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# Russian "Lessons Learned" in Bosnia

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*In January 1995 Colonel Andrei Demurenko, who in 1993 became the first and to date the only Russian officer to attend the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), was sent to Bosnia, where he became the Chief of Staff of Sector Sarajevo for a year. He returned home to Moscow in January of 1996. On a June 1996 trip to Moscow, the author, who in 1993 was an active duty LTC and served as the Russian officer's military sponsor at FT. Leavenworth, caught up with Colonel Demurenko. Their discussions of Russian lessons learned in Bosnia make up the major portion of the following article. The interpretation of Colonel Demurenko's comments is solely the responsibility of Mr. Thomas .*

One of the little known facts of the early era of Russian President Boris Yeltsin was that a Russian military officer actually participated in two attacks against American forces with a full complement of tanks and armored personnel carriers, and won both battles---and this happened in America!! In May 1993, then Russian LTC Andrei Demurenko, while visiting the National Training Center (NTC) in California, was placed in one of the lead vehicles of the opposing force (OPFOR) from which he assisted the regimental commander's attack against U.S. forces in training. LTC Demurenko was offered the opportunity to conduct this training during his time as a student at CGSC by General William Nash, then the Deputy Commanding General for Training (DCGT) at Fort Leavenworth.

This experience, and several others associated with Russian-U.S. peacekeeping exercises, provided Colonel Demurenko with a unique insight into the conduct of U.S. and Russian operations. He is the only officer in Russia or America who has attended the two educational institutions that train our mid-level officers, the Frunze Military Academy



and CGSC. Colonel Demurenko's Bosnia experience has further added to his background, where he worked on an international staff, serving as the Chief of Staff of Sector Sarajevo.

Americans will agree completely with some of Colonel Demurenko's comments, yet will find others highly controversial. An example of the latter is Colonel Demurenko's high appraisal of Serbian commander General Ratko Mladic, who the Hague has indicted for war crimes. Demurenko noted in a 1996 *Komsomolskaya Pravda* interview:

I did have occasion to meet with the Serb leaders. It would be difficult to find a better commander than General Mladic. He is an extremely talented, exceptionally literate, tough commander. And we had very difficult conversations. To my face they accused all of Russia of betrayal.<sup>1</sup>

Why such high marks for Mladic? There are specific reasons for Colonel Demurenko's remarks. First, Mladic received gold medals at every military academy he attended, indicating that he finished first in his class. Second, he is considered a very brave commander by his men, one who was always in the trenches with his soldiers. Finally, all of his soldiers respected him for his interest in them. He knew the first names of men holding positions of company commander and above, as well as their personal concerns such as number and names of family members.

On the other hand, Colonel Demurenko underscored the fact that he in no way supports anyone (whether it be Serb, Croat, or Muslim) who violates the Geneva Convention. There is a wide disparity between professional respect for a leader's qualities and intellect, and the use of the same intellect to commit heinous war crimes, he added. With this beginning, we will now explore further the following "lessons learned" which represent the main points from Colonel Demurenko's experience as Chief of Staff of Sector Sarajevo; and from reading the Russian military press for "lessons learned" from the conflict.

### **Lesson One: Learning how to work with the international community**

Bosnia offered one of the first opportunities for Russian (vice Soviet) forces to participate in a real deployment under the control of the United Nations (UN). This was particularly valuable for Russian forces from the standpoint of international command and control, and organization. The UN deployment utilized three coordinators, one each for the military, diplomatic or political, and economic arenas. In Russia's operations in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) only one individual is used to control all three areas, and this will probably be adjusted in the future. Bosnia serves as a "how to do it" example in this respect.

Colonel Demurenko noted in an article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that the "blue armies" (UN peacekeepers) would be around for a long time. Global conflicts now are less likely than local or regional ones, and many future conflicts will require UN control. But in Russia's premier military institute, the General Staff Academy, lectures on peacekeeping are not even offered (according to Demurenko). This means senior leaders are given no theory and no explanation of how to interact with other armies.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the experience in Bosnia is invaluable for Russia.

## **Lesson Two: Combatants are continuously trying to manipulate the UN force into supporting one side at the expense of the other**

One of the more frustrating lessons of the conflict was the overt and covert manner in which all combatants attempted to manipulate the perceptions and actions of the UN force. This usually involved the sniping or mortaring of either civilians or the UN force itself in an effort to make it appear that the other side did the shooting. The use of perception management also involved maiming and other acts of cruelty.

