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Some Theoretical Considerations on the Situation before the Outbreak of Conflict in Croatia During the Dissolution of Yugoslavia

Dejan Marolov

Goce Delchev University, Shtip 2000, Republic of Macedonia

Email: dejan.marolov@ugd.edu.mk

Abstract

This paper treats the period just before the breaking out of the conflict in Croatia during the Yugoslavia crises. It is an attempt to provide answers of questions that concern the reasons for this war conflict by using the theoretical frameworks of two international relations theories, i.e. the “security dilemma” and the “prisoner's dilemma”.

Keywords: Croatia, Yugoslavia, Serbia, security dilemma, prisoner's dilemma

1. Introduction

In a situation where the federal Yugoslav bodies have become dysfunctional and maimed Serbia access to its new tactics in distribution of YNA troops in the Serb populated territories in Croatia. The strategy envisioned waiting for the Croats to provoke with the expected proclamation of independence. In such a turn of events the overwhelming military YNA would seize and retain these territories from Croatia. So if Croatia would want to leave Yugoslavia than it would be forced to do that without part of its territory. Croatia's desire for independence on one hand and the strategy of Serbia on the other, were diametrically opposed options. This paper is making analysis of what and why happened in the moments before the start of the war in Croatia using the theoretical concepts of security and prisoner dilemma.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dejan.marolov@ugd.edu.mk.

2. Materials and methods

We use qualitative methods and descriptive research.

3. The security dilemma

There were two sides. These are the Croats in fact the Republic of Croatia and the Serbs who live in Croatia supported by the Republic of Serbia. In our opinion, in the moments just before the start of the war in Croatia, they were in the so-called "security dilemma". This theoretical framework suggests the one particular side (most commonly the state) in order to increase its own safety increase its own military capabilities or enters into alliances (for more see [3]). Such behavior on one side can be seen and characterized as aggressive from the other party. This other party, as a respond to this will start undertaking similar measures. By this, both sides will come to a situation of increased tensions between them that can easily transform in to a real conflict despite the fact that neither side actually wanted. If the above mentioned situation is transformed in Croatia before the war, it can be see that the Croats and the Serbs were in a very similar situation as the theoretical situation in the security dilemma. Thus, seen through the prism of the Croatian Republic, they (the Croats) have adopted a new Constitution in response to the aggressive Serbian politics in Yugoslavia and because they taught that this will ensure stronger security. The Croatian Serbs interpreted this as an act of aggression aimed directly at them because of the changes in their status under the new Constitution. Thus the Croatian Serbs react with non - recognition of the Croatian authorities. This occurs almost everywhere, where Serbs lived in large number in Croatia. Furthermore, in order to increase their own safety, the Serbs are setting up barricades on roads. These actions, as seen by Croatian authorities were considered as pure aggression and disloyalty and according to this as a potential threat for Croatian sovereignty. This is the reason why the Croats reacted with the illegal buying of weapons from Hungary in order to increase their safety that would be definitely affected by the possible involvement of Serbia on the side of the Croatian Serbs. Those actions done by Croatia were interpreted as possible aggression over the Serbs and so on.

This theory may partially explain the beginning of the war in Croatia. In a certain percentage it is believed and claimed that the conditions of this dilemma which refer to the non-existing will of conflict, were also met. Namely, under the security dilemma theory, none of the parties really wanted to enter into the conflict. Thus, without ignoring the existence of nationalists on both sides or the desire of certain groups for war, still it could be claimed that the war in general was not a desirable option for any party. Thus for Serbia and the President Milosevic, much more important contribution for achieving the slogan "all Serbs in one state" was B&H, and not the territories inhabited by Serbs in Croatia for which [1] he was ready to give up as a sign of goodwill if B&H would have stayed in future Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia. In this scenario Serbia would have promoted itself as a stability and peace factor, and the Serbs in Croatia probably would have obtained much more than just a national minority rights by which the silent assimilation would have stop- see SANU memorandum [2] (for more see [4]). On the other hand, the peaceful way out for Croatia from Yugoslavia with its full territory, even in places where Serbs were the majority, was certainly preferred option that would have saved many Croatian lives, cities, villages and avoid huge damage. According to this the war was not cherished option for Croatia.

However if we want to be consistent to the elements of security dilemma then we must analyze the communication element too. The security dilemma suggest that the war should be result of the failure of communication between the parties i.e. having a situation with lack or no communication between the sides, or existence of bad communication which is wrongly interpreted. So in this case, perhaps some would argue that this requirement is not met i.e. that there was a satisfactory degree of communication between the parties (if not directly between the Serbs in Croatia and the Croatian government, then at least between the presidents of Croatia and Serbia). Still we do not agree in full with this because the existing literature claims that the communications between the two presidents (Milosevic and Tudjman), especially through their secret meetings was much more frequent during the war in B&H and were not so intensive before the beginning of the war in Croatia. We can even argue that the existing communication was on a level of badly interpreted communication, and this is still a failure in the communication. So we can say that this condition of security dilemma was also fulfilled accordingly.

