

Various key persons at the Ministry of the Interior played an important role in the formation of the Patriotic League, including Minister Delimustafic, Deputy Interior Minister Jusuf Pusina, Assistant Interior Minister Avdo Hebib, and head of internal state security Bakir Alispahic. In the early months of 1991, Bosnian Interior Minister Delimustafic began buying Kalashnikovs and munitions for the League in Vienna.[32] Avdo Hebib was the chief contact between the Ministry and the League. On 10 April 1991, Hebib was arrested with a few assistants when they rode into Sarajevo with three trucks full of weapons. The military prosecutor of Sarajevo threatened to prosecute him[33], after which the directors of the Ministry of the Interior kept a lower profile.

It was Halid ('Hadzija') Cengic, the father of Hasan and Muhamed who had the biggest hand in organizing the arms.[34] In that respect, he had good contacts with Iran, as did his son Hasan. The Cengic family had made a name for themselves in the weapons trade. As Deputy Prime Minister, Cengic signed a contract for military collaboration with Turkey in March 1992, under the pretence of ensuring that Turkey would purchase arms from Bosnian weapon manufacturers who could no longer supply the Yugoslav army.[35] Given the position of the Cengic family and the interests of the Bosnian Muslims, it would seem obvious to assume that the Turkish-Bosnian weapon transport was, in actual fact, going in the other direction. From late 1991 to early 1992, Hebib created a secret police to back Izetbegovic.[36]

From 7 to 9 February 1992, the regional commanders of the Patriotic League met in secret in Mehurici, a village near Travnik. Each commander was accompanied by two other men. Also present at the meeting were the General Staff and Hasan Cengic. Each co-ordinator reported how many men and weapons he had under his charge. It seems to have been established at this point that the Patriotic League had at its disposal 60,000 to 70,000 men under arms[37], which is probably a slight exaggeration. Halilovic and Karisik reported separately that, in the spring of 1992, the League had 120,000 members, thirty per cent of whom bore arms. That would amount to about 36,000 armed men, which corresponds to the number of between 35,000 and 40,000 mentioned by Izetbegovic.[38]

On 25 February, the SDA top approved Halilovic's Bosnian defence plan. The basis of this plan was that the Patriotic League would defend the lives of the Muslims and the integrity of a multi-ethnic Bosnia against the JNA, SDS and 'extremist wing' of the HDZ. The League would collaborate as far as possible with the Croats.[39] According to the handbook, the League would liberate all Bosnia within 67 days. That was a statement intended mainly to boost morale. The military command of the League actually surmised that it would need at least two to three years. Nonetheless, with that supposition, too, those who had drafted the plan were still too optimistic. They assumed that war in Bosnia would coincide with a conflict in Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandzak. They had also sent various persons to those regions to act as co-ordinators. Since, at that stage, things remained quiet, the JNA and Serb paramilitary groups could focus without restraint on Bosnia.

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[1] The difference between *demokratija* and *demokracija*.

[2] Burg & Shoup, *War*, pp. 53-55.

[3] Doder & Branson, *Milosevic*, p. 91; Bougarel, *Bosnie*, p. 56.

[4] Cf. Duijzings, *Geschiedenis en herinnering in Oost-Bosnië*, on the exclusive character of the SDA who refers to the repeated refusal of the SDA in Srebrenica to admit a Serb woman.

[5] Doder & Branson, *Milosevic*, p. 92; Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p. 219.

[6] Cohen, *Hearts*, p. 186; interview R. Dukic, 14/06/00.

[7] Mahmutcehajic, *Bosnia*, p. 30.

[8] Izetbegovic, *Govori*, passim.

[9] Silber & Little, *Death*, p. 213.

[10] Jovic, *Dani*, pp. 273-274.

[11] Jovic, *Dani*, p. 152.

[12] Jovic, *Dani*, pp. 176-177.

[13] This information from Jovic's diary refutes arguments that Milosevic long entertained the hope of holding on to the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina for a rump state of Yugoslavia, after Slovenia and Croatia had left. Cf. for those views Kadijevic, *View*, p. 159; Pedrag Simic, quoted in: Levinsohn, *Belgrade*, p. 161.

- [14] Jovic, *Dani*, pp. 273-274; Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 150.
- [15] Borba, 14/05/91, quoted in X. Bougarel, 'Bosnia and Hercegovina - State and Communitarianism', Dyker & Vejvoda (ed.), *Yugoslavia*, p. 100. See also Bougarel, *Bosnie*, p. 50.
- [16] 'US Secretary of State in Yugoslavia', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 27/06/91. A few days later Raymond van den Boogaard wrote that Bosnia-Hercegovina itself feared that it would become the largest battlefield if the Yugoslav crisis were to degenerate into a civil war, 'Angst voor provocaties Servië' (Fear of Serb provocations), *NRC Handelsblad*, 24/06/91.
- [17] General Aleksander Vasiljevic, head of the KOS, to Izetbegovic, on the outbreak of war in Bosnia, Mahmutcehajic, *War*, p. 21.
- [18] Donia & Fine, *Bosnia*, p. 228.
- [19] Izetbegovic, *Govori*, pp. 6 and 53. Cf. Mahmutcehajic, *War*, p. 13; Marko Attila Hoare, 'Civilian-Military Relations in Bosnia-Hercegovina 1992-1995', Magas & Zanic (eds.), *War*, p. 181.
- [20] Mahmutcehajic, *War*, pp. 14-15.
- [21] For more information on the Zelene Beretke, see Vildana Selimbegovic, 'Evrin Svrakic, Zelena Beretka: Mismo poceli, Atif završio', *Dani*, January 1996, pp. 46-49.
- [22] Izetbegovic, *Govori*, p. 90.
- [23] Hannes Hofbauer, 'Neue Staaten, neue Kriege. Die Zerstörung Jugoslawiens (1991-1999)', idem (Hg.), *Balkankrieg*, p. 85.
- [24] Mahmutcehajic, *War*, p. 19; Marko Attila Hoare, 'Civilian-Military Relations in Bosnia-Hercegovina 1992-1995', Magas & Zanic (eds.), *War*, p. 181. Ibidem, p. 260.
- [25] Bougarel, *Bosnie*, p. 111; Mahmutcehajic, *Bosnia*, pp. 98; Mahmutcehajic, *War*, p. 20. The following information about the Patriotic League is based mainly on serial instalments by Sefko Hodzic, 'Meho Karasik Kemo – Tajne Patriotske Lige', *Oslobodenje*, 09 to 17/01/99 and 'Kako je nastajala Bosnië-Hercegovina. armija', *Oslobodenje*, 15/04 to 10/05/1997.
- [26] Halilovic, *Strategija*, pp. 55-56.
- [27] Wijnaendts, for instance, thought that Izetbegovic was not making any military preparations, interview H. Wijnaendts, 08/06/00.
- [28] Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 43.
- [29] Appendix, Duijzings, *Geschiedenis en herinnering in Oost-Bosnië*.
- [30] Meho Karasik quoted in Sefko Hodzic, 'Meho Karasik Kemo – Tajne Patriotske Lige (6)', *Oslobodenje*, 14/01/99.
- [31] Medina Delalic, 'SDA Strategy: Low Blows', *Slobodna Bosna*, 20/04/00; Obrad Kesic, 'Defeating 'Greater Serbia', Building Greater Milosevic', Danopoulos & Messas (eds.), *Crises*, p. 62.
- [32] Interview B. Spasic, 16/09/01.
- [33] Yugoslav Press Agency, 'Sarajevo military prosecutor charges Assistant Interior Minister with spying', 1436, 08/06/91, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 12/06/91.
- [34] Tino Andic & Marko Juric, 'Muslimanska obavestajna sluzba djeluje pod krinkom humanitarnih rijeci, a bavi se nabavom oruzja', *Globus*, 11/10/96.
- [35] Moore, *Relations*, p. 9.
- [36] Interview B. Spasic, 16/09/01.
- [37] Marijan, *War*, pp. 160-161.
- [38] Burg & Shoup, *War*, p. 74. Incidentally, he called them the Green Berets, a term that was increasingly being used in the Bosnian forces in the making. In January 1992, the Serb leadership was said to have had access to information showing that the League had 96,000 armed men at its disposal. Interview D. Cosic, 13/09/01.
- [39] Marijan, *War*, p. 161.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