Colonel Demurenko himself was involved in one of the most widely discussed and controversial events of the war. It involved the mortaring of a Sarajevo market square, reportedly by Serbs. Initial reports from CNN advanced this interpretation of the incident for the world. Colonel Demurenko conducted his own investigation of the incident and came to a very different conclusion: that the attack could not conceivably have occurred as CNN reported initially due to both scientific and practical evidence. Colonel Demurenko used UN crater analysis, the firing tables of the Serb armed forces, and street width/roof overhang measurements to determine angles of descent of the mortar shells. He calculated the probabilities of a shell hitting the street and not the roof. He went into the mountains surrounding Sarajevo and video taped the locations from which these shells would have had to have been launched according to the firing tables to produce the damage as CNN reported (one of the locations was in a mine field). His evidence that the attack could not have occurred as originally reported was so overwhelming that he soon had two American officers and one Canadian agreeing publicly with his analysis. Demurenko's conclusion was not that the Serbs didn't do it and the Muslims or Croats did. It was simply that the attack didn't occur as originally reported. Someone appeared to be manipulating the incident for their benefit.

## **Lesson Three: Politicians need to understand the reasons for a war, especially who is responsible, to know how to react with the proper force**

The reasons behind most conflicts are varied and complex, and Bosnia was no exception. The Russian experience in Chechnya showed that initially only the leadership of Chechnya was a problem for Russia. In Bosnia, the situation was entirely different. Here a near majority of each ethnic group wanted conflict, and the problem became trying to separate Serbs, Moslems, and Croats, not just trying to control the leadership. In some cases, cease fires did not work because the combatants listened to local commanders and not to the voice of state or ethnic leadership.

Colonel Demurenko noted that the biggest problem for Russians and the entire international staff, and most likely for the politicians formulating a response, has been trying to remain emotionally apart from the conflict. It is all too easy to be drawn into the tragic situation faced by all three sides, he noted, and any slip takes away your credibility as an impartial peacekeeper.

However, there was another point in Colonel Demurenko's *Komsomolskaya Pravda* article regarding this lesson learned on the use of force that U.S. leaders would not agree with totally. He noted that armies not used, like powerful biceps that aren't exercised, can become flabby. Perhaps this is why, he notes, that the U.S. occasionally uses its muscles

in Grenada, Somalia, and now Bosnia. This is also why, he adds, that the Russian army needs to flex its muscles a bit, gaining the experience of international interaction as well.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Lesson Four: Some Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) worked well, others caused more trouble than they were worth**

There were some 112 NGOs in all that serviced the Sarajevo and Bosnia area. In Colonel Demurenko's opinion only three were really proficient in their duties: the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Red Cross, and the World Health Organization. While others most likely also had spotless records (Demurenko obviously did not meet all 112), many of the NGOs left a bad taste in his mouth. He referred to the activities of many as "economic espionage" in that an NGO would send an advance team into an area to determine what was needed, and then would end up selling the item instead of giving it away. NGOs, it should be noted, did not pay taxes. Thus, war became a very profitable black market activity for a few of them, while some learned how to exploit the ethnic factor to their benefit.

Colonel Demurenko believes that individuals who were already getting along well, that is those who drove around in flashy cars and escorted gorgeous women, made money hand over fist by exploiting the wartime situation to their benefit, especially in and around Sarajevo. Here, where some people used coupons to get bread and where potatoes were grown in cemeteries, luxurious restaurants and fancy discotheques reportedly also thrived, existing side by side. Sarajevo's primary defense was maintained by two whole corps of Muslims and the UN presence, but was further buttressed by criminal formations.<sup>4</sup>

Colonel Demurenko also vividly remembers sitting on a hillside with other UN members watching through binoculars as an NGO unloaded flour and stacked it in a warehouse. After a short while, when the UN troops accompanying the convoy and the NGO representative had left, thieves were observed simply carting off many of the sacks of flour. The next day in the center of the city the flour was being sold at a profit. Colonel Demurenko noted that some of the NGO groups were receiving kickbacks from the thieves for this type of activity.

#### **Lesson Five: Russia and the U.S. are learning to work together**

The UNPROFOR and IFOR experiences will undoubtedly result in a closer working relationship between Russian and U.S. units. They have already conducted two major peace operations exercises together, one in the U.S. and one in Russia, and both have joint experience in Bosnia. The forces are learning more and more about one another's operating procedures, although there are always more difficulties to work out in real situations than in a staged exercise in one's own backyard.

Just as Colonel Demurenko was preparing to leave Bosnia in the December-January time period, the IFOR force was arriving. Who would Demurenko meet but the IFOR ground commander, General Nash, who had sent him to NTC some three years earlier when the two had met at Fort Leavenworth! Perhaps this chance meeting, three years after their first encounter, underscores best of all the value of the military to military contact program. The two officers had worked together first in the sterile academic environment

of Fort Leavenworth, and now they had the chance to put into practice the result of the past years of cooperation in a very important international environment. Nash asked Demurenko if he could extend his stay and help establish a working relationship between the Russian and U.S. force. Unfortunately this could not be worked out, but the meeting was indicative of the growing cooperation between the forces and underscores the value of military-to-military contacts among professional soldiers.

