moving graves to areas of actual combat. The individual we spoke with reflecting that it is surprising how few people have come forward in the communities – the scale of the mass graves indicating that what happened was not the result of a few rogue military units, entire towns were involved or witnessed the atrocities. As many of the excavations were in non-permissive environments, the individual we spoke with also discussed the need for external security support from the international community. This was difficult initially because the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was there in a neutral role to observe so did not want to risk escalation.

3.2 Day 2: The Siege of Sarajevo

After a full day of briefs, we spent Friday walking Sarajevo on a guided siege tour. The tour guide himself was too young to fight during the conflict, being only eight years old when it



During the guided siege tour, the group walked portions of the bobsleigh and luge track built for the 1984 Winter Olympics. Less than decade later, the Army of the Republika Srpska used portions of the tract as fighting positions to defend their artillery positions on the hills surrounding the city. From Left to right, Cadet Dave Stanford, Cadet Sam Ruppert, Cadet Pat McCallion, and Cadet Josh Crafton.

started; however, his father was a Bosniak who had fought for BiH Army for the entire three and a half years of the siege. Our guide was effective in showing us military significant parts of the city and explaining the fighting from a tactical perspective – blending his individual study of the conflict with first-hand accounts from his father.

We started at a key intersection which was to be the entry point for the main Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) attack on the city.

However, the BiH Army and emerging resistance force effectively blocked the intersection and destroyed the lead VRS tank with one of the few

mines they had. Somewhat surprising, this initial tactical success seemed to shape the operational approach for the rest of the siege – the VRS never really tried a coordinated attack into the city after that. We also drove the surrounding hills to see the frontlines of the siege and the fighting

positions of the Bosniaks and Bosnian Serb forces. We also explored the Sarajevo tunnel which was used to move items for the black market during the siege and supplies for the people and how it played a crucial role in keeping the city stocked while all other options were unavailable.

An interesting discussion during the Sarajevo Siege tour revolved around the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) preparation for the siege and the growth of a largely civilian based resistance. Prior to the split of the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS), the JNA, largely under the control of Serbia, began establishing fighting positions around Sarajevo. The people of Sarajevo were initially told that the Army was conducting military exercises to be prepared to defend the city and they believed it. The BiH citizens we talked to all seemed to have a great deal of respect for the JNA prior to the conflict – one said that idea that the Army could turn on Sarajevo seemed simply unbelievable at the time. Simultaneously, the Yugoslav National Army was systematically removing all of the local armories which had been established to support local mobilization for territorial defense forces. Thus, when the JNA official left Bosnia and many of the units simply reflagged themselves as VRS then had a tremendous advantage over a city with very few options for defending itself. According to our guide, the primary source of weapons for the initial defense of the city came from weapons caches that the VRS forces had originally built throughout the city to arm Sarajevo Serbs when the conflict escalated.

3.3 Day 3: The Battle for Mostar

The next day we set off to Mostar in the south. Unlike Sarajevo, Mostar was a conflict between Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks. After initially working together to clear the city of VRS, the Bosnian Croats turned against the Bosniaks and attempted to clear them out of the city. When we arrived to Mostar, the weather was 122 degrees Fahrenheit and the streets were paved with stone. You could tell the city was old and provided very little defense against snipers and artillery on the mountains that encircled the valley in which Mostar was built. Our guide for the battlefield tour of Mostar was a Bosniak gentlemen who had commanded approximately 40 men during the conflict. When we met him, he proudly showed us a letter from his BiH commanding general acknowledging his valor during the fight. He took us to multiple sites throughout Mostar where either the Bosniaks or Bosnian Croats had established sniper and machine gun positions to control parts of the city. At one point, our guide took us to a former Bosnian Croat machine gun position that dominated one of the important intersections in the city. Even today, more than 20

years after the conflict, the area was littered with discarded shells – a fact that was surprising to our interpreter who grew up in Mostar and still has family there.

Our guide also brought us to fighting positions in the hills surrounding the city that were primarily used by Bosnian Croats to shell the city. Interesting, the Battle for Mostar was not



During a battlefield tour in the city of Mostar, the group surveyed former fighting positions which Croat forces used to shell the city for nearly 18 months. The guide was a Bosniak who commanded approximately 40 men during the conflict. From left to right, Cadet Sam Ruppert, Cadet Dave Stanford, MAJ Mike Jackson, guide, Cadet Josh Crafton, and Cadet Pat McCallion.

intended to become a siege, but much like Sarajevo the conflict soon became fixed in positional warfare that resembled trench warfare of World War I far more than the dynamic urban warfare such as that of the American Forces in Baghdad in 2003. Along the way we had a chance to see a secret bunker which the former dictator of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, built to protect from nuclear fallout.

