

**The Regimental System and
the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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The Regimental System

The regimental system is a method of military organisation developed by the British Army over the last 300 years, variations of which can be identified in the present-day armed forces of numerous Commonwealth states including Australia, Canada, India, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom (UK). Despite its widespread application and well documented history, however, any definition of the Regimental System must remain fluid. Socio-economic developments, coupled with advances in technology and military organisation, means that the parameters of what a regiment is – in terms of structure, composition, identity, and purpose – are constantly changing. David French, in his detailed study of military identities in the British Army, postulates that ‘the language of the “regiment” is so shot through with anomalies that to talk of a “regimental system” is itself almost a misnomer, for there was much about it that was anything but systematic.’¹ Perhaps the only consistent observation of the Regimental System focuses on its abstract, emotional appeal. When joining a regiment, a soldier enters a community which offers them an inspirational heritage, a legacy to defend, and the support of a “family” in a manner considerably more personal than the faceless bureaucracy of an army organised along the lines of the continental system. Such a dynamic, it is argued, fosters *esprit de corps* and boosts the morale of troops, ultimately leading to increased combat effectiveness and cohesion. This understanding of the regimental system is perhaps best illustrated by Queen Elizabeth II, who, when addressing a group of regimental colonels in 1956, told them that the British Army

More perhaps than any other in the world, has always lived through the regiment and the regimental tradition. In the hour of battle it has repeatedly relied on it, on the pride and comradeship of men who would sooner die than betray the traditions of their corps or be unworthy of the men of old who fought before them under its colours. There is no first among the regiments and corps of my Army and there is no last; all are bound in the same spirit of brotherhood and proud service to sovereign and country and each regards itself – with every reason – as second to none.²

Over 130 years after Edward Cardwell reformed the British Army and established the Regimental System, the model was applied to the newly integrated Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Bosna i Hercegovina*, BiH; AFBiH), a military with no significant historical links to the British Army or the wider Anglosphere. This paper will offer an overview of the origins and development of the regimental system in a number of countries, explain how such a system came to be applied in BiH, and compare the application of the system in the AFBiH with other militaries which utilise it. The strengths and weaknesses of the regimental system in the AFBiH will then be considered, and the report will conclude with an analysis of how the regimental system could be reformed in order to strengthen the AFBiH.

¹ David French. *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c.1870-2000*. (Oxford University Press, 2007) Introduction

² *The Times*, 28 Nov. 1956. Quoted in: French. *Military Identities*. p.3

Origins and Development: The British Army

The regimental system one would recognise today was not introduced until midway through the Nineteenth Century, however many of the practices and concepts of the model were developed in response to the increasing pressures the British Army faced in its continental endeavours and imperial conquests. During this period, the regiment served as both the key operational and administrative unit of the British Army, and 'for the individual, the regiment *was* [sic] the army. Officers would be commissioned and promoted in the regiment, while men would be recruited into the regiment and remained with it until death or discharged.'³ In 1871, Cardwell, the Secretary of State for War, passed the Regulation of the Forces Act, laying the foundation for the modern regimental system. The Act divided the country into 66 districts loosely based on the counties and regions of the UK, each of which would house a regimental depot and support two battalions which together would form a regiment. One battalion would serve abroad for a period usually of five years, whilst the other would remain in its home county and focus on recruitment and training.⁴ The creation of territorial designations and the establishment of links with local communities under the Cardwell reforms had mixed results. In some cases the reforms simply formalised existing practices and required little implementation, however in many instances the efforts have been described as 'the reinvention of "tradition" with a vengeance,' and the idea that all of the regiments constituted a community or family has been dismissed as 'largely bogus.'⁵ The reforms introduced by Cardwell created regiments from units as disparate as the 27/Inniskilling Fusiliers (based in Ireland) and the 108/Madras Infantry (based in India), and in some cases, the composite parts of the regiment rarely interacted. The two regular battalions of the Sherwood Foresters, for example, did not meet at all between 1899 and 1938.⁶

In 1881, Hugh Childers, building upon the reforms initiated by Cardwell, continued the reform process and attempted to reinforce regimental identities. French points out that, in pursuit of these new identities, 'the regimental and military authorities manipulated symbols, rituals, ceremonies, and "histories" to create a new regimental *esprit de corps*,' resulting in the creation of what Benedict Anderson (when discussing the origins of nationalism) famously described as 'imagined communities.'⁷ Most regiments were named after their home county, such as The Devonshire Regiment, however those with distinct (non-English) identities had them recognised, resulting in the formation of units such as The Royal Irish Regiment, The Welsh Regiment, and The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders). The ethno-national distinctions between the regiments were highlighted in the uniforms of the soldiers. English and Welsh regiments sported roses on the lace of officers and white facings on the redcoats of their soldiers; Scottish regiments bore thistles, yellow facings, and some wore kilts; and shamrocks and green facings decorated the Irish regiments.⁸ Furthermore, the battle

³ Bob Burnham & Ron McGuigan. *The British Army Against Napoleon: Facts, Lists and Trivia, 1805-1815*. (Casemate, 2010) p.59

⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Jim Storr. "The Regimental System in the British Army – 1685-2010." in Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey, Eds. *Raise, Train and Sustain: Delivering Land Combat Power*. (Australian Military History Publications, 2010) p.245

⁵ French. *Military Identities*. pp.77-78

⁶ Ibid. p.78

⁷ Ibid. p.78; Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. (Verso, 1991) p.7