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Recognition of Croatia and Slovenia and the significance of that for Bosnia

7. The consequences of the war in Croatia for Bosnia

Milan Martić's remarks of early June 1991 about the disappearance of the frontiers between Bosnia and Croatia had accelerated the Bosnian Muslims' military preparations. A few weeks later, when Croatia and Slovenia declared independence, threats regarding the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina grew. Verbally, Serbs and Croats went for each other's throats. On the eve of the declaration of Croatia's independence, the Croatian Serbs announced that on 28 June they wanted to align their autonomous regions with Serb-dominated areas in Bosnia.[1] On 27 June, a day earlier than announced, the union of the Bosnian and Croatian Krajinas was proclaimed in Bosansko Grahovo. In a declaration adopted at the time, it was said that the union of all Serbs was imperative. A day later, the SDS warned that a peaceful division of Bosnia was out of the question.[2]

President Tudjman said in his declaration of independence to the Croatian Parliament that Croatia would respect all internal Yugoslav borders 'and those of Bosnia in particular'. Should Serbia aspire to a Greater Serbia, however, it would then raise the matter of the Croats in Bosnia. It was one of the three moments in his long speech that Tudjman had to pause for applause from the Croatian delegates.[3] Early in July 1991, the leader of the HDZ in Bosnia Stjepan Ključić, warned that if Croatia were to actively devolve from Yugoslavia, the Croats would not want to remain in a Bosnia that was still part of it.[4]

Once war had broken out in Croatia, this soon had even more consequences for Bosnia. Not only did the war fuel the memories of the Second World War, but it showed each day what the various population groups could do to one another. As early as the beginning of July, Serbs started fleeing from Croatia to Bosnia. Conversely, Serbs, Croats and Muslims went from Bosnia to Croatia to join the war.[5] Early in December 1991, there were a total of approximately 10,000 Bosnians fighting in Croatia.[6] 'No Vukovars here', boards along the roads in Bosnia announced towards the end of 1991, [7] referring to the struggle between Serbs and Croats for this town. A total of 100,000 people protested in Sarajevo on 12 November against the war in Yugoslavia, but it was illusory to think that the Croatian war would not also leave its mark on Bosnia.[8]

From September 1991, JNA units used Bosnia as an operating base for attacks on Croatia. That was initially the case in Bosanska Krajina, from where attacks on West Slavonia were launched. Croats and Muslims blocked the passage of JNA troops on their way to Croatia at various points. When Croatian and Muslim citizens attempted to stop a column of armoured cars on the road to Vukovar in September 1991 near Visegrad in Eastern Bosnia, the latter opened fire.[9] Moreover, units under the command of General Nikola Uzelac of the Banja Luka Corps of the JNA started bombarding Croatian cities and villages from Bosnian territory.[10] Tudjman then tried to convince Izetbegović to launch Bosnian territorial defence against the JNA, so that the federal army would become implicated in a war on two fronts.[11]

Apart from the Bosnian Krajina, JNA units were also active in the area of Eastern Herzegovina.

This took place in the light of the war in Croatia, in this case, the attacks on Dubrovnik and Prevlaka. On 20 September 1991, units of the Uzice and Podgorica Corps of the JNA fanned out in Central and Eastern Bosnia, where, they maintained, the Mostar airport was in danger.[12] In their wake, 3,000 Montenegrin reservists appeared in Mostar, who stirred up a lot of trouble with their undisciplined and trigger-happy behaviour. Their actions elicited reactions from armed Muslims on the spot, who set up barricades against the JNA.[13] In October, the village of Ravno near Trebinje – where Croats lived – was razed to the ground by the JNA and other volunteer units, in addition to ten or so other villages.[14] Elsewhere in Bosnia, the presence of irregular troops, who were on their way to or from the front in Croatia, caused great trouble, firing at mosques, for instance[15], or inciting and provoking the local population *en route*, as was the case in Foca, Bijeljina and Visegrad.[16]

The arrival of the Uzice and Podgorica Corps of the JNA on Bosnian territory induced the government in Sarajevo to mobilize territorial defences, all the more since the JNA was not only deployed to fight the war in Croatia, but was also starting to 'protect' Serb areas in Bosnia. The atmosphere of tension grew when the Bosnian government refused to co-operate in calling up Bosnian youth to fight for the JNA in Croatia. On 21 September, Izetbegovic demanded that all JNA troops, who had recently entered Bosnia-Herzegovina, make an about-turn and go back where they came from. [17] Milosevic promised to withdraw certain JNA units, if Izetbegovic were to disband the Islamic paramilitary groups. In the end, neither took place.[18] An agreement was made however, in which the Bosnian government promised to make sure that the JNA could move through Bosnia unhindered, while the JNA agreed to refrain from every kind of ethnic provocation.[19] In October, Izetbegovic declared Bosnia's neutrality in the conflict between Croats and Serbs. 'It is not our war', said the Bosnian President.[20]

Where the polls in Bosnia had until mid-1991 shown a majority of 80 to 90 per cent in favour of retaining a federative Yugoslavia, there was now a change of heart.[21] The feeling that one's own safety could be threatened by other groups intensified this. A survey in November 1991 revealed that almost 60 per cent of the Muslims and 70 per cent of the Croats thought that the Serbs had too much influence in Bosnia. Conversely, 52 per cent of the Serbs were of the opinion that Croats and 44 per cent that Muslims had too much say.[22] The fact that the map of Bosnia-Herzegovina was an ethnic patchwork, without the comparatively clear dividing lines as in Croatia, did nothing to alleviate that feeling of being threatened. On the contrary, the closer 'the others' got, the greater the perceived danger and the stronger the need to get rid of 'the others' before they struck. Visits to pubs took place more and more along ethnic lines and there were regular fights among Serb and Muslim pub-goers.[23]

Ethnic relations came under additional pressure because the war in Croatia also had economic consequences for Bosnia. In the autumn of 1991, Croatia forbade the export of foodstuffs to Bosnia, the first motive being to keep these products for its own market, but also because it wanted to prevent Bosnia from 're-exporting' them to Serbia. In the early part of 1992, Serbia took a similar step, intended also as punishment for Bosnia's neutrality. 30 per cent of the Bosnian working force was out of work in February 1992, a quarter had earnings of no more than DEM 50 per month.[24]

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[1] Blaine Harden, 'Yugoslav Regions Assert Independence', *The Washington Post*, 26/06/91.

[2] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 152.

[3] 'President Tudjman's speech proclaiming the independence of Croatia', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 27/06/91.

[4] 'Other reports on Bosnia-Herzegovina', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 11/07/91.

[5] Cf. Gajic Glisic, *Vojaska*, p. 116; Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 286; Marijan, *War*, p. 158.

[6] Burg & Shoup, *War*, p. 428 n. 100.

[7] Bell, *Way*, p. 33.

[8] Bell, *Way*, p. 33.

[9] Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p. 228.