3.4 Day 4: Srebrenica

On Sunday, we traveled to Srebrenica, the site of one of the most well-known atrocities of the conflict. In July, 1995, over five thousand Bosniaks sought protection in a factory warehouse under UN control and an additional twenty to twenty-five thousand Bosniaks sought protection just outside; however, on July 12, 1995, the Dutch battalion handed those Bosniaks over to VRS forces under the command of General Ratko Mladic who had besieged the city. Ultimately, over eight thousand Bosniak men and boys were massacred as a result. Listening to the tour guide at Srebrenica and seeing the grave site across the street, we were given a morbid and sobering look at the effects of genocide on the Bosniak people and the failure of the Dutch UN soldiers charged with the protection of those people. This event still ripples through Bosnia as a cruel and unjust measure that continues to embarrass the Bosnian Serbs to this day.

Srebrenica was an extremely powerful event in its own right, and even reading about it, as we did during the preparation week, is enough to convey the gravity of the atrocity. Actually



Cadets Josh Crafton and Sam Ruppert look at an exhibit in the Potcari Memorial to the Massacre of Srebrenica. The memorial is located in a former warehouse that was part of the Dutch Headquarters overseeing a UN Safe Area in Srebrenica.

visiting the location of Srebrenica and speaking with those who lost family members in the genocide, though, created an entirely new context from which to understand the genocide. It sparked a large discussion of not only moral leadership, but also command authority. During the preparation week, we read not only about Srebrenica, but also about the Dutch commander and soldiers who had compromised the UNPROFOR garrison of the Srebrenica “safe zone.” However, the discussion changes when you are standing outside the old factory where the

Bosnians had come for UN protection, and the tour guide points to a building off in the distance and explains that that is where the Bosnian Serbs began killing men, and how it was so close everyone could hear their screams and death. It became even worse when the guide explained how Srebrenica had also been under siege for almost a year prior to the UN’s arrival, and had been successfully defending itself, but then the UN had forced the townspeople to turn over their arms in return for the establishment of a UN “safe zone.” Developing this visceral understanding, and then hearing how the UN forces first refused thousands entry into their compound, then gave up those they had already allowed into their compound, and finally assisted the Bosnian Serbs in loading Bosnian Muslims onto buses so they could be taken to execution sites, prompts serious consideration of the moral-ethical leadership questions raised by the tragedy at Srebrenica.

This discussion remains extremely relevant today, because Srebrenica was largely caused by uncertain operational conditions, highly limiting rules of engagement, and a highly complex multinational operation projecting force into another state in an attempt to resolve conflict between two parties. Given the current international climate, it is not unlikely that soldiers – American or otherwise – could find themselves in a similar condition at some point in the future. That is why it is imperative to fully explore and understand the leadership challenge at Srebrenica. First, the Dutch battalion stationed at Srebrenica was clearly outmatched by the

Bosnian Serbs surrounding the town – not only in numbers, but in terms of equipment and heavy weapons as well. However, the question raised by our group, as well as many Bosnians, was could the Dutch have realistically expected reinforcements or support, from either air or ground? Given the experiences at other cities and towns in Bosnia – including Srebrenica itself, which had held out for over a year prior to UN arrival - where a numerically superior, better equipped Bosnian Serb force chose to engage in a static siege against a much smaller defending force, our group concluded that a decisive destruction of the UN battalion by the Bosnian Serbs was unlikely, even given the size and equipment advantage of the Bosnian Serbs. While it is too late for the thousands of people who lost their lives at Srebrenica, it is an important discussion point for officers operating in a non-traditional combat environment who may have to make similar decisions in the future; hopefully one that can lead them to making the right decision.