⁸ It should be noted that by 1931 only sixteen line infantry regiments still wore the facings they had been prescribed in 1881; French. *Military Identities*. p.96

honours inscribed on the regimental colours (the flag historically carried into battle) not only distinguished units from each other, but also served as a record of a regiment's history. The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, for example, is the most decorated regiment in the British Army, and bears battle honours from the conquest of India and battles against Napoleon's armies, to its deployment in Korea.⁹ Modifications, also based on past glories, were also made to the uniforms of the soldiers in a regiment. In 1801, for example, the 28th (North Gloucestershire) Regiment was awarded the honour of wearing an extra Sphinx emblem on the back of their headdresses to commemorate the bravery displayed at the Battle of Alexandria, where they were simultaneously attacked in the front and rear by French forces.¹⁰ Customs such as this led to a situation in which, as French states:

No two regiments in the British Army wore exactly the same uniform. Variations might in some cases be quite minor – a different pattern of button or cap-badge – but the functions of the differences were quite deliberate. They were a visible symbol of the common identity that each member of the regiment shared, and they enhanced each regiment's sense of separateness.¹¹

The expression of unique identities by the regiments of the British Army was not restricted to names and uniforms. A number of measures were taken to instil a distinct cultural identity for each regiment in order to further embellish their separateness. Each regiment would possess an unpaid titular head of the regiment in the form of a Colonel, usually a retired or serving senior officer, who, whilst serving a purely symbolic role, would act as a patriarchal figurehead and preside over institutions that created 'the image of the regiment as a community' such as the Regimental Association.¹² The Regimental Associations would offer financial and emotional assistance to present and former soldiers and their families, organise regimental events, erect memorials to fallen comrades, publish regimental journals and histories, and when the regimental colours were replaced (usually at thirty-year intervals) the old ones would be laid up in a church associated with the regiment by the Regimental Association.¹³ The journals would focus on the military and sporting triumphs of the regiment, and would also offer extracts from the historical records and tales of heroism, whilst most of the histories 'presented a chronological account of the significant achievements of the regiment, concentrating on wars and battles, rather than on the dreary years of garrison service that was the lot of most soldiers.'¹⁴ The focus on rooting the regiment deep in the past and ensuring the continuation of its traditions can be explained to some extent by Lieutenant General Sir Alastair Irwin: 'To one degree or another the past provides a powerful motive for performing well in the present. And so, we must not lightly sever the direct links with that past.'¹⁵ However, it is evident that such links with the past are, to some extent, created.

⁹ Army Tigers: Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. *Queen's and Regimental Colours: Battle Honours*. (PWRR) Available at: <http://www.armytigers.com/artefacts/queen-s-and-regimental-colours-battle-honours> (Accessed: 19/09/2017)

¹⁰ Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum. *The Battle of Alexandria*. (SOGM) Available at: <http://www.soldiersofglos.com/1801/05/20/the-battle-of-alexandria/> (Accessed: 18/09/2017)

¹¹ French. *Military Identities*. p.85

¹² Ibid. p.79

¹³ Ibid. p.87

¹⁴ Ibid. p.83

¹⁵ Irwin. "What is best in the regimental system?" p.2

The activities of the Regimental Associations underpinned the effort to foster unique identities among the regiments of the British Army. French argues that, far from being an organic process, the Regimental Associations acted with 'the explicit purpose of influencing behaviour of men in the present and the future' and intended to 'bolster pride in the regiment amongst its members, to encourage the present generation to enlist, and then to emulate the heroic deeds of their predecessors.'¹⁶ One regimental history, for example, warned that 'the past is the heritage which nothing can take from you, but the present and the future are in your hands, see that you are worthy of these great traditions.'¹⁷ Irwin observes that the celebration of heritage and identity in the Regimental System offers soldiers 'a sense of belonging to an entity which has an existence, a past, present and future of its own.'¹⁸ The community formed around a regiment, he continues,

extends over several generations, across all ranks, serving and retired. In belonging to this community its members benefit from a powerful sense of mutual support, of comradeship, of obligation to others in the regimental family. These provide the encouragement and moral strength necessary to sustain the regiment or corps through good times and bad.'¹⁹

Regimental identities, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Storr postulates, have a marked impact on the quality of troops as they foster social cohesion and resilience, qualities which are difficult to imbue in peacetime. He notes that social cohesion within a unit contributes 'markedly to operational effectiveness,' and stipulates that it can be generated in three main ways.²⁰ The first and most significant is operational experience (going into combat together), which is of course dangerous, temporary, and unpredictable. The second is through a unit enforcing a threshold to entry, which creates a perception of elitism and separateness from the rest of the army. Whilst this may create a unique identity for the elite units, no social cohesion can be attained by soldiers unable to cross the threshold. The third, and for Storr the most noteworthy, is through the creation, perpetuation, and celebration of unique identities, as he explains:

The problem, however, is not whether or not battalions can gain cohesion through operational experience. They have done so for centuries. Cohorts of the Roman Army did. The problem is whether units which do not have some form of barrier to selection can generate and sustain an appropriate level of cohesion in the long periods – sometimes several decades – between major operational deployments.²¹

The deep emotional bonds forged in regimental life can be illustrated by the many debates among service personnel in the UK when efforts are made to streamline and modernise the British Army, which over the years has led to historic regiments being amalgamated together. Lieutenant Colonel Nick Welch, who commanded The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire (RGBW) Regiment, offered this response to news that his regiment was being considered for amalgamation:

¹⁶ Ibid. p.83

¹⁷ Anon. *A Short History of 13th Hussars*. (Aldershot, 1923) p.63 Quoted in: French. *Military Identities*. p.84

¹⁸ Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin. "What is best in the regimental system?" in *The RUSI Journal*. Vol. 149, No. 5. (June 2008) p.2

¹⁹ Ibid. P.2

²⁰ Storr. "The Regimental System in the British Army." p.248

²¹ Ibid. p.254

The RGBWs do not wish to disband. Such action would destroy over 300 years of history and provide no future for those serving in the present regiment. It would also sever a long history of close links with the communities of those counties.²²