4. The prisoner's dilemma

Perhaps a better representation could be done in the actual situation through the so-called “prisoner's dilemma”. If a graphic overview is made the situation would have looked like this (table 1):

Table 1: Serbs living in Croatia and Serbia are marked as “S” & Croats and Croatia are marked as “C”

	<u>C - cooperate</u>	<u>C – do not cooperate</u>
<u>S- cooperate</u>	The best possible outcome for both	C– The best possible outcome S– Worst possible outcome
<u>S- do not cooperate</u>	S- The best possible outcome C–Worst possible outcome	S–Intermediate acceptable outcome C–Intermediate acceptable outcome

In the actual situation, i.e. the time before the beginning of the war in Croatia (officially still SFRY) there were two sides, namely, the Serbs living in Croatia and the Republic of Serbia on the one hand and Croats and the Republic of Croatia on the other side. If we transformed the two sides in the imaginary situation of “prisoner’s dilemma” and try to get the possible outcomes for the both sides we will get the table 1. So both sides had two options. Each of them can cooperate with the other party or not, which in this practical cause would mean starting a war with the other side. Let’s analyze the possible outcomes.

The first possible outcome is presented in the table 1 left corner up. In this case, both sides cooperate, i.e. not initiated military operations and agreed to a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Thus, the solution could have been found in a peaceful independence for Croatia which would have been recognized by Serbia, with a precondition that the Serbs in Croatia would receive something more than the usual civil and ethnic rights. In our opinion this would be acceptable for Croatia as long as it would connote creation of an independent Croatia with its full territorial integrity and sovereignty recognized by the Serbs and Serbia. Even in reality if this was acceptable for the President Milosevic [1] who gave his consent to such settlement for the Croatian question under the plan proposed by Lord Carrington (reasons for this could be seen at credits that Serbia would have obtained as an constructive player in the eyes of the international factor. But also further on this should be compensated with the Bosnian question i.e. B&H would remain in the new Serbian dominated mini Yugoslavia). So, although this possible outcome might have been encountered with some disapproval and disappointing among certain nationalist groups, yet there is no doubt that the first possible outcome is advantageous variant for both sides and it have been possible only if both sides cooperated. However the chances of this outcome in that historical moment were less than the minimum but still possible.

The second possible outcome is indicated in the left corner down. In this variant the Serbs and Serbia would get their best possible outcome unlike the other side - the Croats and the Republic of Croatia which would get worst possible outcome. This outcome would have occurred when one side - the Croatian, would have simply rely on the good will of other side and would not undertake any actions naively hoping that the other side will cooperate and will also not take any actions. But the other side - the Serbs would have taken an advantage of the passive position of the other side and use it for a quick military strike that would result in a quick military victory. In this way, they would have been able to dictate the conditions for the peace agreement which will be the best possible outcome for Serbia and the Serbs but also the worst possible outcome of Croatia. In our opinion, the possibility for this scenario in reality was less than zero not just because of the prisoner's dilemma logic, but also because of the existence of foreign factors. So it is very unlikely that Serbia (Yugoslavia) would have decided to be directly involved in a war that would have put an end of Croatia in a situation of the existence of the external factor that very likely would have not allow this (NATO, primarily the USA and Germany).

The third possible outcome is virtually the same as the second except that in this outcome the sides are changing. So according to the third scenario which is marked in the right corner up, the Croats and the Croatian Republic will get their best possible outcome unlike the Serbs and Serbia, which will get their worst possible outcome. It is a situation Serbia and the Serbs would naively cooperate without undertaking any measures for their own safety and would have hoped that the other side would do the same. But the other side has taken the advantage of their passive position and initiated a quick and successful military attack over the places settled with Serbs in Croatia. This outcome as well as the previous was almost impossible. In fact hardly anyone in Croatia would dare to such a step having in mind that this will cause a direct involvement of military superior Serbia in the war, quite sure.

Finally the fourth and final possible outcome is the situation marked in the right corner down. It is the outcome in which both sides gain something and lose something which is a secondary possible outcome acceptable to both sides. This outcome gets the best chances to occur and really happen according to the logic of "prisoner

dilemma". Thus the existence of fear that the other party will not cooperate and will try to attack first in order to achieve its best possible outcome, both parties actually enter into military conflict, which guarantees at least minimal realization of their goals. Thus the Serbs took control over the places in Croatia that were with predominantly Serbian population, and the Croats established their own military control above the rest of Croatia and gained factual independence. Of course, this scenario had bad sides and was accompanied by enormous sacrifices from both sides and enormous economic and material damage.

So according to the logic of prisoner dilemma, not cooperation as an option chosen by one side almost always carries a more favorable outcome for the same side, regardless of actions of the opposite side. So the most predictable and the most possible outcome was the one that actually happened i.e. the fourth one (table 1).

Note: The "prisoner's dilemma" is a theoretical approach and not always fully includes all elements from the reality in a current specific situation. However, the situation between the Serbs and the Republic of Serbia on the one hand and Croats and the Republic of Croatia on the other hand, in the time of the period just before the start of war in Croatia, contains a good proportions of the elements of the prisoner dilemma, which in large percentage has a predictable outcome according to the logic of this theoretical framework.

5. Conclusion

By using the theoretical frameworks of two international relations theories, i.e. the "security dilemma" and the "prisoner's dilemma" this paper presented the conditions and events in the period before the breaking out of the conflict in Croatia from different points of view. However, we must note that this theoretical approaches not always include all the elements from the reality in a current specific situation.

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