[10] 'Stipe Mesic orders JNA to withdraw to barracks', *Croatian radio*, 11/09/91, 15:00, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 13/09/91.

[11] Kumar, *Divide*, p. 47.

[12] Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 166.

- [13] Wilbur G. Landrey, 'In Yugoslav breakup, there is plenty of blame to go around', *St. Petersburg Times*, 27/09/91; Mahmutcehajic, *Bosnia*, pp. 41-42 and 82-84; Th. Engelen & R. van de Boogaard, 'Groot offensief van leger Joegoslavië' (Yugoslav army launches full-scale offensive), *NRC Handelsblad*, 21/09/91.
- [14] Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 167 and 186.
- [15] Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 167.
- [16] Woodward, *Tragedy*, p. 276.
- [17] 'Izetbegovic message to Igalo signatories wants troop columns out of republic', *Tanjug*, 21/09/91, 17:15, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 23/09/91.
- [18] Sremac, *War*, p. 84.
- [19] 'Agreement reached between government and army in Bosnia-Hercegovina', *Radio Sarajevo*, 2000, 25/09/91, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 27/09/91; 'Other reports on Bosnia-Hercegovina', *Radio Sarajevo*, 1700, 28/09/91, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 03/10/91.
- [20] Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p. 228.
- [21] Calic, *Krieg*, pp. 87-88.
- [22] Calic, *Krieg*, p. 80.
- [23] Cohen, *Hearts*, p. 195.
- [24] Calic, *Krieg*, p.65.

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Part I

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8. Serb preparations for war

Meanwhile, in consultation with political and military leaders in Belgrade, the Bosnian Serbs were also preparing for war. A day after the Karadjordjevo meeting, at which Milosevic and Tudjman had, in principle, agreed to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina, Seselj left for Bosnia to meet Karadzic 'to proclaim the uprising' there.[1] In other words, Seselj was already active in Bosnia before he made a move in Croatia with his paramilitary troops.

In June 1991, the JNA confiscated weapons from the territorial defence in Bosnia, as it had done earlier in Croatia and Slovenia, fearing that these weapons would be used for an independence struggle.[2] This appropriation was not successful everywhere. Whilst the JNA was impounding weapons in areas in which the Bosnian Muslims were in the majority, they began distributing them to Bosnian Serbs. To avoid the impression that the JNA was only disarming the territorial defence in Croatian and Muslim communities, the federal army even confiscated weapons in Serb localities only to distribute them in secret to Serbs in other places later on.[3]

By Mid-1991, the SDS in Bosnia-Herzegovina placed a summons that the JNA make weapons available to all Serbs of fighting age.[4] The Serb sections of the Bosnian territorial defence and 'voluntary units' were to be brought together under the command of the JNA. Conscientious objectors would be regarded as traitors and punished.[5] As in Krajina before, the first to be terrorized were moderate elements in the movement's own ranks.[6]

From May 1991, the Bosnian authorities stopped weapon transports meant for Serb (para) militaries.[7] In September 1991, the Serb Minister of Information in the Bosnian government, Velibor Ostojic was prepared to admit to the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* correspondent Nicole Lucas that although the Bosnian Serbs were heavily armed, so were the other parties. He believed that the fact that all parties had organized themselves and procured arms was, in a way, advantageous. This, he thought, created a 'balance of fear'.[8]

As from the end of May, Milosevic phoned Karadzic regularly.[9] The reports were tapped by the Federal Secret Service and the transcripts handed to Prime Minister Markovic. In August 1991, Milosevic referred Karadzic for initial assistance to JNA General Nikola Uzelac, the commander of the Banja Luka Corps, in charge of arming the Serbs in Bosnia. However, if he so wished, Karadzic could always go directly to the Serb President himself.[10]

In September 1991, Prime Minister Markovic disclosed the transcript of a conversation in which Milosevic instructed Karadzic to contact General Uzelac, who was in charge of carrying out the 'RAM' or outline plan of the JNA General Staff.[11] Most authors believe that this plan dates from shortly before the telephone conversation in question. One of the co-founders of the Bosnian SDS, Vladimir Srebrov, believed that the plan dated from as early as the 1980s[12], though this seems unlikely given both the contents and the names and ranks of the signatories.

According to Defence Minister Kadijevic, whilst planning the war in Croatia, the JNA had decided to take full control of Bosnia-Herzegovina with the aim of looking after Serb interests there, should that become necessary, because the role of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina 'would be instrumental for the future of the Greater Serb nation'.^[13] When that was seen as aiming too high, the JNA confined itself to focusing on Serb areas in Bosnia. Protection of Serb residents there was not the only reason why the army command did that. Firstly, Bosnia was an important recruitment area – during the mobilization for the Croatian war, the Bosnian Serbs had caused the fewest problems.^[14] Secondly, a strong presence of the JNA in Bosnia was important to be able to station rapidly deployable forces who could, if necessary, be sent to Serb areas in Croatia.^[15] The realization of the RAM plan should be seen in that context.

According to Italian journalists, who it seems had insight into it – incidentally, it was only two pages long, said Srebrov – the document was drawn up by General Adzic, Major General Gvero, Major General Cedo Knezevic, Lieutenant-Colonel Radenko Radinovic and General Aleksander Vasiljevic.^[16] This plan of the JNA General Staff was based on a Greater Serbia at the expense of Croatia and Bosnia. The JNA set itself the target of creating a Greater Serbia, in collaboration with paramilitary groups from Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The plan focused on provoking interethnic conflicts, followed by the occupation of strategic points by the JNA. To this end, the plan counted on the support of Bosnian-Serb militias. According to Srebrov, the plan was aimed at a kind of 'Endlösung' of the Muslims in Bosnia, comparable to the treatment the Serbs underwent at the hands of the Ustashe during the Second World War: half would be killed, some converted to orthodoxy and a smaller number – those who could pay – would be 'allowed' to leave to Turkey.^[17]

Whether the plan did indeed go that far is questionable. It seemed more likely to have been a plan for the process of ethnic cleansing, the aim of which was primarily to chase Muslims out of the area the Serbs had set their sights on. According to the plan, psychological warfare would play a significant part. Attacks on their religious and social structures would undermine Muslim morale, which would lead to panic, thus putting the Muslims to rout. The Slovenian newspaper *Delo* surmised that this plan had been flanked by another one aimed at breaking the morale of the Muslim population by executing Muslim men and raping Muslim women as soon as war broke out.^[18] The state security and counter-intelligence service of the JNA, KOS, was also given an important role. The SDS top seemed to regard the KOS as the principal agents of its share in the plan.^[19]

The SDS leaders such as Karadzic, Krajisnik, Plavsic, the future Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republika Srpska, Aleksa Buha, the future Minister of Information of the republic, Miroslav Toholj and the Bosnian Memorandum ideologist, Milorad Ekmečić, were among the first to receive weapons in June 1991.^[20] According to Jovan Divjak, a Serb, who after the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina would go on leading the territorial defence of Sarajevo, in the summer of 1991, 8,000 automatic weapons were handed out to local Serb militia in the Drvar region alone.^[21]

In the same period, the first reports were published of attacks in Bosnia by Cetniks from Serbia and large-scale issuing of arms to local Serb militia by the JNA.^[22] Towards the end of the summer of 1991, the shelling of Muslim targets in Eastern Bosnia from the Serb side of the Drina began.

A compromise still possible?

In the year prior to the outbreak of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was undoubtedly the SDS, Karadzic's party – with the Belgrade leadership in the background – that was making preparations for military actions with a view to safeguarding the autonomy of at least those areas in Bosnia referred to as Serb. The Bosnian Muslims secretly tried to set up a defence with whatever means they had at their disposal.