3.5 Day 5: Tuzla and the International Commission for Missing Persons

On Sunday night we stayed in Tuzla. On Monday we visited the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) labs and offices located in Tuzla. We first went to the ICMP laboratory, where forensic professionals were, and are, still actively working to identify victims of genocide in Bosnia. The lab contained 4,000 bodies of victims of genocide found in mass graves around Bosnia during the conflict. The bones were in thousands of plastics bags, with some laid out on tables for analysis and identification. We spoke with a forensic professional there, who explained the ongoing process of identification to us. She explained how new remains are consistently discovered throughout Bosnia, and how difficult it can be to identify them oftentimes. The Bosnian Serb forces went to great lengths to hide the genocide victims, from creating mass graves all across the nation to digging up bodies and reburying them near battlefields or in other separate locations. These actions created the phenomenon of discovering the remains of one person in many different locations, sometimes hundreds of kilometers apart. This makes identification an even more difficult process, as complete skeletons are rarely discovered. However, the ICMP mission in Bosnia has made great strides in combating this issue, and has develop a series of new techniques and processes to collect and identify remains, to the point where there are at the forefront of skeletal identification in the world.

After speaking with the workers at the lab, we crossed town to visit the ICMP headquarters. At first we thought we were in the wrong place because the headquarters was a



During a visit to the city of Tuzla, the group met with International Commission for Mission Persons at their forensics lab. While there, the group saw how the organization extracted DNA from bone sample to identify remains from mass graves through Bosnia-Herzegovina. Pictured from left to right, Cadet Dave Stanford, MAJ Mike Jackson, Cadet Sam Ruppert, Cadet Pat McCallion, and Cadet Josh Crafton.

small office in a sports center. Curious, we asked the director there what the ICMP headquarters was doing in a sports complex. It turned out that when the ICMP was set up, that sports complex had been a major refugee center in Tuzla, and so the ICMP had set up there to be close to the refugees and to more efficiently help and work with them. After the conflict had ended, they had

been too busy to ever move. At the ICMP headquarters, the staff showed us their methods of identifying the remains and DNA samples, as well as the program they used to track the remains of the bodies that have been found to the

families that are still searching for them. It was largely software that they themselves had developed, and seemed both highly complex and highly accurate. They also showed us their massive database on missing persons in both Bosnia and several other sites across the globe where they also work to identify missing persons.

3.6 Day 6: Camp Butmir

At Camp Butmir, we met with a series of individuals who discussed the conflict's history as well as the EUFOR and NATO mission during the conflict and present day, further developing our background understanding of the conflict in BiH. This culminated with a meeting with the Commander of the US Forces at Camp Butmir, BG Wilz, who briefly explained America's current role in Bosnia and was then available for our questions.

One thing that stuck out amongst all these briefings was the consistent mention of the recent census, and how its results had not been released yet. Every presenter mentioned it, and it was clear that in a country as ethnically-focused as BiH a census – which would reveal the exact percentages of each ethnicity residing in the country – is something of grave importance. Because the government structure is so focused on fairly representing each ethnicity, any

significant change in percentages of ethnicities could mean significant changes, or at least calls for significant changes, within the government. Based on the briefs we received, it seemed as if that is exactly why the census results still had yet to be released.

The briefing from Camp Butmir's historian was very valuable, because it went into greater depth and detail than our previous research had. In fact, he began his presentation by speaking about the Balkans area during the Roman Empire, and covered its history from that point until the end of the 1992-1995 conflict. The information ranged from the interesting – 70% of fresh water in the Balkans is within BiH – to what might be considered vital – over one million Serbians were killed during WWII, usually via acts of genocide.

Perhaps the two most significant periods to understand in relation to the conflict in the 90's were the resistance to incursion by the Ottoman Empire from the 15th century onward and the Balkan theater of WWII. The historian explained the long history of resistance – particularly by ethnic Serbs – to the Ottomans, and how they viewed this as their heroic struggle for independence. Additionally, his in depth explanation of the Second World War, particularly the oppressive, Croatian-led Nazi regime that occupied most of the former-Yugoslavia area, provided great context for the events occurring in the 90's. The Serbian people were subject to genocide and terror on a scale many times greater than that Bosnians experienced in the 90's. While this in no way excuses or pardons genocide during the conflict in BiH, it does help contextualize and explain why it may have been perpetrated, and how the perpetrators may have condoned their own actions. He also discussed Yugoslavia and Josef Tito, whose lingering influence and memory was clear not only through his explanation but also through our own observations throughout the trip. In fact, we had been repeatedly surprised by the number of people in BiH who fondly remembered Yugoslavia and had a very positive view of Tito. Again, the historian's explanation of Yugoslavia, Tito, and the non-aligned movement greatly helped us to contextualize these observations.