Since the end of the Second World War the British Army has undergone numerous periods of demobilisation, reform, and restructuring. The retreat from empire and pressures resulting from participation in the Cold War led to the formation of a smaller military more reliant on technology and expertise than an extensive array of infantry regiments. During this period, many of the administrative and operational functions of the Regimental System have been made redundant. In the modern British Army, the Regimental System remains but serves a mostly symbolic function, providing soldiers with a sense of belonging, continuity with the past, and an identity formed from the heritage, traditions, and name of their regiment. As Irwin argues, these features of the 'current regimental system are interlinked, all working together to foster *esprit de corps*. There is no satisfactory translation of this phrase, but it is certainly what is needed for success in battle, for perseverance on demanding operations.'²³

The use of regiments for operational, administrative, and recruitment purposes has changed significantly over the centuries, making any discussion regarding a regimental system for such functions essentially groundless. However, what is significant and unique, and what can legitimately be described as a system, are the cumulative efforts that are made to forge unique regimental identities in order to foster *esprit de corps*. French, in his excellent study of regimental identities, concludes his chapter on the regimental system by highlighting the machinations and circumstances which led to the development of the regimental system:

Regiments were culturally defined organisations that were bound together by shared historical memories, customs, and a myth of descent, not by the common ethnic or local origins of their members. They were the product of a particular set of historical circumstances, the Cardwell-Childers reforms, and of the need identified by the military authorities to find a way of instilling morale and discipline into the large number of short-service recruits that the Regular Army needed. The idea of a 'regiment' was something that was artificially constructed by the Colonels of Regiments and their senior officers. In many cases their efforts were rewarded with success.²⁴

²² Lucy Wilkins. "Why do regiments matter?" *BBC News*. (06/12/2004) Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4049875.stm (Accessed: 15/09/2017)

²³ Irwin. "What is best in the regimental system?" p.2

²⁴ French. *Military Identities*. p.98

Adaptation and Variation: The Armies of the Commonwealth

Many of Great Britain's colonies developed their own armed forces, largely under the influence or direction of the British, which became the core of their national armies following independence. Canada raised its first regular units in 1871, but it was not until 1892 when the Infantry School Corps (previously responsible for training militia) was redesignated as the Canadian Regiment of Infantry, becoming the genesis of today's Canadian Army. Canadian forces largely operated under British command until the First World War, when in 1917 Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie (a Canadian) took command of the Canadian Corps.²⁵ The modern Canadian Army organises its forces with a regimental system notably similar to the British model, and retains significant links to both the British Army and Royal Family. Three infantry regiments form the core of the Canadian Army, with each one tracing its heritage back at least as far as the First World War, and each one historically recruiting from a loosely defined district or community. The Royal Canadian Regiment, for example, bears battle honours dating back to the War of 1812, and has historically recruited from Ontario and New Brunswick in Eastern Canada.²⁶ The Royal 22^e Régiment is the largest regiment in the Canadian Army, and also holds battle honours dating back to 1812, but was only truly formed in 1914.²⁷ Following the implementation of the infamous Regulation 17 (which restricted the use of French in schools) in 1912 and the enforced primacy of English in all units of the 1st Canadian Division, the prospect of any francophone identity emerging in the Canadian Army seemed unlikely. However, following the intervention of Arthur Mignault, a French-Canadian entrepreneur who offered to pay for the training and equipment of a new French-Canadian unit, the 22nd battalion was established.²⁸ After the war, the 22nd was maintained following public and legislative pressure from Quebec, ensuring French-Canadian identity in the military could be preserved through the heritage, traditions, and language of the Royal 22^e Régiment, which became officially designated by its French name in 1928.

The application of the regimental system in the Canadian Army reflects the legacy of British influence and, unsurprisingly, is grounded in much the same rationale:

The regimental system...gives the individual soldier a sense of being part of a greater whole, of being directly linked to the sacrifices and achievements of the past, and of being a personal stakeholder affecting what transpires in the future.

Its utility and value further lies in the strong sense of comradeship it fosters among members of a regiment and in its tribal/familial nature which bonds soldiers in devotion, loyalty and selflessness to each other, contributing powerfully to unit cohesion.²⁹

²⁵ Canadian Armed Forces. *CFP – 300: Canada's Army*. (Caf, 2001) p.11

²⁶ Canadian Armed Forces. "The Royal Canadian Regiment." *Official Lineages*. (2010) Available at: <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/ol-lo/vol-tom-3/par2/RCR-eng.asp> (Accessed: 21/09/2017)

²⁷ Canadian Armed Forces. "Royal 22^e Régiment." *Official Lineages*. (2010) Available at: <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/ol-lo/vol-tom-3/par2/R22R-eng.asp> (Accessed: 21/09/2017)

²⁸ Pierre Vennat. "La fondation du 22e Bataillon (canadien-français)." in *Le Québec et les guerres mondiales*. (2012) Available at: <http://www.lequebecetlesguerres.org/la-fondation-du-22e-bataillon/> (Accessed: 21/09/2017)

²⁹ Ibid. p.21; 24

However, additional reasoning for maintaining the regimental system can be identified by the Canadian Army's interpretation of its duty to promote Canada's interests, which it sees as 'enhancing and promoting Canadian unity, identity and pride.' As a result, since 1968 it has catered to the diversity of Canada's population by operating and training in both English and French, and recruiting additional francophone units in order to give itself 'a more distinctly Canadian character.'³⁰ Additionally, whilst not formed as a regiment, the Canadian Rangers (a frontier force that operates in the Arctic Circle) largely recruits from First Nations.³¹ In this sense, the application of the regimental system in the Canadian Army allows it to (in theory at least) serve as an inclusive and reflective microcosm of wider Canadian society in a manner similar to the inclusion of Scottish, Welsh and Irish units in the British Army. Such a view is reflected in the Canadian Army's manual, *CFP-300: Canada's Army*, the prologue of which states: 'Comprising citizen volunteers from every province and territory, and operating as a bilingual force with unity of purpose and effort, the army constitutes national beliefs and ideals in actions.'³²