Yet it goes too far to say that there were no more openings left to avert a war. In the course of the year preceding the war, there were a number of situations in which a compromise might have been possible. Of what subsequent value they would have been, we shall never know. The root lies in Izetbegovic's and the SDA leadership's behaviour. Each time a compromise was within reach or even

carried out in essence, it was always Izetbegovic who backed out. The description below of the discussions in Split between Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic on the division of Bosnia-Hercegovina, and the account of the attempts by Adil Zulfikarpasic to reach a settlement between Muslims and Serbs will uphold this. Later on in this section, this will also be shown to have been the case at other times, particularly the first months of 1992.

From the moment Milosevic and Tudjman in Karadjorjevo had, in theory, reached a settlement on the partitioning of Bosnia-Hercegovina, there were rumours about further discussions. Two joint working committees were set up as a consequence of 'Karadjorjevo', which were to work out the details of the agreement on the map. The commission convened three times in April, but the ethnic confusion in Bosnia deadlocked their discussions.[23] Dozens of these kinds of discussions on the apportionment of Bosnia-Hercegovina were to be held in subsequent years; some claim as many as 48.[24]

Milosevic left no stone unturned in arousing Tudjman's interest in a joint partitioning of Bosnia-Hercegovina. At a secret meeting in Tikves in April 1991, he presented Tudjman a document which would reveal that Muslims and their descendants, who had earlier emigrated from Bosnia to Turkey, were on the brink of returning and would take control in Bosnia. Milosevic believed this demonstrated that the Muslims were pursuing what was known as the 'Green Transversal' (a continuous Muslim area that would stretch from Turkey through Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo and Sandzak to Bosnia-Hercegovina).[25] Milosevic, who himself did not believe in the Green Transversal [26], knew that Tudjman was obsessed by the fear of the emergence of a (fundamentalist) Muslim state in Bosnia.[27] A shocked Tudjman asked Milosevic for a copy of the document and waved it around at home during meetings. However, the 'top secret' document was nothing more than a plan that had been published in September 1990 in the satiric magazine *Vox*, in which various young people in Sarajevo were attacking sacred cows and bringing up taboo subjects. They had written the 'plan' in question in response to the increasingly loud claims to Bosnia-Hercegovina by Croats and Serbs[28]

On 12 July 1991, at a meeting with Izetbegovic in Split, Tudjman and Milosevic came up with the idea for a partitioning of Bosnia-Hercegovina. Milosevic made no secret of his intentions. That very same day, he announced to US Ambassador Zimmerman that he did not mind if Croatia were to annex the Hercegovina region. He had little pity for the 'Muslim fanatic Izetbegovic'. [29] In what was for him a typical move, Izetbegovic did not resist the partitioning during the meeting, but complained afterwards that he had had no chance to put his own opinion forward. Moreover, Izetbegovic declared that he had not protested because the Muslims could not do without the Croats in the fight against the Serbs. That was why Izetbegovic felt compelled to accept the plan in the presence of Tudjman.[30]

Immediately after returning from Sarajevo, Izetbegovic started to speak out loudly against the plan. He called partitioning Bosnia the worst solution imaginable.[31] He might be prepared to discuss partitioning it into cantons.[32] Apparently, once he was back from Sarajevo, Izetbegovic felt pressure from the home front. Minister Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, Salim Sabic, who had succeeded Zulfikarpasic as Deputy Chairman of the SDA, and Deputy Prime Minister Muhamed Cengic let it be known that the integrity of Bosnia would be defended militarily.[33] Izetbegovic now said that an attempt to partition Bosnia 'would most certainly lead to a civil war in which Yugoslavia, the Balkans and maybe even Europe would get involved'. [34] Meanwhile, because he had taken part in a debate on partitioning, Izetbegovic had thwarted a joint initiative of his and Zulfikarpasic to visit Major, Kohl and Mitterrand in order to seek international support to prevent a civil war in Bosnia. The journey was cancelled immediately.[35]

In the meantime, it had become clear to the Muslim leaders in Sarajevo from Tudjman's position, that no more than spurious support was to be expected from the Croats in a conflict with the Serbs. As such, Zulfikarpasic – who had always been of the opinion that a political solution for Bosnia would only be possible with the approval of the Serbs – consulted with Izetbegovic to reach an agreement to avoid a bloodbath. Zulfikarpasic was in no doubt that the confrontation between the three ethnic groups would have such results:

'This is a country of murderers (...) We are not the Lebanon, where various religions and ethnic groups live separately. In the space of one week, there will be 200,000 dead. No one is better than the other, be he Serb, Croat or Muslim. And yet, there is so much hatred here. If we could sell that, we would all be millionaires.'

If an agreement could not be made with the Serbs, there would be mass murder: 'The knives have been sharpened, the guns oiled'.^[36]

Izetbegovic agreed with Zulfikarpasic that something had to be done, but he was not prepared to contact the Serbs himself, fearing that he would come up against recriminations from his own party following. However, he did assent to Zulfikarpasic and Filipovic, the second-in-command of the MBO party, which had broken with the SDA, having discussions with the Bosnian Serb leadership.^[37]

On the morning of 14 July, the two Muslims spoke to the Bosnian Serb leaders Karadzic, Krajisnik and Koljevic. Zulfikarpasic propounded the idea that Bosnia-Herzegovina should remain part of a union of states, which also included Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and maybe Croatia. The integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina would have to be maintained, however. To begin with, the Bosnian Serbs were not prepared to relinquish their regions, in which they were showing intensified autonomous behaviour. In contrast to Zulfikarpasic, who had said that a confrontation was imminent, they thought that that stage was already passed. Finally, they agreed and the deal was clinched verbally with Izetbegovic. A meeting with Milosevic was scheduled for Zulfikarpasic for the following day. Izetbegovic said that he was leaving for a short visit to the United States the following day, and he would sign the agreement on his return. At that point Koljevic said in front of the others, including Izetbegovic himself, that the President was lying. Even so, that same evening Koljevic announced the agreement on television and added that for the first time in months, he was relieved that an impending conflict between Muslims and Serbs had thus been averted. Karadzic also publicly backed the agreement.^[38] Zulfikarpasic was given a warm welcome by Milosevic who approved all parts of the agreement. In Zulfikarpasic's view, the Serb President considered the idea appealing that an ethnic group had suggested remaining part of Yugoslavia at a time when the rest of the world was blacklisting him.

On his return to Sarajevo airport from the United States, Izetbegovic declared on Bosnian television that he had heard that negotiations between Muslims and Serbs were underway and that he gave them his assent, hoping that they would come up with results.^[39]

On 23 July, a two-hour meeting took place between Zulfikarpasic, Filipovic, Karadzic, Koljevic and Krajisnik with Izetbegovic in the latter's presidential office. At the end of the talks, Izetbegovic concluded that the parties had drawn up close to one another and he suggested that Filipovic and Koljevic draft an agreement. Filipovic, however, thought that there was still one obvious difference: the Serbs thought in terms of a Yugoslav federation, whereas the Muslims saw Bosnia as a part of a future confederation of states. It was decided that Filipovic and Koljevic would each draft an outline agreement, after which any remaining differences of opinion would be discussed two days later.^[40] Filipovic advised Kljuic on how the discussions were progressing so that the political top of the Bosnian Croats was also up to date.

However, shortly after, in a press declaration, the SDA leadership said that it did not approve the talks and had no wish for an agreement. The implication was that Cengic was behind this about-turn.^[41] Nevertheless, at the instigation of Zulfikarpasic, Izetbegovic visited his colleague Milosevic in Belgrade, after which meeting he indicated that he was no longer enthusiastic about the agreement.