Our discussion with BG Wilz was also a fantastic opportunity. She gave us many insights into operating in a multi-national environment, both in general and specifically as American soldiers. What she first mentioned was that the Army should increase opportunities to work in multinational efforts, not only to strengthen ties with other nations, but also to develop experience with working in multinational operations. Her observations on the discrepancies

between different militaries was also intriguing, particularly her comments on the command relationship between commanders and NCOs. She listed the American NCO system as one of our greatest strengths, and noted that many other nations do not rely on NCOs as heavily – invest in their development and entrust them with responsibilities - as the American military does. She also mentioned debate within NATO, and spoke on why the U.S. military culture dominates the international environment – largely because we are respected as military professionals and acknowledged that we “get results.” However, BG Wilz also cautioned us to temper arrogance: understand our role, and respect the contributions and capabilities each nation offers. One thing she was adamant about, though, was ultimately to never compromise on core interests – at the end of the day, despite operating in a multinational environment, as American soldiers our first responsibility is to represent the interests of the United States and the United States Army. While cooperation is important, and we should always do our best to cooperate with other nations, we must never do so at the expense of our core interests. She also mentioned that every nation will act similarly with respect to their own national priorities.

3.7 Day 7: Banja Luka and the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) Regimental Museum

One of the important goals of the trip was to gain an understanding of each of the three side’s perspective of the conflict. We traveled to Banja Luka to tour the Army of the Republika Srpska



The group traveled to Banja Luka, the capital of the Republika Srpska entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina, to meet with the commander of the 3rd Infantry regiment which maintains the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) Regimental Museum. From left to right, Cadet Sam Ruppert, Cadet Josh Crafton, Cadet Pat McCallion, VRS Commander, MAJ Mike Jackson, Dr. Leila Dizdarevic, Cadet Dave Stanford, CPT David Knox, VRS protocol officer.

(VRS) Regimental Headquarters to hear the Bosnian Serb perspective. Crucial to understanding this is understanding the ethnic regiment system within the BiH armed forces. There are three regiments – one for Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs – within the BiH army. They exist to preserve the heritage of each ethnicity, but are not actually combat units. They consist of a staff of about ten officers and NCOs, and hold no command authority. Their main functions include maintaining regimental museums and organizing functions for soldiers of their

respective ethnicities. Basically they serve a ceremonial function. However, the BiH military is still segregated in some other respects – infantry units from the battalion level down are ethnically segregated, leaving Bosnian, Croat, and Serb combat battalions.

The VRS commander began with a briefing, explaining to us the purpose of his regiment – technically the 3rd IN Regiment – which was to preserve the history of the VRS, and the 2006 Defense Reform Act, which merged the armies of the Bosnian Federation and the VRS. He was careful to emphasize his regiment's lack of command relationship with any combat units. He then proceeded to explain the history of the Regiment, the VRS, and by extension Serbians in Bosnia. His history began with the resistance of Serbs against the Ottoman Empire – particularly the famous 1389 battle involving Saint Lazar. He heavily focused on Serbian resistance to the Ottomans, and then moved on to speak about the First and Second World Wars. Here again, he emphasized the hardships and sufferings of Serbian people during these wars. The facts he presented were all true – many Serbians died in both wars, and in WWII particularly many of Serbians were the victims of genocide. This all culminated with him presenting the ethnic makeup of BiH and the BiH region. He showed how while prior to the two World Wars Serbians had constituted a relatively large percentage of BiH, after WWII that percentage had been significantly reduced, and largely replaced with Bosniaks. In essence, by 1991 the Serbians had gone from 44% to 33% of the population, while Bosniaks had gone from 31% to 44%.