By far the largest army to emerge from the British Empire was the Indian Army, which since independence has continued to employ the regimental system first introduced by the British. Following the First War of Independence (historically known as the "Sepoy Mutiny") in 1857, the patchwork of recruitment and organisational methods utilised by the British in India was reformed, and a new army was built based on the regimental system. Racial identities, many of which were constructed by the British, formed the basis of the regimental system in the Indian Army and "martial races" and "warrior castes" became the foundation upon which many regiments were built, in the same manner as the Scottish Highlanders had been.³³ The Gurkhas, Rajputs, and Sikhs, Kaushik Roy argues, are examples of groups that were, to some degree, created by the British, designated as "martial," and then formed as constituencies which would provide soldiers for their respective regiments.³⁴ Following the Cardwell-Childers reforms in the British Army, the practice of allocating a designated area to a regiment for the purposes of recruitment was introduced, although many units retained a racial, religious, or caste threshold. Distinct identities were further cultivated through many of the same practices used by the British Army, such as the development of variations in heritage and 'through unique and colourful uniforms and accoutrement – hackles, lanyards, cap badges and shoulder flashes and ornate turbans that tie the recruit to centuries of martial traditions of bravery and sacrifice as a way of life.'³⁵ The 2nd Gurkha Regiment, for example, was awarded the name The Gurkha Rifles (an accolade usually reserved for British units) and had its uniform modified to resemble that of the 60th Rifles, a British unit with which it had fought particularly well in 1857.³⁶

The modern Indian Army retains many of the aspects of the colonial army, and many of its units claim heritage and battle honours dating back to the eighteenth century. Major General VK

³⁰ Canadian Armed Forces. *CFP 300: Canada's Army*. p.5; 14

³¹ Ibid. p.6

³² Ibid. p.ii

³³ Kaushik Roy. "The Construction of Regiments in the Indian Army: 1859-1913." In *War in History*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (2001) p.129

³⁴ Ibid. pp.130-139

³⁵ Major General VK Srivastava & Colonel GD Bakshi. "Infantry Regiments: The cutting edge of soldiering." in *Indian Defence Review*. (17/10/2011) Available at: <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/infantry-regiments-the-cutting-edge-of-soldiering/0/> (Accessed: 15/09/2017)

³⁶ Roy. "The Construction of Regiments in the Indian Army." p.142

Srivastava and Colonel GD Bakshi, in their discussion of the Indian regimental system, identify many of the same advantages of the system as their British counterparts:

It is the primary system of bonding for combat and creates an extended family system. It gives the recruit and young officer an identity and a deep sense of belonging. It forges bonds of camaraderie and trust that see the soldier through the stress and trauma of combat.³⁷

Srivastava and Bakshi's analysis of the advantages of the regimental system is essentially indistinguishable from the analyses given by British officers and academics, however a key additional factor is postulated. Whilst mixed units exist in the Indian Army, such as the Guards Brigade and the Parachute Regiment, most units are based on (and celebrate) ethnic and caste identities. As a result, distinctive groups such as the Jats, Sikhs, Dogras, Garhwali, Kumaoni, Bihari, Mahars, and Gorkhas possess their own regiments (some can field up to twenty battalions) within the Indian Army.³⁸ Such is the status and symbolic significance of the regiments that in 1960 a delegation from the Naga Peoples put forward a proposal for a separate regiment 'to fulfil their desire of playing a greater role in the Defence Forces of India.'³⁹ As a result of regimental ethnic representation, Srivastava and Bakshi state, 'the Indian Army is a microcosm that faithfully represents the rich and vibrant diversity of the Indian macrocosm,' and elaborate that 'this unique regimental system creates a mini ethno-universe of sorts – a cultural microcosm that faithfully replicates and preserves the cultural and ethnic background and context that the recruit comes from.'⁴⁰ Whilst the British Army does possess ethnically defined regiments, in practice their composition is mixed, and a much greater focus is placed on the heritage of the unit rather than its ethnic identity. Uniquely, the regiments in the Indian Army represent a symbol of status for those ethnic communities which are represented. In addition, regiments are viewed as institutions which replicate and preserve the cultural and ethnic identities of those who serve in them, each of which is viewed as part of the greater Indian whole. An article in the *Hindustan Times* summarises the Indian perspective of the regimental system:

Regiments provide a living example of how Indians, without abandoning their religious belief or ethnic pride can whole heartedly [sic] work together for the good of the country. It is a brotherhood in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians try to excel in their service for the good name of their Regiment, Indian Army and the Country.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ There are in fact two Sikh regiments, one composed of Jat Sikhs, and one composed of Mazbhi Sikhs. This reflects caste divisions within the community; Pradeep P. Barua. "Ethnic Conflict in the Military of Developing Nations: A Comparative Analysis of India and Nigeria." in *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1. (1992) p.132

³⁹ Srivastava & Bakshi. "Infantry Regiments: The cutting edge of soldiering."

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Anon. "Regimentation in Indian Army." *Hindustan Times*. (27/03/2006)

The Regimental System in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The history of the regimental system spans centuries and encompasses numerous regions of the world. Developments in technology and military organisation drove its evolution, whilst each army that has utilised the regimental system has adapted it to suit the particular demands of their respective states. Until 1981, all countries that have used the regimental system either inherited their armed forces from the colonial armies of the British Empire, or modelled their armies on the British Army following independence. The introduction of the U.S. Army Regimental System marked an expansion in the application of the regimental system, however the model used by U.S. forces plays a significantly lesser part in the organisation of the army and essentially serves to 'increase a soldier's probability of serving recurring assignments with his or her regiment.'⁴² It was not until 2005 when a country with limited historical, political, and military associations with the UK adopted the regimental system.