Meanwhile the war in Croatia began to accelerate and Izetbegovic did not fancy taking sides with either the Serbs or the Croats.^[42] Even after Izetbegovic had rejected the plan, the SDS went on backing it in public. In support of the initiative, the SDS and the MBO, Zulfikarpasic's and Filipovic's party, held well-attended joint meetings at various locations in Bosnia. During one such meeting in Zvornik, Karadzic announced that Greater Serbia was a wonderful dream, but no more than that because Muslims and Serbs lived intermingled throughout Bosnia.

The longer Izetbegovic's signature was in coming, the more watered down the interest among the Bosnian Serbs. After a few weeks, mutual distrust returned. On 7 August, Izetbegovic said that he could not accept an agreement to which Croats were not a party, nor a Yugoslavia to which Croatia and Slovenia did not belong. 'We have not written them off yet,' he said. One of the Bosnian Serb leaders, Koljevic, replied that neither Muslims nor Serbs would be dictated to by Tudjman. He could not understand Izetbegovic's consideration for the Croats; if it was so that two parties were conspiring against a third, then that was not Muslims and Serbs against Croats, but Muslims and Croats against Serbs, who were continually being voted down in the Bosnian Parliament and the Presidency.[43] On 12 August, Milosevic convened a meeting in Belgrade of representatives of three of the four republics that had not (yet) seceded from Yugoslavia: Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia. Izetbegovic was invited on behalf of Bosnia. He declined with thanks. One person who did attend, however, was the chairman of the Bosnian Parliament, Momcilo Krajsnik.

In the third week of August, Izetbegovic made it known that he would publicly oppose a permanent participation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in a Yugoslavia dominated by Milosevic. He announced that he was going to organize a referendum on secession, which would, he believed, show that three quarters of the Bosnians were against the idea of Bosnia having permanent ties with Yugoslavia.[44] A few months earlier, Izetbegovic had opposed a proposal put forward by Milosevic to organize a referendum on independence among each large ethnic group in each Yugoslav republic. Izetbegovic had warned that that 'could cause an explosion that would completely shatter Bosnia-Herzegovina and that in the future, people would shoot at one another through their windows (...) The population of Bosnia-Herzegovina is as mixed as grain and flour'.[45] At this point, Izetbegovic evidently had no problem with a referendum that would sideline...

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[1] Libal, *Serben*, p. 174.

[2] Appendix, Duijzings, *Geschiedenis en herinnering in Oost-Bosnië*.

[3] Zulfikarpasic, *Bosniak*, p. 147.

[4] Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 42 and 182.

[5] Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 44-45.

[6] Cf. Calic, *Krieg*, p. 93.

[7] Cf. Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 45-114, for a detailed report.

[8] N. Lucas, 'Doodvonnis voor Bosnië' (Death penalty for Bosnia), *Trouw*, 26/09/91. Others also entertained the notion that a balance of fear could prevent an armed ethnic conflict from erupting in Bosnia, Judah, *Serbs*, p. 194.

[9] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 152.

[10] Williams & Cigar, 'War Crimes', IV.A; Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 43; Doder & Branson, *Milosevic*, pp. 95-96; Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 152-153.

[11] Cf., for instance, F. Hartmann, 'Sévère réquisitoire du premier ministre M. Ante Markovic, contre l'armée' (Severe indictment of the army by Prime Minister Ante Markovic), *Le Monde*, 21/09/91; Zulfikarpasic, *Bosniak*, p. 148.

[12] Interview with Vladimir Srebrov, with Adil Kulenov, <http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/bosnia/srebrov.html> q.v., consulted on 06/03/00. A more extensive version of this interview was published in *Vreme* on 30/10/95; 'Vladimir Srebrov speaks out', BosNet, 15/11/99, <http://www.bosnet.org/archive/bosnet-bw3archive/9511/msg00342.html> consulted 06/03/00.

[13] Kadjevic, *View*, p. 145. cf. ibidem, p. 97.

[14] Kadjevic, *View*, p. 159.

[15] Kadjevic, *View*, pp. 159-160.

[16] Allen, *Warfare*, p. 56.

[17] Interview with Vladimir Srebrov, with Adil Kulenov, <http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/bosnia/srebrov.html> q.v. consulted on 06/03/00. A more extensive version of this interview was published in *Vreme* on 30/10/95; 'Vladimir Srebrov speaks out', BosNet, 15/11/99, <http://www.bosnet.org/archive/bosnet-bw3archive/9511/msg00342.html> consulted, 06/03/00.

[18] Duijzings, 12/06/01, p. 133; Cohen, *Bonds*, p. 231.

[19] Cf. Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 42 n. 3.

[20] For a detailed overview of the weapons handed out to SDS leaders, see Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 86-88.

[21] Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 41.

[22] Peter Michielsen, 'Bosnië meegesleurd in kolkend conflict' (Bosnia dragged into seething conflict), *NRC Handelsblad*, 16/07/91; E. Nysingh, 'Moslims blijven Tito trouw' (Muslims stay faithful to Tito), *de Volkskrant*, 19/08/91; Cohen, *Hearts*, p. 195; Gow, *Forces*, p. 1; Zimmermann, *US*, p. 3.

[23] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, pp. 129-130.

- [24] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 130.
- [25] Mile Stojic & Senad Pecanin, 'Punkerer kao ratnici Dzihada', *Dani* 29/03/99; Tudjman's assistant Hrvoje Sarinic, cited in 'His Master's Voice: the adventures of Hrvoje Sarinic in the land of the Serb aggressor', *Bosnia Report*, new series no. 8, January-March 1999.
- [26] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 130.
- [27] Cf. ABZ, DEU/ARA/05252, Nederlof to Kooijmans, 07/12/93, no. ZAG-93.19.
- [28] Mile Stojic & Senad Pecanin 'Punkerer kao ratnici Dzihada', *Dani* 29/03/99.
- [29] Zimmermann, *Origins*, p. 150.
- [30] Izetbegovic, *Govori*, pp. 122-123. Cf. Larrabee, *Instability*, p. 40; X. Bougarel, 'Bosnia and Hercegovina - State and Communitarianism', Dyker & Vejvoda (ed.), *Yugoslavia*, p. 102; Zimmermann, *Origins*, p. 132; M.Boroagovic and S. Rustempasic, 'The white paper on Alija Izetbegovic', http://www.xs4all.nl/~frankti/Bosnian_congress/izetbegovic_white_paper.html consulted on 17/02/00; Judy Dempsey, 'Serbs, Croats in secret border talks', *Financial Times*, 10/07/91; Tim Judah, 'Creation of Islamic buffer state discussed in secret', *The Times*, 12/07/91; 'Serviërs en Kroaten in geheim grens-overleg' (Serbs and Croats in secret border negotiations), *Trouw*, 11/07/91; Nicole Lucas, 'Bosnië vreest ten onder te gaan aan kempende burenen' (Bosnia fears fighting neighbours will be its downfall), *Trouw*, 15/07/91; André Roclofs, 'Kroatië bevestigt plan voor opdelen republiek Bosnië' (Croatia confirms plan for division of Bosnian republic), *de Volkskrant*, 13/07/91.
- [31] 'Izetbegovic: division of Bosnia-Hercegovina the worst possible solution', *Yugoslav news agency*, 13/07/91, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 15/07/91.
- [32] Charles Richards, 'Intrigue returns to a Sarajevo caught in the political crossfire', *The Independent*, 18/07/91.
- [33] Charles Richards, 'Intrigue returns to a Sarajevo caught in the political crossfire', *The Independent*, 18/07/91; 'Bosnian government seeks official explanation on Tudjman statement', *Yugoslav news agency*, 17/07/91, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 19/07/91.
- [34] 'Izetbegovic warns against civil war in Bosnia-Hercegovina', *Tanjug*, 21/07/91, 09:48, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 23/07/91. Cf. Kitty McKinsey, 'Bosnia fears it will be sliced up by Croatia and Serbia', *The Ottawa Citizen*, 04/08/91.
- [35] Dusko Doder, 'Yugoslav Muslims Align With Serbs', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 27/07/91.
- [36] Dusko Doder, 'Yugoslav Muslims Align With Serbs', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 27/07/91.
- [37] Cf. Zulfikarpasic, *Bosniak*, pp. 171-185 for a discussion of this meeting and the incidents that followed immediately after that; Dusko Doder, 'Yugoslav Muslims Align With Serbs', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 27/07/91, in addition to the sources listed below.
- [38] Dusko Doder, 'Yugoslav Muslims Align With Serbs', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 27/07/91; 'Bosnian Serbs and Muslims 'about to reach historic agreement' on Yugoslavia', *Belgrade home service*, 25/07/91, 13:00, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 29/07/91.
- [39] Muhamed Filipovic, 'Hasan Cengic's Conspiratorial Logic', *Dan*, 08/04/00.
- [40] Muhamed Filipovic, 'Hasan Cengic's Conspiratorial Logic', *Dan*, 08/04/00.
- [41] Muhamed Filipovic, 'Hasan Cengic's Conspiratorial Logic', *Dan*, 08/04/00.
- [42] Yugoslav news agency, 31/07/91, 12:28, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 06/08/91.
- [43] 'Controversy over 'historic accord between' Serbian and Muslim parties in Bosnia', *Yugoslav news agency* 07/08/91, 11:46, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 12/08/91.
- [44] Blaine Harden, 'Bosnia Braces for Arrival of Ethnic Violence', *The Washington Post*, 23/08/91.
- [45] Quoted in Kumar, *Divide*, p. 45.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