After this, he began to speak on the history of the 1992-1995 conflict specifically. Here again he positioned the ethnic Serbs as victims in the conflict. He compared the orders for activation of VRS units with those of Bosnia army units (the VRS units were not activated until after the Bosnian ones) to demonstrate that the Bosnian Serbs were not the aggressors. Like much of his presentation, everything he said was true, however, it was all framed with a clear intention. While it was true that VRS units were activated later, it ignores that fact that it was many Yugoslav National Army (JNA) units that instigated the fighting against the Bosnians, and that these JNA units were later integrated into VRS units. However, despite – or possibly even because of – the commander's strong bias, meeting with him was very beneficial. First, it clearly demonstrated the influence of ethnic bias in description of the conflict. This showed us that we not only needed to think very critically of what the VRS commander told us, but that Croat and Bosniak opinions were also likely very biased, and we should remember to think critically about

those sides of the story as well. Additionally, it showed how easy it was to legitimize and condone actions by framing legitimate facts a certain way. Each ethnic group had legitimized what happened to themselves, and none of them viewed themselves as the “bad guy.” Somewhere amongst all three competing biases lies the truth, but to understand it all three biased sides must be understood and evaluated.

The VRS commander also demonstrated a fair amount of resentment towards NATO and the end-state of the conflict. Aside from his view of the Serbian people as the true victims in the conflict (again, highly debatable when considering the genocide perpetrated during the war), he believed that the VRS was cheated out of what it earned in the conflict. He did believe the VRS earned it was well – he was adamant in taking us to the memorial room, which contained the names of over 22,000 ethnically-Serbian soldiers who had died in the conflict. He mentioned multiple times how at the time of signing the Dayton Peace Agreement, the Bosnian Serbs occupied 73% of the territory, but were granted only 49% of it after the conflict. He employed this as evidence of how the international community and NATO had unfairly come together against the Bosnian Serbs and worked to undermine them. As further proof of this, he mentioned how only Bosnian Serb generals had been held accountable for war crimes, and he even mentioned that Bosniaks and Croats had been funneled superior weaponry by NATO and other countries despite arms embargoes. Again, much of this was at odds with what we had been told earlier – everything we knew pointed to the Bosnian Serbs being much better armed than the Bosniaks and Croats thanks to their obtaining arms from the JNA.

Although the commander’s motivation was clear and some of his points seemed ahistorical, meeting with him was important to understand the distinct Bosnian-Serb perspective. While not everything he said may have been entirely accurate, parts of it were true and the broader narrative he told still influences almost all aspects of life in BiH. Most importantly, it highlighted how in a conflict as complex as the 1992-1995 conflict in BiH, there are no clear cut answers. All sides had potentially legitimate reasons for their actions, all sides committed atrocities, and all sides continually work to push their own perspective on the conflict. That is not to say that this makes all three sides equal either, though. For example, although all sides committed crimes during the war, they were of different magnitudes – few things in the war compare to the horror

of Srebrenica. However, an objective view must account for the good and bad, right and wrong, on all sides.

Lastly, the commander provided valuable information about the VRS thought process during the actual conflict. He had been an active officer in VRS forces during the conflict, and was able



The commander of the Army of the Republic of Srpska (VRS) Regimental Museum describes the VRS strategy during the conflict from an original war plans map. From left to right, Cadet Josh Crafton, Cadet Sam Ruppert, Cadet Dave Stanford, and the VRS Commander

to answer some of our questions about VRS strategic, operational, and tactical decisions. Our first question was concerning the sieges. It was clear the VRS had a large equipment advantage – tanks, artillery, mortars, etc – when attacking Sarajevo, but instead of capturing it they chose to besiege it for years. From speaking with Bosniaks in Sarajevo, they made it sound as if they VRS forces were too cowardly or incompetent to actually take the city despite their superior armament – launching one attack, taking

casualties, and retreating. However, the Regimental Commander offered a much different reason. He said that the siege of Sarajevo was intentional, and that the VRS never intended to take any large cities. He said that the real goal was to use a smaller force (and the VRS forces were often numerically much smaller than Bosniak forces opposing them) to fix a much larger enemy force within the city. In his view, using several dozen thousands of VRS soldiers to fix potentially hundreds of thousands of Bosniak soldiers within Sarajevo made perfect sense. Strategically, this does fit with some common concepts, including economy of force, and would allow the VRS to operate unobstructed elsewhere while committing minimal forces to fixing a large enemy presence within a small area. Judging by his repeated mention of the percentage of territory controlled by the VRS at the end of the war, the goal was never to capture cities or populations, but to acquire as much land as possible for the VRS. In this sense, it makes much more sense to use a small number of soldiers to fix many enemy soldiers within a small (in the sense of land area) city, allowing VRS forces to concentrate elsewhere on capturing land.

