Success!
Security Assistance and
Its Impact in Croatia, 1995-2000

By

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In January, 1996 the Croatian military clearly and overwhelmingly supported former Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and his monolithic party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). From the average Croatian soldier's point of view, there were good reasons for this support. Through its near total control of the press, the HDZ had managed to convince most of the military and many of the civilians in Croatia that the HDZ, and only the HDZ, could efficiently govern Croatia and effectively represent its interests abroad. It was, at that time, nearly unthinkable that, in the event of a crisis, the HDZ would not be able to count on the support of the Croatian military.

By January 2000, the situation had changed dramatically. The economy, damaged early by the loss of the large free market represented by the former Yugoslavia, and continually over the years by a lack of capital investment and the mismanagement of both the government and of the so-called Croatian "Tycoons", was in crisis[1]. Internationally, Croatia had been excluded from Partnership for Peace and the World Trade Organization. It found itself at constant odds with the International Criminal Tribunal over war crimes issues and with the rest of the international community over its failure to completely fulfill its obligations under the Dayton Accords. Foreign businessmen considered Croatia one of the most corrupt places in the world.[2]

With the death of former President Tudjman in December, 1999 and the onset of regularly scheduled parliamentary elections in January and February, 2000, the Croatian people found themselves with an historic opportunity to disown the isolationist and nationalistic policies of the past decade and to move towards integration with other western democracies. It was an opportunity they took. Polls prior to the election consistently showed the HDZ falling from favor (even while Tudjman was alive). By the time of the elections, an overwhelming HDZ defeat seemed imminent and this time, at least, the polls did not lie: HDZ representation in the Sabor (Croatia's parliament) fell from 59 percent to 29 percent of the available seats.[3] The newly elected president, Stipe Mesic, came from the Croatian People's Party (HNS) and, for the first time in ten years, the opposition, with the Social Democrat Ivica Racan as Prime Minister, took control of the government. The HDZ has continued to disintegrate. Three HDZ members of parliament recently joined the Democratic Center (a splinter group of the HDZ) and in recent municipal elections in Zagreb the once ruling party garnered only 11 percent of the vote.[4]

Before, during and after this crisis in the then ruling party, the Croatian military did a remarkable thing: nothing. Despite calls from some right wing extremists for a coup[5], the Croatian military stayed on the sidelines and refused to get involved in domestic politics. While this sort of behavior is expected in western democracies, it is not the norm in countries transitioning from authoritarian rule. In fact, the exact opposite is commonly true. Generally speaking, an accommodation with the military is one of the essential pre-conditions for a successful transition[6], making the Croatian military's professional respect for the political process even more remarkable.

This significant achievement was not accidental. In fact, the U.S., along with some NATO allies and, interestingly, the Croatians themselves, have devoted substantial resources to the professionalization of the Croatian military since 1995. It is clear that the Croatian military's lack of a role in the recent elections was due to a number of factors, including diplomatic pressure by the international community. It is equally clear, however, that security assistance activities sponsored by the U.S. and its allies designed to educate and de-politicize the Croatian military contributed materially to the success of a conscious policy of positive military engagement. The rest of this article will be devoted to examining the resources contributed and the way in which those resources were used to help support this environment of change.

The United States was the first to provide resources to the Croatian government for the professional education of its military and remains by far the largest single contributor of resources and full time personnel to security assistance and other engagement activities.

The U.S. has a broad definition of "engagement". Ship visits to Croatian ports, visits by senior officers and admission to U.S. service academies[7], among others, are all considered to be part of a comprehensive strategy designed to promote regional stability and democratization.[8] More specifically, these efforts are designed to "support U.S. efforts to ensure self-sustaining progress from the Dayton Process" and "develop military institutions in the Former Yugoslavia adapted to democratic civilian control".[9]

The United States efforts in country were focused by Ambassador William Montgomery's "Road Map to Partnership for Peace".[10] More importantly, however, the U.S. defense attaché's office was made responsible for synchronizing the entire U.S. engagement effort in Croatia.[11] While the U.S. attaché's office only managed a few of the U.S. engagement activities directly, it significantly influenced the success of all of the activities. The presence of a high-level engagement "czar", the attaché, both protected the programs (by building a successful working relationship with Croatian senior leaders) and multiplied their impact (through careful coordination).

Direct U.S. to Croatia military training assistance grew from $65,000 in fiscal year 1995 to $500,000 in fiscal year 2000. This money was provided to Croatia through the Congressionally authorized International Military Education and Training (IMET) fund. The U.S. trained over 190[12] Croatian military and civilian personnel at military training facilities during this time frame in the U.S. and trained several hundred others during one-two week training seminars conducted in Croatia. IMET money also paid for the establishment of three sophisticated language laboratories. The Croatian Military School of Foreign Languages is now capable of producing nearly 150 fluent English speakers annually. The total cost of the IMET program in Croatia to the U.S. since 1995 has been nearly $2 million.[13] The Defense Security Cooperation Agency, in collaboration with the U.S. European Command, supported two full-time personnel to assist the Croatian military with scheduling and executing IMET funded training since 1997.