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Recognition of Croatia and Slovenia and the significance of that for Bosnia

9. Towards independence for Bosnia-Hercegovina

On 9 October, Milosevic's party held a conference in Pec. In his speech to the delegates, party ideologist Mihailo Markovic said in no uncertain terms that the new Yugoslavia would comprise Serbia, Montenegro and an area consisting of Bosnia and Knin. If the Muslims so wished, they could also be part of this new Yugoslavia. If they did not want this, then they would have to reckon on being surrounded by Serb territory.[1]

The die was cast within a week, on 15 October 1991. In the Bosnian Parliament, the Muslim and Croatian delegates adopted – there were no negative votes and a few abstentions – a declaration of sovereignty initiated by the SDA. This proclamation did not yet constitute formal independence, but established conditions under which internal laws could take precedence over those of the federation, stipulations Slovenia and Serbia had already included in their constitutions. Moreover, representatives of Bosnia-Hercegovina would no longer take part in activities of the Federal Presidency and Parliament, if representatives of all other republics did not do so either. As soon as Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia, a start would be made realizing the right to self-determination, 'including secession of the population groups of Bosnia-Hercegovina (Muslims, Serbs and Croats)'. [2] One of the aims of this bill was to prevent JNA troops from moving across Bosnian territory.

The Serb SDS felt that Parliament could not adopt such a bill because the Bosnian constitution required a two-thirds majority for an amendment and the bill had been adopted by 142 to 240 votes. Radovan Karadzic warned the other two parties: 'I seriously ask you to take note that what you are doing is not good. Do you want to send Bosnia-Hercegovina in this direction, the same fast track to hell and suffering that Slovenia and Croatia are following? Do not be sure that you will not send Bosnia-Hercegovina to hell, or that you might not be bringing the Muslim population to ruin, because the Muslims cannot defend themselves if war breaks out.' [3] Those were far less mild words than those spoken by Mihailovic. Izetbegovic did not dispute that there could be a 'bloodbath', given that 200,000 Bosnians were already armed to the teeth. [4] However, he believed that Karadzic's words had stated exactly why groups other than the Serbs did not want to remain part of Yugoslavia. [5] Out of protest, the Bosnian Serb members of parliament had left the chamber before the vote, obediently following the instructions Jovic had received from Karadzic eight months earlier. When the other members left Parliament after the vote, they were wearing bullet-proof jackets and were escorted by armed police. They were afraid of being attacked by their Serb colleagues. [6]

That same day, UN envoy Cyrus Vance reported to EU mediator Carrington, with the Dutch diplomat Wijnaendts as go-between, that all his recent interlocutors – Gligorov, Tupurkovsky, Djukanovic, Kostic, Izetbegovic, Bogicevic, the Bosnian Prime Minister Jure Pelevan and the Bosnian Foreign Minister Silajdzic – regarded the adoption of the declaration of sovereignty by the Bosnian Parliament as 'a seminal event in the current crisis'. In their view war in Bosnia-Hercegovina was now imminent. [7]

On 24 October, in response to these events, the Serb delegates in the Bosnian Parliament decided to establish their own Serb Parliament under the chairmanship of Krajisnik, also chairman of the Bosnian Parliament. Meanwhile, they would also remain part of the Bosnian Parliament.[8] On 9 and 10 November, the new Bosnian Serb representatives organized a plebiscite among the Serbs on the question whether they wanted to become part of Greater Serbia. The response was an almost unanimous 'yes'.

The twelve-month period ended in November 1991, after which Izetbegovic, as chairman of the seven-strong Bosnian Presidency had to make way for one of the other members. However, he refused to relinquish his seat, pleading special circumstances. As from that moment, he became the de facto president of Bosnia-Hercegovina. The SDS backed Izetbegovic's decision. However, it was one of the SDS last actions in an interethnic context.

Now that the conflict in Croatia was coming to an end and Bosnia seemed on the verge of one, the final touches could be put to military preparations. After the referendum among the Bosnian Serbs on 9 November 1991, the distribution of arms to the Serbs was accelerated.[9] According to Divjak, during the winter of 1991-1992, the Bosnian Serb volunteers received another 51,000 automatic rifles and 800 rocket launchers and guns.[10]

Bosnian Serbs get the upper hand in the JNA

On 5 December, Milosevic instructed his entourage to start negotiations on the withdrawal of the JNA from Macedonia, which had declared its independence on 22 November.[11] With a ceasefire in Croatia and the JNA pulling out of Slovenia and Macedonia, Milosevic could give all his attention to Bosnia-Hercegovina. Jovic's diary states that, as early as December, Milosevic had given the order to ensure that the Bosnian troops be made up of as many Bosnian Serbs as possible so that when Bosnia-Hercegovina declared independence only the command would have to be changed.[12]

Within three weeks, 85 per cent of the JNA troops in Bosnia-Hercegovina came from that republic.[13] Although Croats and Muslims continued to leave the JNA, the JNA troops doubled in Bosnia from 50,000 to somewhere in the region of 90,000 to 100,000 soldiers in the period from December 1991 to March 1992.[14] After a reorganization, the officer's corps comprised 92.6 per cent Serbs and seven per cent Montenegrins. The federal army had approximately 500 tanks, 400 armoured vehicles and 1,000 mortars.[15] At almost the same time, the federal state security operation *Jedinstvo* (Unity) got off the ground by order of Petar Gracanin, the federal Minister of the Interior. Representatives of the federal state security were placed next to existing department heads in all large cities in Bosnia.[16]

On 21 November, the *Slobodna Bosna* newspaper published a secret plan, which it had been able to attain, showing that with the help of paramilitaries to be trained by the JNA, the SDS was going to blockade Sarajevo.[17] In December, the JNA began digging in artillery in the hills around Sarajevo, with guns pointing towards the city. This was just the beginning of a large-scale deployment of the JNA and Serb units at strategic positions in Bosnia, which took place in late 1991 and early 1992.[18] In the first days of January 1992, Major General Ratko Mladic, who had lead the war in Krajina, began organizing 'volunteer formations' in Bosnia.[19] He was able to recruit almost 70,000 men, half of whom resided in Sarajevo and surrounding areas.[20] In areas in which Serbs were not in the majority, they were ordered to establish parallel municipal councils that were wholly Serb. A 'crisis staff' was set up in each locality, consisting of representatives of the SDS and Serb police. In collaboration with the JNA, they organized arms for the Serb population and created a climate of war. In addition, they made lists of HDZ and SDA activists.