Our second question was concerning the tunnel into Sarajevo, which contributed greatly to the Bosnian ability to sustain Sarajevo throughout a multiple year-long siege. Our first thought

had been that if we were besieging Sarajevo we would want to shut the tunnel down as quickly as possible, to starve out the city more quickly and shorten the siege. Again, the Bosniaks we spoke with in Sarajevo led us to believe that the VRS had attempted this, but were too inept or cowardly to successfully shut the tunnel down despite having superior weaponry. However, speaking with the regimental commander again elucidated the VRS reasoning for leaving the tunnel open. He said that the tunnel was purposefully left open, because it reduced the incentive for the besieged forces (who were numerically much larger) to break out or for external Bosnian forces to attempt to break through the siege. Considering his earlier assertion that the point of the siege was to practice economy of force and use as few VRS soldiers as possible to fix the enemy within Sarajevo it makes sense to leave the tunnel open – it kept the situation within Sarajevo from deteriorating to the point where the Bosnians had no choice but to attempt a breakout. If they had been forced to break out, the VRS would have needed to commit many more soldiers to the siege in order to contain them.

The answers to these questions not only satisfied our curiosity as military professionals and strategists, finally making sense of decisions that before had seemed to be poor choices militarily, but also helped to highlight again the importance of gaining the perspective of all sides. Had we never spoken with the VRS regimental commander, we may have never understood the reasoning for the seemingly peculiar VRS military decisions concerning the siege of Sarajevo, thereby never developing our own understanding and knowledge of urban operations and also continuing forward with a fundamental misunderstanding of both the capabilities of the VRS and the conflict in Bosnia itself.

3.8 Day 8: The Croatian Perspective

On Thursday, we returned to Sarajevo to meet with Nikola Brzica, a Croat and graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. After graduating West Point, Brzica served as an officer in the Croatian Army in the early 2000s. He focused on the historic context and build-up to the conflict as well as what he described as the hybrid model of warfare that dominated the conflict. He described the proximate cause of the war as Tito's death in 1980 and the collapse of the Cold War Architecture under which small nations could only achieve their ends when big nations were pre-occupied. After Tito's death, Serbian Nationalism collided with a move towards greater Slovenian and Croatian independence. Initially, this led to JNA preparations for

intervention and the disarmament of territorial defense forces. However, during the first fighting in Slovenia improvised resistance defeated the JNA in 10 days in 1991. Croatia had a somewhat higher Serbian pop (15%), so their struggle for independence was not as easy as Slovenia's 10 day war. Instead the JNA shifted to a hybrid conflict using paramilitary forces within Croatia. Unlike many of those we spoke with in BiH, our Croatian speaker did not think that highly of the JNA's military capability. He believed it was more of a paper tiger with large quantities of weapons and reserves, but poorly trained and lead.

He also asserted that the Croatian conflict from 1991-1995 and the Bosnian conflict from 1992-1995 had to be looked at together – they were part of a single battle space. In fact, he asserted that the costly urban battle known as the Siege of Vukovar in 1991 influenced VRS tactics for the duration of both conflicts. In the Siege of Vukovar, JNA forces successfully defeated Croat resistance, but at a very high cost. He believes this is what lead the VRS forces toward siege warfare in cities like Sarajevo.

3.9 Day 9: Sarajevo: General (retired) Divjak and Command Sergeant Major Bagaric

On our final full day in BiH, we had the opportunity to speak with General (retired) Jovan Divjak who served as the Deputy Commander of the BiH Army's Main Staff during the conflict.



General (retired) Divjak took the group to multiple locations around Sarajevo that were important during the conflict, including the location pictured above which was an Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) position used to shell Sarajevo for over three and a half years. From left to right, Cadet Josh Crafton, Cadet Pat McCallion, General (retired) Divjak, Cadet Dave Stanford, and Cadet Sam Ruppert.

General (retired) Divjak was a career soldier, a Bosnian Serb who was a senior leader in the JNA as the conflict began. He explained that his identity was complex – he saw himself as a Bosnian, as Yugoslavian, and as Serb. However, when the conflict began he decided he was primarily a Bosnian and would fit with the BiH Army against the JNA then VRS. When discussing the history of the conflict, he explained that the Bosniaks were squeezed between Croat and Serb expansion; however, he believes that the Bosniak politicians made a mistake by not having patience to see the proposed federation. Instead,

the Bosniaks put forward a referendum for an independent BiH and after an overwhelming

majority voted in favor of independence, the Bosniak politician declared independence immediately – which he views as the mistake that led to the war. He explained that between January-June of 1992, 80,000 JNA soldiers moved into Sarajevo and after BiH declared independence, the JNA forces simply changed their unit patches and became the VRS.