### **Lesson Six: There is a need for more joint manuals among peacekeeping forces, and especially for one at the UN level**

One of Colonel Demurenko's major contributions to the joint process in Sarajevo was a peacekeeping manual he developed that compared peace operations from the U.S., Russian, Canadian, Nordic, British, Austrian, Eurocorps, Holland, and NATO perspectives. The publication is a collection of comparative tables that examines different aspects of these systems, and is an invaluable asset for officers unacquainted with the peace operation principles of different systems. It is a text that could be used by instructors at Fort Leavenworth.

The manual is called "Peacekeeping Operations: General missions, Methods, Phases". It consists of five chapters. They are: General Terminology of Peace Support and Peacekeeping Operations; Documents of Peacekeeping Operations; Peacekeeping Means; Training for Peacekeeping Operations; and Some Links with OOTW. The manual also contains a glossary and references. There is a section on Rules of Engagement and Anti-sniping activities. There is also a slick foldout on "Specific Features of Russian Peace Operations on the Territory of the Former USSR" that covers Russian involvement in Chechnya, Moldova, Georgia-South Ossetia, Azerbaijan-Armenia, Tadjikistan, and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts.

Apparently, other articles by Demurenko are also finding use at Fort Leavenworth. Each year one of the new international students, especially those from a former Warsaw Pact country, relate that part of their preparation for Fort Leavenworth was reading Colonel Demurenko's article that compared CGSC and the Russian equivalent, the Frunze Academy, that appeared in *Military Review*. This gave them a unique comparative analysis before they arrived at Fort Leavenworth.

### **Lesson Seven: The overall leader needs a good military-political background**



**US and Russian soldiers discussing operations in Bosnia, March 1996**

One of the clear lessons learned by the Russians (close to-- yet distinct from--Lesson Three) is that the political leadership needs to be more educated in

the areas of when, why, and how much force should be used, and under what conditions. This lesson was driven home during the Russian incursion into Chechnya in their own country as well. Military leaders from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Ministry of Defense have reiterated several times that political leaders need short courses in the use of the armed forces, and they need more military specialists on their staffs. That Colonel Demurenko would also emphasize this point comes as no surprise. The new

Russian Minister of Defense, Colonel-General Igor Rodionov, also made this point several times over the past year.

### **Lesson Eight: The IFOR also requires people who are acutely aware of the military-political situation**

In an article in the Russian publication *Moscow News* the Russian deputy commander of IFOR, Colonel General Leonty Shevtsov, noted that "we should have used our heads before we brought troops into Chechnya" (he participated in the taking of the cities of Grozny, Argun, Gudermes and Shali).<sup>5</sup> "Shevtsov can now see for himself what should have been done in Chechnya in light of the operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an operation that was in the pipeline for over a year," noted the authors of the article. When asked why the IFOR effort to date has been successful, Shevtsov noted that "in the first place the Dayton accords. They formed the political base, without which the military operation would have been impossible. IFOR members are not facing any particular peace deal. In the second place, the UN Security Council assigned a powerful military structure the task of preparing the operation, giving it the right to use force, unnecessary so far. During the four years of war, UN blue helmets did not have this right." Shevtsov also reiterated calls to clean up mines together and to work harder on the problem of refugees and prisoners of war, problems which are hindering the implementation of the political accords.<sup>6</sup>

It is not only the Dayton experience that has proven valuable for Russia. In May, an article appeared in the Russian paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Independent Newspaper)* that highly rated the use of U.S. psychological operations forces in Bosnia. The article drew three conclusions: first that peace is being managed "largely thanks to the efforts of the PSYOPS specialists" in spite of the fact that the peace plan is so complex, that plans for weapons surrender and prisoner of war exchanges have not been completely implemented, and in spite of the presence of Mujaheddin mercenaries who fought on the side of the Muslims; second, the PSYOP staff permits them to effectively "react to the developing situation and to change the direction of the information psychological influence" (the Americans are already beginning to gradually prepare public opinion for the fact that the one year that was allotted by the Dayton accords may not be enough); and finally, these efforts have exposed Russia's inability to use such levers of influence on public opinion.<sup>7</sup>