In addition to IMET funded activities, the U.S. European Command sponsored a four person Military Liaison Team (MLT) in Croatia under the Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP). The team began operations in 1996 and has conducted nearly 300 events to date[14] designed to present the U.S. armed forces as a role model of a capable military under effective civilian control.[15] Joint contract team program events differ substantially from IMET funded training. The JCTP is prohibited from conducting training and must restrict its activities to familiarization and orientation type events. Participants are not required to be fluent in English, and the events

normally last less than a week (versus IMET funded courses which normally last several months). That said, JCTP funded events played an important role in exposing a large number of Croatian military personnel to democratic norms and expectations.[16]

The U.S., along with Germany, also supported the Marshall Center in Garmisch, Germany. The Center is designed to support higher security and defense learning for foreign and security policy officials.[17] Croatia sent over forty members of its Ministry of Defense and General Staff to the Marshall Center for training since 1995.[18] According to the U.S. State Department, this effort cost the U.S. nearly $350,000 in 1999 and 2000 alone.[19]

In addition to the Marshall Center, Germany began providing direct training opportunities to Croatia in its military schools in 1999. Since then twenty-three officers have been educated in German military schools and thirty officers have completed familiarization or orientation events, making Germany the second largest provider of western style training to the Croatian Ministry of Defense. Total aid, paid out of the defense budget of Germany to Croatia, has been approximately $2 million. Finally, Germany, as well as all other NATO attachés, participated in monthly meetings of the NATO attaché corps in Zagreb. While these meetings covered a broad range of topics, they provided a regular opportunity to plan and de-conflict engagement activities of the various NATO allies.

France also provided a significant level of training. Beginning in 1998 with the signing of a bilateral cooperation agreement, the French established a program which saw thirty-one[20] officers graduate from schools such as the French War School as well as international courses in a variety of subjects.

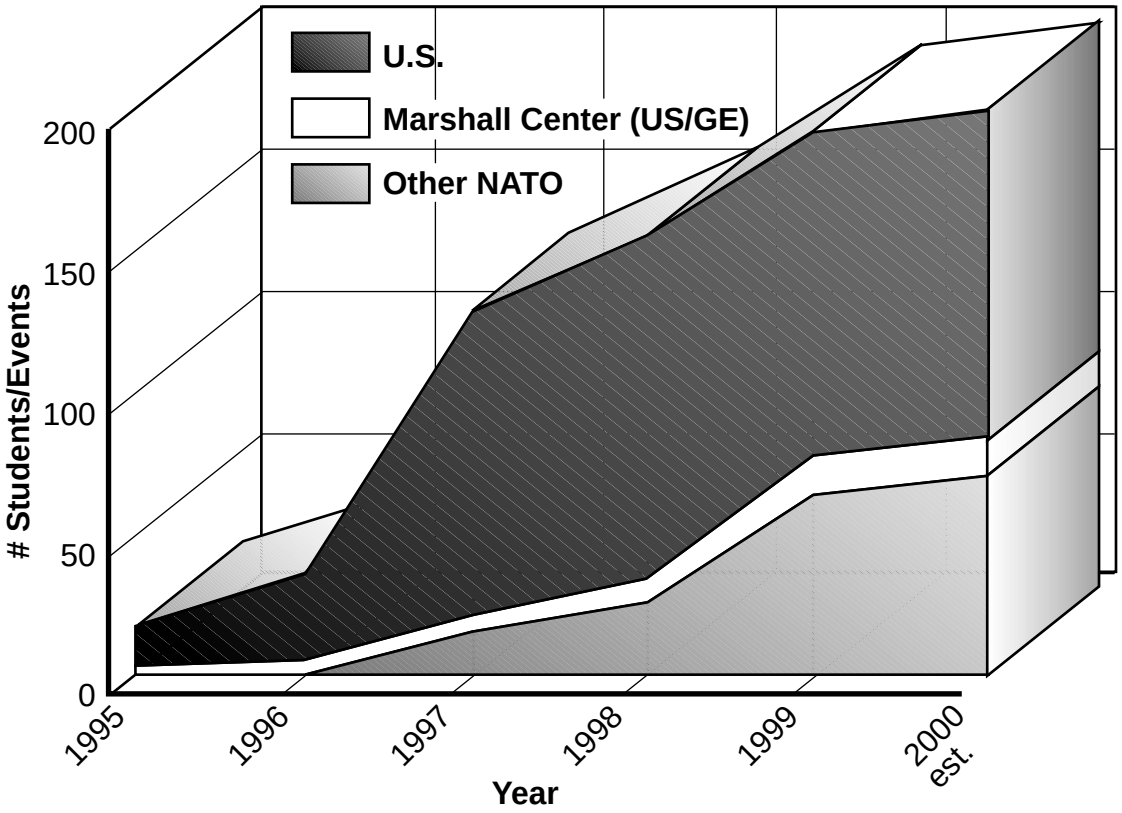
In line with previous agreements between Turkey and Croatia, twelve Croatian officers have attended Turkish schools since 1999. The United Kingdom has also supported the Croatian military. Since 1997, when the United Kingdom began working with the Croatian military on arms control (in particular in relation to the Dayton Accords), some forty-five Croatian students have been sent to the United Kingdom for English language instruction. In addition, the U.K. has sponsored seminars on a broad variety of topics, including the arms-control provisions of Dayton, military law, and the military and the media.