He explained that the original VRS plan anticipated that Sarajevo would fall in seven days and all of BiH would be under VRS control within one month. After discussing some of the early fighting and the growth of the territorial defense forces, General (retired) Divjak took us out to drive and walk some of the important spots in and around Sarajevo. Like our original guided tour, we visited the intersection where BiH forces defeated the initial VRS armored push into the city. He asserted that the VRS was reluctant to continue the attack because of their fear of landmines (rockets, etc took toll also, but landmines specifically cited as reason they stopped attacks into city). He also believed that the VRS never had the three-to-one numerical superiority that has historically been required to capture a city. Finally, he explained that the BiH Army made two deliberate attempts to break the siege. The first was a failure because of poor logistics and weapons and the second was a failure because of poor command and artillery.

Our final formal event was meeting with the Command Sergeant Major of the BiH Army, Command Sergeant Major Bagaric. Command Sergeant Major Bagaric shared his thoughts on the conflict from his perspective as a Bosnian Croat fighting in the war and discussed the current state of the BiH Army.

4. Reflections

4.1 Understanding military operations in densely populated urban environments

One of the research focuses of this contemporary battlefield assessment was gaining a better understanding of military operations in densely populated urban environments. The intent was to contrast the longest siege of a capital city in modern warfare, the Siege of Sarajevo, with the shorter duration and more intense Battle for Mostar. Interestingly, while the Battle for Mostar was not intended to become a siege, it soon became fixed in positional warfare that resembled trench warfare of World War I far more than the dynamic urban warfare such as that of the American Forces in Baghdad in 2003.

A significant finding from this trip is that no force had an effective approach to urban warfare – they lacked the warfighting concepts to move beyond positional warfare and assert military control over either Sarajevo or Mostar. After the VRS had a costly experience capturing Vukovar in Croatia early in the war, they became much more casualty adverse. When an initial attack met resistance in Sarajevo, they transitioned into siege warfare quickly. Some argued that this was a deliberate strategy which allowed them to fix a much larger enemy force within the city than their own, exercising economy of force. However, from all of our discussion during this trip, it does not appear there was a viable alternate approach.

A second finding was that there is a significant difference between two organized militaries fighting in an urban environment and hybrid warfare in an urban environment. In Mostar, the combined efforts of the Bosniak and Bosnian Croat forces were able to defeat the VRS relatively quickly and effectively. This was in large part because there was not a significant Bosnian Serb population in Mostar and the small population that was there did not mobilize into a hybrid resistance force. However, when the Bosnian Croats turned on the Bosniaks and tried to control the entire city, the conflict quickly devolved into a violent stalemate in which neither force had the capacity to defeat the other. In fact, as with Sarajevo, there was never a military solution to the Battle of Mostar – the Battle of Mostar only ended after the international community stepped in and negotiated a ceasefire.

Another interesting note about the defense of cities was the importance of having an organizational framework for the defenders. Many of Sarajevo's defenders were regular citizens,

and it was often through the already established nucleus of organization provided by criminal elements that allowed them to mount the initial defense that kept the city from falling within the first few days. Without that organizational impetuosity, some claimed that it is likely the city could have fallen within the first several days due to shock and ill preparedness.

4.2 The complexity of multinational operations

The second research focuses of this contemporary battlefield assessment was gaining a better understanding of the complexities of multinational operations and the evolution of the UN, NATO, and now EUFOR missions in BiH. Perhaps our most significant finding was that the U.S. Army should increase opportunities to work in multinational efforts, not only to strengthen ties with other nations, but also as way for U.S. Army officers to develop experience working in multinational environments.

4.3 Additional Reflections

There was also a heavy, unexpected emphasis on leadership and morality when our group toured Srebrenica, the site of the worst genocide of the war in BiH. While this clearly had a bearing on moral issues as an officer, it sparked discussion and thought on a wide range of leadership topics. For instance, our group heavily debated the role and actions of the Dutch UN Battalion Commander that allowed Srebrenica to occur. We talked about the leader's responsibility, his situation, and the various courses of action and he could have taken and their outcomes. If anything, it made each of us wonder what we would have done had we been in that situation.