### **Lesson Nine: The huge UN apparatus must be trimmed down**

Colonel Demurenko felt that many UN missions or jobs were duplicated, and that a complete scrub of the organization's equipment and personnel will be needed after the Bosnian conflict ends. This primarily was due to the fact that this type of mission had not been foreseen or experienced in the past. For this Colonel Demurenko does not want to lay blame at the feet of the UN or anyone else, but he wants to make a point that someone today, not tomorrow, needs to start the restructuring effort. As but one of many examples, Colonel Demurenko pointed out his feeling of frustration when watching the work of the UN element known as the civilian police, who were given the mission of "monitoring violations of human rights." Demurenko pointed out that military observers, political



observers, human rights groups, and OSCE representatives, among others, were also doing this. And what did the civilian police have to show for the \$3,500 per person they were earning each month? Nothing, in his opinion, that the others already weren't reporting. The most important function of the civilian police appeared to be control of prisoners of war that were turned over from one side to another. Formation of a rapid reaction brigade would be useful as well.

### **Lesson Ten: The boundary between peacekeeping and peace enforcement must be clarified<sup>8</sup>**

Colonel Demurenko noted that there was too much slipping back and forth between peacekeeping and peace enforcement in Bosnia, and that this boundary had to continually be clarified. Much of the blame lay with the combatants, who took hostages, baited UN forces into an aggressive response, or failed to comply with an agreement in a timely manner. As a result of the actions of the combatants, the UN reacted by employing NATO's air power. There were even cases in which the combatants positioned their forces near Russian units in the hopes that NATO aircraft might inadvertently kill some Russian soldiers and thereby elicit a huge protest from the Russian government over the incident. Perhaps the wider use of non-lethal weapons will help clarify the boundary between these two areas in the future.

Bosnia has been unique in that two approaches different than peacekeeping and peace enforcement have been used. In the first instance, there was the use of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) concept of which Demurenko was a part (with vague rules of engagement). The actions of this UN force were more akin to warfare monitoring and refugee assistance than peacekeeping. In the second instance, the use of IFOR, the operation resembles a stability operation more than peace enforcement. The goal is to maintain stability so that an election can be held while maintaining the ability to use force if required.

The rules of engagement are known



very well by **US and Russian IFOR soldiers on a patrol near their contingents' sector boundary** all parties to the cease fire.

One of the many humorous items that passed through the joint headquarters in Sarajevo was the "Air Operations View on World Politics". Socialism, it noted, is when you have two cows and you give one to your neighbor. Communism is when you have two cows, the government takes both and gives you some milk. Bureaucratism is when you have two cows, the government takes both, shoots one, milks the other and then throws the milk away. Capitalism is when you have two cows, you sell one and buy a bull. UNPROFORISM is when you have two cows, the government takes both, throws the milk away, shoots one, sells the other for a bull five times the price of one cow, and pays you \$1.28 a day to milk the bull.

Today Colonel Demurenko is working as the deputy director of the peace operations department in the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. His interest in peace support and peacekeeping operations is intense. Colonel Demurenko knows very well the

strengths and weaknesses of the Russian, U.S., and UN peace operations systems, and should provide a voice of reason and expertise worth listening to as the world attempts to grapple with lessons of low intensity conflict.

His will not be the only set of Russian lessons learned to emerge from the Bosnian conflict. The U.S. and other members of the Partnership for Peace venture should pay close heed to what the Russians say. Theirs is a unique perspective on the problem and may hold the answer to finding new and innovative methods of ending the conflict.

#### *Endnotes*

1. Elena Kalyadina, "Colonel Demurenko's Bosnian Confession," *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 29 May 1996, p 6. [BACK](#)

2. *Ibid.*, p 6. [BACK](#)

3. *Ibid.*, p 6. [BACK](#)

4. *Ibid.*, p 6. [BACK](#)

5. Dmitry Sabov and Leonid Gankin, "Our Man in NATO," *Moscow News*, April 4-10, 1996, p 1. [BACK](#)

6. *Ibid.*, p 5. [BACK](#)

7. Alexander Znamenskiy, "The Balkans": "The Successes of Task Force Eagle: They Are Managing to Maintain Peace on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia Largely Thanks to the Efforts of 'Psychological Operations' Specialists", *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye (Independent Military Review)*, 16 May 1996, p 2. [BACK](#)

8. During the author's June trip to Moscow he attended a conference on peace operations in the CIS and obtained a list of military definitions for the Russian understanding of the terms peacekeeping and peace enforcement . These definitions will form the basis of a future article that compares the U.S. definitions for the same terms. Both the Russian and U.S. versions also should be compared with the UN versions of the terms. Without common definitions, the border between peacekeeping and peace enforcement will continue to be a trouble spot. Interestingly, no definitions are offered for UNPROFOR or IFOR in either case. [BACK](#)