And meanwhile, the European Community tackled the question of whether Bosnia-Hercegovina should be recognized.

- [1] Quoted in Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p. 229.
- [2] Quoted in Hayden, *Blueprints*, p. 93.
- [3] Burg & Shoup, *War*, pp. 77-78. Similar quotes in Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 288; Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 247; Oslobodjenje, 15/10/91, quoted in X. Bougarel, 'Bosnia and Hercegovina - State and Communitarianism', Dyker & Vejvoda (ed.), *Yugoslavia*, p. 100; Silber & Little, *Death*, p. 215.
- [4] U. Rudberg, 'Soevereiniteit van Bosnië wekt woede Serviërs' (Bosnian sovereignty stirs up Serb anger), *de Volkskrant*, 16/10/91.
- [5] Silber & Little, *Death*, p. 215.
- [6] 'Bosnië-Herzegovina gaat zijn eigen weg' (Bosnia-Hercegovina going its own way), *Trouw*, 16/10/91; U. Rudberg, 'Soevereiniteit van Bosnië wekt woede Serviërs', *de Volkskrant*, 16/10/91.
- [7] ABZ, PVNY. Vance to Wijnaendts, 15/10/91.
- [8] Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 289-291.
- [9] Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 48.
- [10] Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 41.
- [11] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 186.
- [12] Jovic, *Dani*, p. 420; Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 187.
- [13] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 188.
- [14] Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 41.
- [15] Domazet-Loso, *Aggression*, p. 139.
- [16] Spasic, *Lasica*, p. 237; interview Spasic, 16/09/01.
- [17] Cohen, *Hearts*, p. 158; Doder & Branson, *Milosevic*, p. 97.
- [18] Cf. Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 115-154 for a detailed overview of the movements of and positions taken up by the JNA and Serb soldiers.
- [19] Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 198.
- [20] Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 200 and 319-321.

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Part I

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10. Recognition by the European Community and the United States

Double game by Izetbegovic

Apparently, Izetbegovic was fully convinced that a break-up of the Republic of Yugoslavia would lead to the outbreak of civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For this reason, he had made several attempts early in 1991 to prevent the break-up together with Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov.[1] By the end of April 1991, he told the EC Ambassadors in Belgrade that any attempt by one of the three ethnic groups to split up Bosnia-Herzegovina would certainly lead to civil war.[2]

On 21 November, the day before Izetbegovic was to visit Bonn to attend the recognition talks between the German government – that had taken the initiative – and the leaders of the region, UN envoy Vance and UN Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Goulding travelled to Sarajevo. They talked to Izetbegovic and his Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic. Izetbegovic again pointed out the danger of fights breaking out between Croats and Serbs and asked that a peacekeeping force be deployed. Milosevic was against it however. He was also against the UN setting up headquarters in Sarajevo to carry out peace operations in Croatia, fearing that Izetbegovic would take advantage of the UN presence to effect Bosnia's secession from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Bosnian Serbs also spoke out against deployment.[3]

Meanwhile, Hansjörg von Eiff, the German Ambassador in Belgrade, shared Izetbegovic's worries about what would happen to Bosnia after German or EC recognition of Croatia and Slovenia. Nearly overstepping the mark in respect of his authority, he gave Izetbegovic elaborate instructions, before the latter's visit to Bonn on 22 November, about the arguments he should use in Bonn to prevent Genscher from forcing through recognition among the EC partners.

However, while visiting Kohl and Genscher in Bonn, Izetbegovic did not bring up the issue of recognition at all.[4] Disappointed, US Ambassador Zimmermann concluded that Izetbegovic was playing a double game. Apparently, the Bosnian President was hoping that the recognition of Bosnia's independence would lead to a Western intervention in support of his government the minute Serb cannons would threaten his country.[5] Izetbegovic was indeed pursuing the course that had been determined at the *Dom Milicije* at Sarajevo on 10 June, i.e. pressing for recognition while preparing for war at the same time.

On 25 November, three days after Izetbegovic, Croatian Foreign Minister Ivan Separovic arrived in Bonn. After he had aired his worries about the precarious situation in his country and the lack of Western aid, Genscher reminded him of the final recognition date set by Van den Broek, two months after 10 October. The German Minister did however point out to his Croatian colleague that Zagreb should create a climate in which the rights of minorities were better protected.[6]

The next day, 26 November, a meeting of Christian Democrat government and party leaders

was held at Stuyvenberg Castle near Brussels. Attended by German Chancellor Kohl and Prime Ministers Andreotti, Lubbers, Martens, Mitsotakis and Santer, the meeting decided to recognize Croatia and Slovenia before Christmas.[7] The outcome was not made public. The status of the agreement is not entirely clear, but it must at least have encouraged Bonn that the term of 10 December set by Van den Broek as an ultimatum would not again be deferred.

On 27 November, the day after the meeting at Stuyvenberg Castle, Kohl announced in the Bundestag that the German government would recognize Croatia and Slovenia before Christmas.[8] Although he said that a unilateral action of Germany would be dangerous and unsound, he also said unanimity would not be required. He just hoped that as many EC countries as possible would support Germany's position. Neither should the issue of recognition be linked to the conclusion of the Treaty of Maastricht in any way, he warned, i.e. Yugoslavia should not dominate the important EC summit taking place in Maastricht, the Netherlands, on 9 and 10 December.[9] The unanimity that was so crucial for the summit's success would no longer be put to risk by the issue of the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia after the Maastricht Agreement had been adopted by the 12 EC member states on 9 and 10 December, German Chancellor Kohl must have thought. Recognition should therefore be effected between 10 December, i.e. the day of the Maastricht summit, and Christmas.[10] Later, it was officially decided to avoid the subject of Yugoslavia in Maastricht. Yugoslavia would be discussed during a special European Political Cooperation (EPC) meeting the week after the summit. The day after Kohl's announcement, Italian Prime Minister Andreotti said the Italian government would back Germany, in the 'conviction' that other governments would follow suit.[11]

In spite of a telegram sent by the Dutch Ambassador in Bonn[12] about the agreement that had been reached, it seems that Van den Broek was not aware of such a settlement.[13] This was possibly the result of deficient communication between Dutch Foreign Minister Van den Broek and Lubbers.[14] However, Foreign Affairs staff might have known the truth if they had read the newspapers more carefully. Interviewed by *Die Welt* on the subject of the forthcoming EC summit in Maastricht on 9 and 10 December, Lubbers - described by the German newspaper as unusually clear for a Prime Minister renowned for his 'clever but often also vague diplomatic phrasing' - said the German and Italian announcements regarding the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia did not come as a surprise. Only the actual moment was new: 'But we have to close the books on this matter, in any case before the end of the year.'[15] The magazine did not fail to conclude that the Prime Minister appeared to disregard the objections made by Van den Broek. Dutch daily newspaper *De Volkskrant* quoted the crucial statements made by Lubbers in the German newspaper.[16]

On 3 and 5 December, respectively, Kohl received Slovenian President Kucan and Croatian President Tudjman and told them that Germany, and as many other EC member states as possible, would recognize both countries before Christmas.[17] In a telephone conversation with Mesic about this time, Kohl announced that he did not intend to postpone German recognition until all EC countries were in agreement.[18] Almost at the same time, i.e. on 5 December, the Croatian Parliament recalled Mesic as President of the collective Federal Presidency, a decision that would have retroactive effect from 8 October, the day on which the Brioni moratorium expired and Croatia considered itself independent. Federal Foreign Minister Budimir Loncar, a Croat, had resigned two weeks earlier on 20 November.