The Dayton Peace Agreement (Dayton), signed in December 1995, brought an end to a brutal conflict that had begun following BiH's bid to secede from Yugoslavia in April 1992. In addition to bringing peace, Dayton also established the structures of the new Bosnian state, divided the country into two autonomous entities, and allowed for the continued existence of the armies that had been fighting each other in the war. The presence of multiple armies not only greatly increased the chances of renewed violence, but also served to undermine the authority, legitimacy, and viability of the nascent Bosnian state. Richard Holbrooke, the chief architect of Dayton, would recall: 'The most serious flaw in the Dayton Peace Agreement was that it left two opposing armies in one country, one for the Serbs and one for the Croat-Muslim Federation.'⁴³

The two entities created by Dayton broadly reflected the territory held by each army at the end of the war. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation) has a decentralised structure, and in 2013 its population was 70 percent Bosnian Muslim and 22 percent Bosnian Croat. The other entity, Republika Srpska (RS), is more centralised and its population is 81 percent Serb.⁴⁴ Together, Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Bosnian Serbs are the "constituent peoples" of BiH, and share power through layers of devolved government and representation based on ethnicity at the state-level. Following Dayton, military power in BiH was divided between the entities, with a minimal (almost non-existent) link between the two existing through the Standing Committee on Military Matters. International observers identified 'the instability that is inherent in having two – and in practice three – armies present in one country,' but their efforts to stabilise BiH were faced with myriad obstacles.⁴⁵ However, the economic burden of maintaining multiple armies, the impact of NATO conditionality and incentives, mounting pressure from the international community, and a political scandal involving the illegal sale of weapons to Saddam Hussein, created the conditions in which a comprehensive reform programme could be initiated. Paddy Ashdown, the international community's High Representative in BiH, established a Defence Reform Commission (DRC) in 2003 and tasked it with finding solutions to the many problems in the defence sector of BiH. He announced its main aims as:

⁴² Army Regulation 600-82. *The U.S. Army Regimental System*. (Department of the Army, 1990) p.2

⁴³ Richard Holbrooke. *To End a War*. (New York, 1998) p.363

⁴⁴ Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2013. (Sarajevo, 2016)

⁴⁵ Military Issues. *Piece Implementation Council Declaration – Annex*. (PIC Main Meeting, Madrid, 16/12/1998)

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to establish transparency and proper civilian control of its armed forces, in the interests of BiH and its people, but this process will also help BiH achieve its stated desire of joining Euro-Atlantic structures, and in particular, NATO's PfP Programme.⁴⁶

The first report of the DRC focussed on replacing the post-war military *status quo* with a more conventional defence sector in BiH, and resulted in legislative and constitutional reforms, the creation of a state-level Ministry of Defence (MoD), and significant troop reductions.⁴⁷ Following the successful implementation of the commission's findings, the first joint exercise was conducted between the Army of the Federation and the Army of RS, a ceremonial Honorary Unit of the AFBiH was formed, and a second commission was established with the goal of creating 'a single defence establishment and single military force in Bosnia and Herzegovina under fully functioning state-level command and control.'⁴⁸ The report of the 2005 commission suggested a complete restructuring of the defence establishment in BiH, a process centred on the amalgamation of 'three essentially mono-ethnic brigades' (derived from the wartime armies) into a single, unified force.⁴⁹ Such a task, however, would be complicated, as the report stipulated: 'Given the constitutional provisions for the three constituent peoples [and others] within Bosnia and Herzegovina, the challenge for the creation of a single military force is how to achieve this while still preserving military heritage and identity.'⁵⁰ Furthermore, the entities were ardent that some degree of ethnic identification be retained in the new structure.⁵¹

The solution the DRC turned to was the regimental system. Inspired by the expertise of the commission, many of whom had either studied the British Army or served in a regimental system, the decision was as much a product of compromise as it was design.⁵² The intention was to maintain 'as great a proportion of integrated units as possible' and to impose a 'degree of control over the extent to which the culture of the new AFBiH would be inherited from the former entity armies,' whilst also providing a 'degree of ethnic identification.'⁵³ The report suggested that:

The infantry elements of the two components of the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Army of RS would be organised into three infantry regiments. Each infantry regiment would be comprised of three infantry battalions, and the total of nine infantry battalions would be assigned to three multi-ethnic brigades – three battalions per brigade – so that each brigade has one battalion from each regiment.⁵⁴

In practice, such a system would entail the bulk of the AFBiH being deployed in three manoeuvre brigades. Each brigade would be composed of one battalion from each regiment (One Muslim, one

⁴⁶ OHR. "High Representative Appoints Defence Reform Commission." (08/05/2003) Available at: <http://www.ohr.int/?p=48512> (Accessed: 25/09/2017)

⁴⁷ DRC. *The Path to Partnership for Peace*. (Sarajevo, 2003)

⁴⁸ MoD BiH and AFBiH. *Brochure 2015*. (Sarajevo, 2015) p.4; DRC. *AFBiH: A Single Military Force for The 21st Century*. (Sarajevo, 2005) p.1

⁴⁹ DRC. *AFBiH: A Single Military Force for The 21st Century*. p.21

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.21

⁵¹ Rohan Maxwell & John Andreas Olsen. *Destination NATO: Defence Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2003-2013*. (RUSI, 2013) p.75