Italy has limited its training opportunities to one person per year at the Italian Naval Academy and to an exchange of observers during national exercises but expects, due to its May 19, 2000 signing of an agreement on defense cooperation, to increase the level of activities. Italy is currently the lead nation for implementing Partnership for Peace with Croatia.

Other NATO allies have also provided exposure to Western military practice to the Croatian military through direct training and other activities. According to the Office of International Peacetime Engagement Activities within the Croatian MOD, Poland, Hungary, Spain and Norway also provided limited support to the Croatian military.

Interestingly, between 1995-2000, Croatia itself dedicated a significant level of resources to professionalizing and modernizing its military. For example, Croatia has had a policy of paying for the travel and living allowance of all students sent abroad. In the case of the U.S. IMET program, this had the effect of tripling the money available for training in the U.S. According to the Croatian Office of International Peacetime Engagement, Croatia will spend over two million dollars in 2000 of its own money supporting training activities abroad. Over eighty percent of that

money will be spent supporting U.S. training and other engagement activities. Croatian Minister of Defense, Jozo Rados, recently recognized the value to the Croatian military of education in U.S. sponsored schools. He also confirmed his commitment to continue Croatia's support for U.S. training in the future.[21]



Such a large degree of support would seem counterproductive to a regime intent on maintaining absolute control over its military. However, in 1995, when the first, very modest, U.S. program began, Croatia had a political need to confirm its relationship with the West and a military need to train the largest number of officers possible.[22] According to the Plans and Policy Department of the Ministry of Defense, the military budget at that time was nearly $1.4 billion[23] and the investment of approximately $130,000 was likely viewed as politically prudent.

By the late 1990s, however, this policy was in the process of quietly backfiring. The Tudjman regime was at odds with the international community on virtually every point except military to military cooperation. Reducing the level of support at that time would have sent an extremely negative political signal. At the same time, the rapid growth of the programs coupled with a strict adherence to entrance standards[24] effectively de-politicized the process of selection of candidates for training. Even in those cases where "politically correct" candidates met the rather stringent entrance criteria, the exposure offered by schooling abroad clearly widened their perspectives and deepened their understanding of western expectations. Finally, upon return, over 95 percent of those trained at U.S. military institutions remained in the military (due primarily to the nearly twenty percent unemployment rate in the Croatian economy) allowing these new perceptions to be rapidly transferred throughout the military.

As a critical mass of trained officers and NCOs began to return from training abroad, U.S. military personnel began to find common ground with an increasing number of Croatian soldiers. Every major command, every sector of the general staff, every directorate in the Ministry had, by the end of 1999, someone who had attended training abroad.

Beginning in 1997, the United State's security assistance office was also able to evaluate the impact of all engagement programs (not just IMET). Areas where the U.S. believed it had provided adequate resources for Croatia to move in the direction that it had said it wanted to go were clearly identified as a result of this evaluation process. More importantly, Croatia was then held accountable for using those resources efficiently. Not only were officers trained in the U.S. expected to be used in positions commensurate with their new skills, but also systems in transition were expected to move towards western norms, a goal the Croatian MOD stated publicly and consistently but which it had often ignored in practice.

An example of where detailed accountability made a clear difference occurred in late 1998. At that time the U.S. was able to state unequivocally to the MOD that it had trained over 100 Croatians in modern defense resource management techniques[25]. It was clear to both Croatian and U.S. officers that this was sufficient for the MOD to move forward towards a more efficient and transparent budgeting process - a goal that the MOD had publicly espoused but which had met with considerable resistance from within. Faced with this accounting (as well as significant diplomatic pressure), the hard-liners were forced to acquiesce. Shortly thereafter the MOD issued its most transparent and detailed budget to date.