5. Conclusion

While this trip involved intensive preparatory research and extensive travel in BiH, it is by no means an exhaustive study of the 1992-1995 conflict. In fact, during our research we found the conflict to be noticeably understudied and feel there is much more we could learn as military professionals from the conflict. However, it was an extraordinary experience for all of us and we are grateful for the opportunity to make this contribution to the understanding of military operations in densely populated urban areas and multinational operations.

In particular, we would like to express our deep thanks to the following individuals who helped make this such a meaningful experience:

Mr. Vincent Viola, who has been a consistent advocate of the military program at the United States Military Academy. He encouraged us to organize and conduct this trip as the Modern War Institute's first Contemporary Battlefield Assessment.

General (retired) Eric Shinseki, who shared his experiences as the Commander of the NATO Stabilization Force from 1997 to 1998 and put us in contact with his interpreter at the time who accompanied us during our visit.

General (retired) David Petraeus, who shared his experiences as the NATO Stabilization Force Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations from 2001-2002.

Dr. Leila Dizdarevic, General (retired) Shinseki's former interpreter and current medical doctor who accompanied our group for the entire trip, serving as an interpreter when necessary and consistently providing insights and context to help us understand our experiences.

Captain David Knox, who as a Foreign Area Officer assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo at the time of visit helped coordinate the entire trip.

6. Appendix A: Preparation Week Schedule

Mon, 6 JUL	Events	Notes / Readings
0900-1000	Balkans Overview: Key Political and Geographical Concepts	Guest Speaker: Dr. Richard Wolfel, GENE
1015-1100	Trip Overview	
1115- UTC	Administrative Tasks	
1300-UTC	Reading Time	
Tue, 7 JUL	Events	Notes / Readings
0900-0945	Overview of Conflict in Bosnia Documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pt5n2381Fzc	- United States Army, Europe, and Seventh Army, AE Pamphlet 525-100 3-6 (Hiedelberg, GE: Regional Chief Information Officer - Europe, 2003), 3-6. - Steven Woehrel, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Current Issues and U.S. Policy (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 1-3.
1000-1100	The Seige of Sarajevo	- Andreas, Peter, Blue Helmets and Black Markets: The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2008), 1-33
1115-1200	The Seige of Mostar BBC Documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ipu2Mh_F_c	- Jonathan Landay, Cease-Fire at Mostar Creates Hopes for Peace (The Christian Science Monitor, 1994), avaiable at: http://www.csmonitor.com/1994/0314/14013.html
1300-UTC	Reading Time	
Wed, 8 JUL	Events	Notes / Readings
0900-0945	Multinational Operations	- Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-17 Multinational Operations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), ix-II-17.
1000-1045	UNPROFOR	- United Nations Security Council, Report to the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 947 (1994) (UNSC: 1995).
1100-1200	US Army Operations in Bosnia	AE Pamphlet 525-100 3-6, 6-23.
1300-UTC	Reading Time	
Thu, 9 JUL	Events	Notes / Readings
0900-1000	Transition to IFOR	- United Nations Security Council, Report to the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1026 (1999) (UNSC: 1995).
1015-1100	Transition to European Union Police Mission	- United Nations Security Council, Report to the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNSC: 2002). - Eueopean Union, European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM) (European Union External Action: 2012).
1300-UTC	Reading Time	
Fri, 10 JUL	Events	Notes / Readings
1000-1130	Joint Staff J5 US Mission to the United Nations Visit, NYC	
1330-1500	General (retired) Petreaus Visit, NYC	
Mon, 13 JUL	Events	Notes / Readings
0900-1000	Srebrenica http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-shame-of-srebrenica/	
1000-1100	International Tribunal for the Fomer Yugoslavia (ICTY)	- Sanja Ivkovic and John Hagan, The Politics of Punishment and the Siege of Sarajevo: Toward a Conflict Theory of Perceived International (In)Justice (Tallahassee, FL: Law and Society Review, Volume 40, Number 2, 2006), 369-379, 402-404.
1100-UTC	Current US Policy and Final Trip Discussion	- Steven Woehrel, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Current Issues and U.S. Policy (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 4-11.