⁵² Ibid. p.50

⁵³ Ibid. pp.50-51

⁵⁴ DRC. *AFBiH: A Single Military Force for The 21st Century*. p.5

Croat, one Serb), a multi-ethnic headquarters, and multi-ethnic supporting elements such as artillery.⁵⁵ The proposed system, Rohan Maxwell and John Andreas Olsen explain, was met with calls for even greater ethnic representation. They recall proposals to 'group non-infantry functions into three non-infantry regiments . . . so that each of the three constituent peoples would get one non-infantry regimental command position,' and others that called for the infantry brigades (rather than battalions) to be mono-ethnic, or for all AFBiH personnel to belong to one of the infantry regiments, regardless of their position in the military, in order to maintain ethnic identification.⁵⁶ Maxwell and Olsen argue that extending ethnic identification beyond the infantry would result in 'an AFBiH divided into three distinct ethnic groups,' whilst having no ethnic identification at all 'would destroy the regimental compromise that allowed for agreement on a single military force.'⁵⁷ 'The application of the regimental system to the infantry,' they concede, 'is the concession to ethnic identity within the AFBiH.'⁵⁸

The recommendations made by the Defence Reform Commission were implemented, and as of 1 January 2006 the AFBiH has existed as a unified and multi-ethnic army. Authority over the armed forces was transferred from entity institutions to the state-level MoD, which was accountable to the BiH Parliament and answered to the Presidency of BiH. The leadership of the AFBiH itself is provided by the Joint Staff of the AFBiH, who oversee both the Operational Command and Support Command.⁵⁹ With the exception of the infantry, units in the AFBiH are multi-ethnic and some, such as the artillery, are organised in multi-ethnic regiments.⁶⁰ The AFBiH as a whole is subject to a system of ethnic quotas based on data from the 1991 census, with the intention of ensuring ethnic representation in proportion to the pre-war population. As a result, its target composition is 45.9 percent (4,826 people) Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak, 33.6 percent (3,533 people) Serb, 19.8 percent (2,084 people) Croat, and 0.7 percent (74 people) Other.⁶¹ The 2005 DRC Report also stipulated that the three constituent peoples should be 'equally represented in each senior decision-making level' and as a result, the Minister of Defence, Chief of the Joint Staff, the Commander of Operational Command, and the Commander of Support Command 'each have two deputies whose responsibilities are defined in the law. The principal and his deputies cannot be from the same Constituent Peoples.'⁶² Thus, the overall ethnic composition of the AFBiH broadly reflects the 1991 ethnic composition of the country, and each Constituent People of BiH is represented at senior command positions. Most units in the AFBiH serve as mixed formations and are not marked by any ethnic criteria, however in the infantry battalions (which form the core of the army), ethnic identity is embraced both in the composition and aesthetic of units through the regimental system.

In the regimental system used in BiH, the regiments themselves were intended to be of relatively minor significance, as the updated Law on Defence of BiH stated: 'There are three infantry regiments, which are the organisations responsible for the military heritage and identity of the units and peoples from which they are descended. They have no operational or administrative

⁵⁵ Maxwell & Olsen. *Destination NATO*. p.76

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.76

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp.76-77

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.75

⁵⁹ MoD BiH and AFBiH. *Brochure 2015*. p.21

⁶⁰ Maxwell & Olsen. *Destination NATO*. p.75

⁶¹ MoD BiH and AFBiH. *Brochure 2015*. pp.23-24

⁶² DRC. *AFBiH: A Single Military Force for The 21st Century*. p.9

authority.’⁶³ However, significant value has been placed on the regiments since their formation, as each can trace its lineage back to one of the armies which participated in the 1992-1995 War. Thus, the 1. *Pješadijski gardijski puk* (1st Infantry Guards Regiment) possesses a name associated with the Croatian military, and is the successor of the *Hrvatsko vijeće obrane* (Croatian Defence Council; HVO), the predominantly Croat wartime army. The 2. *Pješadijski rendžerski puk* (2nd Infantry Rangers Regiment) is the descendent of the *Armija republike bih* (Army of the Republic of BiH; ARBiH), the predominantly Bosnian Muslim wartime army, and finally, the 3. *Pješadijski republika srpska puk* (3rd Infantry RS Regiment) is named after the Serb entity in BiH and celebrates the heritage of the *Vojska Republike Srpske* (Army of RS; VRS), the predominantly Serb wartime army which became an entity army in its own right following Dayton.

The regiments display variations in uniform, with each one possessing a unique regimental insignia. The Guards Regiment wears the Croatian *šahovnica* (Checkerboard), the Rangers Regiment sports the *Zlatni ljiljan* (Golden Lily), a symbol associated with the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia, and the RS Regiment bears the official coat of arms of the RS, which contains much of the same imagery as the coat of arms of Serbia. Whilst such variations in appearance are common to the regimental system and are usually encouraged by its proponents, the coats of arms utilised by both the Guards Regiment and RS Regiment to indicate their unique identities bear a striking resemblance to those of foreign states. The use of imagery associated with other states not only raises obvious questions regarding the loyalty of the units, but, through subscribing to an existing identity, the individual regimental identities that should be being fostered are undermined. The Royal Irish Regiment of the British Army has perhaps the most in common with the Guards and RS Regiments of the AFBiH, as it historically draws its soldiers from a population who may primarily identify with a neighbouring country, Ireland. However, rather than drawing on imagery from the Irish State, the Royal Irish wear a clover leaf as their insignia, use a motto in the Irish language (*Faugh a Ballagh*; Modern Irish: *Fág an Bealach*; English: Clear the way), and their colours depict a crown, symbolising loyalty to the British monarchy, and a harp, an established cultural symbol of the Irish. As a result, the regiment’s Irish identity is clearly displayed, yet it remains clear to what the regiment owes its loyalty (the British Crown), and furthermore, the regimental identity is free to develop without the influence of a foreign state. In a similar manner, the Royal 22^e Régiment of the Canadian Army displays its Francophone legacy through the use of the French language rather than imagery from France itself, successfully preserving its cultural heritage without styling itself as inherently “French”.