By the time of the elections in early 2000, the Croatian military was well on its way towards mentally transforming itself, with bilateral assistance from the U.S. and others, into a modern, civilian controlled, democratically oriented military. By seeking no role and by having no impact on the Croatian national elections, the Croatian military passed its first great test as a peacetime army.

It is clear from the Croatian example that security assistance activities can provide a powerful lever for change. The Croatian example also demonstrates that it is not enough to merely "do" security assistance. The process must be coordinated with other engagement activities. Furthermore, an evaluation process that identifies areas where a country has received sufficient resources to move in a direction it has publicly (if not internally) decided it wishes to go is also plainly crucial to success. Equally important, however, is a willingness and an ability to hold a country accountable for the efficient use of the resources provided. It is the presence of these critical factors, among others, that has helped make the Croatian story a success story.

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End Notes

1 R Lang, "Privatization, Market Structure and Competition: A Progress Report On Croatia", *Ekonomski Pregled* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko Drustvo Ekonomista, 1994), No. 11-12, p.780. Also see the Business Central Europe website on Croatia at http://www.bcemag.com.

2 Croatia placed 74th of 99 countries in Transparency International's 1999 Corruption Perception Index. See Transparency International's web site at http://www.transparency.de.

3 "Triumf Hrvatskih Gradjana", *Nacional* (Zagreb, February 5, 2000), p. 2.

4 Goran Vezic, "Croatian Extremists on the March", *Balkan Crisis Report* (Institute of War And Peace Reporting) May, 16 2000: http://www.iwpr.ac.psiweb.com/index.pl5?archive/bcr/bcr_20000516_1_eng.txt.

5 Drago Hedl, "Tudjman's Deputies at War", *Balkan Crisis Report* (Institute of War and Peace Reporting), October 18, 1999: http://www.iwpr.ac.psiweb.com/index.pl5?archive/bcr/bcr_19991018_1_eng.txt.

6 Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), p. 25.

7 12 students have been admitted to the U.S. service academies. The first graduated in May 2000.

8 See http://www.state.gov/www/budget/fy2001/fn150/forops_full/index.html for further details of the objectives for international assistance from the U.S. to Croatia.

9 *Strategy of Readiness and Engagement* (Stuttgart, Germany: U.S. European Command), April 1998, p.2.

10 For the full text of the speech, see http://www.usembassy.hr.

11 One of the best examples of this coordination process was the establishment of the Military Engagement Council. Jointly chaired by the U.S. Defense Attaché and the Croatian officer in charge of strategic plans and policy, the council consisted of all Croatian and U.S. officers directly involved in planning and coordinating engagement activities.

12 1995 - 11; 1996 - 14; 1997 - 37; 1998 - 45; 1999 - 48; 2000 - 35 (to date).

13 1995 - $65,000; 1996 - $200,000; 1997 - $325,000; 1998 - $425,000; 1999 - $425,000; 2000 - $500,000. The numbers here represent only the original allocation of funds. End of year re-allocations have been excluded from the data for simplicity.

14 1996 - 13; 1997 - 68; 1998 - 74; 1999 - 67; 2000 - 60 (to date).

15 For additional information on U.S. EUCOM's JCTP Program see http://www.eucom.mil/programs/jctp/index.

16 According to the Croatian International Programs Office in the Ministry of Defense, nearly 5000 individuals (including senior MOD officials, personnel from several other ministries and members of Parliament) have attended JCTP sponsored events.

17 For more information on the Marshall Center see http://www.marshallcenter.org/table_of_contents.htm.

18 1995 - 2; 1996 - 5; 1997 - 6; 1998 - 9; 1999 - 15; 2000 - 3 (to date).

19 Full details concerning U.S. training activities in Croatia are available online from the U.S. Department of State at http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/fmtrain/cta_af_a2gam.html.

20 1998 - 14; 1999 - 17.

21 Vesna Pintaric, "Priznanje - Rezultat uspjesne suradnje", *Velebit* (Zagreb: Ministry Of Defence), 6 April 2000, p. 8.

22 Interestingly, while the money for the programs was allocated for FY 1995, the first graduate did not return from the U.S. until 8 December 1995 - after Dayton had been negotiated.

23 *Republic of Croatia: Annual Exchange of Information On Defense Planning 1999*. Vienna: Organization for Security And Cooperation in Europe 1999), Annex 8.

24 Students applying for admission to U.S. military training institutions, for example, must take a test of English language ability and must meet rank, education and medical requirements before he or she can be sent to the U.S.

25 Over 80 were trained in Croatia through two resource management seminars conducted by the Navy Postgraduate School's Defense Resource Management Institute (DRMI). The remainder were also trained by DRMI but at their much more detailed courses offered in the U.S.