Alongside the preservation of regimental heritage, one of the key roles envisioned for the regiments of the AFBiH was fulfilling a range of ceremonial duties, as the 2005 DRC Report states: ‘The armed force’s nine infantry battalions will be grouped for ceremonial and military heritage purposes into three regiments of three battalions each, within which military heritage and identity will be preserved.’⁶⁴ The ceremonial duties of each regiment are fulfilled by a regimental major and a small staff based at the regimental headquarters. Their tasks include the management of the regimental museum, control of the regimental fund (for ceremonial purposes, e.g. purchasing sports trophies),

⁶³ Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. “Law on Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Official Gazette of BiH*, 88/05. (28/09/2005) p.1

⁶⁴ DRC. AFBiH: *A Single Military Force for The 21st Century*. p.25

preparation, research and maintenance of regimental history, and the planning of ceremonial events.⁶⁵

Each regiment in the AFBiH partakes in numerous ceremonies and commemorative events every year, one of the most significant being the anniversary of the founding of the AFBiH itself. The Day of the Armed Forces of BiH is celebrated on the 1 December, and brings representatives from the AFBiH together with political representatives of all constituent peoples of BiH.⁶⁶ Such an occasion, however, is the exception. Regimental anniversaries, for example, are celebrated on the day on which their respective predecessor army was founded. The Guards Regiment celebrates its regimental anniversary on 6 April, the day the HVO was founded, and the Rangers Regiment celebrates its formation on the 14 April, the day the ARBiH was established.⁶⁷ The RSR Regiment organises and takes part in a host of celebrations throughout the year, with 12 May, the day the VRS was formed, being celebrated as the anniversary of the founding of the regiment. In addition, the regiment marks 27 May as the day the Air and Air Defence Force of the VRS was created, 9 June is remembered as the day the First and Second Krajina Corps of the VRS were established, and for *Vidovdan* (St. Vitus' Day; 28 June), each of its three battalions hosts events commemorating the Battle of Kosovo Polje.⁶⁸ Fulfilling ceremonial duties such as these are one of the key functions of regiments within a regimental system, however in BiH most of the ceremonies attended by regimental personnel are of a significantly different character than those attended by their counterparts from other armies. In the British Army, for example, perhaps the most significant ceremonies are Remembrance Sunday, when fallen soldiers are remembered, and Trooping the Colour, which celebrates the official birthday of the British sovereign. The ceremonies are inclusive of all elements of the army, and focus on shared sacrifices, strength, and the Monarchy. There are no ceremonial functions performed exclusively by one ethnicity within the British Army, religious holidays are not marked, and no units commemorate any previous armies they may have been part of. The unconventional use of the ceremonial function of the regiments of the AFBiH does little to foster regimental identity or strengthen the cohesion of the AFBiH, and instead serves to entrench ethnic exclusivity and perpetuate division.

These divisions almost reached crisis point on 9 January 2017, when a parade celebrating a controversial public holiday marking the establishment of RS was held. The holiday had been banned by BiH's Constitutional Court as it discriminated against non-Serbs in RS, a result of it being held on St. Stephen's Day, a Serbian Orthodox religious holiday. The President of RS, Milorad Dodik, had called for the inclusion of the RS Regiment prior to the event, and had warned that 'if the Third Infantry Regiment does not participate in the parade, we will consider that the Bosnian Armed

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.26

⁶⁶ Anon. "10. Godišnjica i dan oružanih snaga Bosne i Hercegovine." *Bilten, broj 13*. (February 2016) p.2

⁶⁷ Anon. "Obilježavanje 12. godišnjice osnivanja 1. Pješadijskog (gardijskog) puka OS BiH i 25. Godišnjice osnivanja Hrvatskog vijeće odbrane." *Vijesti*. (MoD BiH, 10/04/2017); Anon. "Svečano obilježena 25. godišnjica formiranja Armije RBiH i 12. godišnjica 2. pješadijskog (rendžerskog) puka OS BiH." *Vijesti*. (MoD BiH, 14/04/2017)

⁶⁸ Anon. "Svečano obilježen 12. maj – Dan Vojske Republike Srpske i 3. Pješadijskog (Republika Srpska) Puka." *Vijesti*. (MoD BiH, 15/05/2017); Anon. "Na Ravnoj Romaniji proslavljen Vidovdan krsna slava Vojske Republike Srpske i pješadijskog (Republika Srpska) puka." *Vijesti*. (MoD BiH, 13/07/2017); Anon. "Obilježen Dan Prvog i Drugog krajiškog korpusa VRS." *Vijesti*. (MoD BiH, 09/06/2017); Anon. "Dostojanstveno obilježen 27. maj Dan ratnog zrakoplovstva i protivzračne odbrane Vojske Republike Srpske." *Vijesti*. (MoD BiH, 27/05/2017)

Forces are hostile to RS.’⁶⁹ The eventual inclusion of a detachment of soldiers from the RS Regiment in the celebrations, despite explicit orders against doing so from the Ministry of Defence and a warning from NATO command in BiH, led to serious questions being raised regarding the chain of command and the loyalty of soldiers to the AFBiH. In most regimental systems, ceremonies, parades, and commemorative events serve as an opportunity to forge bonds between elements of the armed forces, and between a society and its military. In BiH the case is essentially reversed, as the regiments are used to legitimise ceremonies and events which are ethnically exclusive and focus on perpetuating divisions both within the AFBiH and in wider society. Kurt Bassuener, a veteran analyst of the region, notes that ‘the lines between regimental events and commemorations undertaken by AFBiH personnel acting in their personal capacity can often be confusing.’⁷⁰ He adds that ‘regimental functions – involving serving AFBiH personnel – can create ample opportunities for misperception, appearing to blur the lines between ethnically polarized commemorations of wartime experience and the needs of a unified state-level force.’⁷¹

⁶⁹ Eleanor Rose. “Bosnian Troops Face Probe over Serb Celebration.” *Balkan Insight*. (190/01/2017) Available at: <https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/investigation-promised-into-army-participation-in-banned-holiday-01-10-2017>

⁷⁰ Kurt Bassuener. “The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Unfulfilled Promise.” *Democratization Policy Council*. (Atlantic Initiative & Democratization Policy Council, 2015) p.9

⁷¹ Ibid. P.9

Underlying Problems and Potential Solutions

The rationale for employing a regimental system in the AFBiH echoes the sentiments purported by most advocates of the system:

Regiments ... provide the basis for *esprit de corps*, morale and unit cohesion by preserving and developing military heritage and identity. They are “living” [sic] institutions that incorporate new traditions through recent experience into existing traditions carried forward from ancestor units.⁷²

The extent to which such ambitions have been realised in BiH is debatable. There is consensus between many military personnel and academics from numerous countries that the regimental system can provide extensive benefits to those armies which employ it, however whether or not *esprit de corps* is actually improved is impossible to quantify. Whilst the regiments within the AFBiH themselves may experience the advantages resulting from being organised in such a way, the manner in which the regimental system has been put into practice has a significant negative impact on the cohesion of the AFBiH as a whole. Attempts to foster regimental identity have been entirely based on ethnic identity and the heritage of the largely mono-ethnic armies which, it should not be forgotten, were formed in order to fight each other. As a result, the regiments have become bulwarks of ethnic segregation, and vehicles for the perpetuation of division. Interviews held by Bassuener illustrate the process, with one interviewee stating that recruits are ‘well-trained and choose their units. Then the ethnic pressure starts,’ and another postulating that ‘the problem is that they are under pressure to wear the ethnic badges. Infantry commanders are squeezed all the time to do ethnic regimental functions by politicians and veterans’ organisations.’⁷³ Furthermore, the ethnicisation of the regiments raises severe questions of loyalty for the personnel of the AFBiH, as ethnic elites will be able to exert significant influence upon them as long as they are defined by ethnicity, as illustrated by the events in Banja Luka in January 2017.

The application of the regimental system in BiH has led to the strengthening of separate ethnic identities, and the use of regimental personnel in commemorations lauding the sacrifices and glories of the 1992-1995 War not only legitimises ethnic exclusivity, but prevents the AFBiH developing an identity of its own. One observer interviewed by Bassuener commented that ‘no other army has segregation like this one.’⁷⁴ The regimental system was intended to offer the AFBiH a way in which it could organise itself in a modern, NATO-compatible way, whilst still retaining some element of ethnic identity. It represented an imaginative compromise between international actors who wished to create the most professional and stable military possible, and those who wished to preserve ethnic identity within the institutions of the state. Lessons from the experience of the British and Commonwealth Armies in reconciling different identities provided a practical foundation from which a unified army could be built, however in practice the regiments have impeded this process. The regimental system in BiH as it currently operates offers no military benefits, threatens the cohesion of the army, perpetuates ethnic division, and is ultimately unsustainable.

Three options can be identified which have the potential to rectify the current failings of the regimental system. The first would be the abolishment of the system itself. In this case, the

⁷² DRC. *AFBiH: A Single Military Force for The 21st Century*. Pp.12-13

⁷³ Bassuener. “The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Unfulfilled Promise.” pp.8-9

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.7

regimental aspect of the AFBiH, which employs a maximum of thirty personnel and has no administrative or operational power, would simply be removed. This would leave the same battalions and brigades as before, but would free them of their ethnic affiliations and the pressures and obligations that come with them. The second option would be to redefine the regiments, perhaps giving them geographical designations rather than ethnic ones. In such a system, for example, the Herzegovina Regiment would draw troops from places such as Konjic, Trebinje, and Čapljina (encompassing all three constituent peoples), and could forge a unique identity using the symbols and heritage of the region as a whole. The third option would be to stimulate a complete reinterpretation of the current system as it is. In this case, the regiments could remain defined by ethnicity, but clear boundaries would need to be set regarding the appropriateness of their use in ceremonial events. The focus of their regimental activities would be directed away from commemorating the 1992-1995 War and the armies that fought them, and could be moved towards ceremonies which commemorate all of those lost, display the strength of the state, or contribute to its sovereignty and integrity (which is, ultimately, the job of an army). If properly implemented, a change such as this would allow the AFBiH to serve as “colourful ethno-verse,” a “microcosm that faithfully represents the rich and vibrant diversity” of the Bosnian macrocosm, in much the same way as the Indian Army. Each ethnicity would be represented by its regiment and the AFBiH would reflect the society of BiH, as it currently does, but regimental functions would be focussed on strengthening the state and improving the cohesion and combat-effectiveness of the AFBiH.

The regimental system in BiH represents a compromise made in order to achieve some degree of military integration, perhaps the most significant step thus far in consolidating the state and stabilising the region. Whilst applying it in BiH allowed for the creation of a unified military, in its current form the regimental system prevents a cohesive armed force from being created, provides ethnic elites with a degree of legitimacy at divisive ceremonial events, and threatens to destabilise the AFBiH. A range of options are available to improve the situation, however the necessity of domestic political consensus, support from neighbouring states, and the guidance of the international community make any such changes an unlikely prospect.

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