After having obtained Kohl's promise, Tudjman no longer objected to the deployment of UN forces in the disputed areas in Croatia instead of along its border with Serbia.[19] Formal recognition is within reach, so sovereignty of the entire Croatian territory will only be a matter of time and military power, Tudjman must have thought. Vance's peace plan was ready for submission to the Security Council on 11 December.

Many objections to German rush

In spite of the promises regarding recognition made at Stuyvenberg Castle, the German government had not yet won the day, which was apparent from the Mitterrand interview published in the

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on 29 November. The French head of state declared that although his country was not against the recognition of Croatia's independence, it could only come about if all EC countries supported it and after the rights of the Serb minority in Croatia had been guaranteed. It seemed that Mitterrand even wanted to discuss the borders of Croatia. 'Will the internal frontier within Yugoslavia separating Serbia and Croatia automatically become an international frontier?', the French head of state contemplated aloud.^[20] Nor did he seem in much of a hurry with regard to recognition: 'I do not think that the recognition of Croatia would improve matters at this moment.'^[21]

There were also many objections against an early recognition of Croatia and Slovenia at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Officials were aware of the enormous implications it could have for the Yugoslavia conference. The Slovenians would see no need at all to negotiate. The Croatians would perhaps be willing to talk, if only to obtain the area that was now under Serb control. To make matters worse, Serbia would no longer regard the EC as a neutral mediator if it recognized Croatia and Slovenia. Nor would it be very willing to continue talks about a Yugoslavia that no longer comprised Croatia and Slovenia. Recognition would also affect the establishment of a peace force, which was now under discussion following Resolution 721 of the Security Council. Serbia would probably not accept the presence within the peace forces of troops from countries that intended to recognize Croatia. If, on the other hand, recognition took place when peace forces were already stationed in the area, the safety of the troops could be jeopardized. The British government had expressed serious concerns about this matter to the Hague and wanted a carefully arranged organisation of UN peace forces before proceeding to recognition. The danger of Serb reprisals following the recognition of Croatia also involved the observers of the European Monitoring Mission, the ECMM.^[22]

Besides, for months now, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hague had been aware of the seriousness of developments within Bosnia-Herzegovina. News reaching the Foreign Office, both through its diplomatic post at Belgrade and through the media, was very alarming. According to Fietelaars, the Dutch Ambassador in Belgrade, there was an 'escalation of the polarization' of the three ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina as early as the end of April 1991.^[23] No more than Izetbegovic did D.R. Hasselman, Dutch Counsellor of the Embassy in Belgrade, entertain any illusions with regard to a conflict in Bosnia. In the summer of 1991, he expected the problems in Bosnia to be far more serious than those occurring at the time in Croatia. Also, in his view, possible frustrations of JNA units that were being withdrawn from Slovenia and sent to Bosnia should be taken into account. However, given the ethnic diversity and the excessive violence that was expected, Hasselman thought that a monitoring mission in Bosnia would 'not be the proper technical instrument' for peacekeeping.^[24] In early August 1991, Izetbegovic had told the European Troika that he hoped observers would also be sent to Bosnia at some point as he did not rule out the possibility that, after Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina would become a victim of Milosevic's Greater Serbia aspirations.^[25]

By the end of September, Fietelaars also recommended that observers be sent to Bosnia. He reported movements of JNA troops and equipment from Serbia and Montenegro to Bosnia, which he interpreted as an attempt to realize the Greater Serbia objective. He observed the JNA provocations against the Muslims and a marked growth of Serb militias, which, in its turn, prompted the forming of Muslim militias. Events that took six months to happen in Croatia took only a week in Bosnia, according to Fietelaars. The Bosnian Presidency, whose member Ejup Ganic was Fietelaars's contact, asked him daily for the immediate deployment of observers in those parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina where incidents had occurred.^[26] The day Fietelaars reported this to the Hague, the Dutch daily newspaper *Trouw* featured an article in which Ganic said he had been pleading for the deployment of observers in Bosnia for more than six months now – in vain. 'It could still do some good,' he added. 'Two weeks from now it will be too late.'^[27]

When, by the end of October, Dutch helicopters deployed for the monitoring mission were called back to the Netherlands as they had been grounded for weeks because of the dangerous situation in the Yugoslav airspace^[28], and, shortly after, the EC observers posted in the area around Vukovar and Dubrovnik had to be recalled because hostilities had broken out, Van den Broek still favoured the presence of the remaining observers in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He praised their stabilizing influence on 'a potentially explosive situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina', where the Serbs held their referendum

against Bosnian independence on 9 and 10 November.[29]

Others were also aware that Bosnia would quickly erupt into violence. A 'joke' going around in Yugoslavia at the time said: 'Why is there no fighting in Bosnia? Because Bosnia will get to the finals directly.' [30] In July, Nijaz Durakovic, leader of the formerly communist Social Democratic Party in Bosnia said it would be an understatement to say that Bosnia was on the verge of civil war, as it was already in the middle of one.[31] On 7 August, *Volkskrant* commentator Koen Koch warned that Croats, Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia would thrash out among themselves where the borders of Croatia and Serbia and a future Muslim state would run: 'As the violence in Croatia is much worse than the violence in Slovenia, the bloodbath in Bosnia will be much worse than the violence in Croatia.' [32] According to *Trouw* correspondent Nicole Lucas, by the end of September 1991, leading politicians of the various ethnic groups in Bosnia were in agreement about what would happen if Europe did not find a solution for Bosnia: 'There will be a civil war worse than ever before in history. Lebanon will seem a nursery game compared to the cruelties that will take place here.' [33]

At the beginning of November 1991, Second Secretary of the Embassy, J.L. Werner, learned from Karadzic in Sarajevo that he had forced Milosevic to extend his protection to the Serbs outside Serbia. This, according to Karadzic, had led Milosevic to reject the propositions of Carrington, although he was personally inclined to accept them. There is no doubt that Karadzic, who liked to give the impression that he exerted real influence over Milosevic, was boasting. However, this did not alter the fact that the JNA was distributing weapons to Serbs, which, according to the Secretary of the Embassy, only made the break-out of a civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina more likely.[34]

The Hague was also aware of the fact that by the end of November and at the beginning of December – except during Izetbegovic's visit to Bonn –, the Bosnian and Macedonian governments had urgently requested the EC countries not to proceed to recognition too soon. However, they also made it clear that, if recognition took place, they also wanted to be recognized as independent states, as they did not want to stay part of a rump Yugoslavia. The Bosnian government pressed for the establishment of UN peace forces in Bosnia prior to EC recognition of Croatia. The British government was sensitive to these arguments. Given the ethnic patchwork in Bosnia-Herzegovina and possible JNA reprisals against Croats in Bosnia after the recognition of Croatia, London expected violence to break out.[35] The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared the British concerns, but seemed, as yet, more preoccupied with the potential consequences for Macedonia and Kosovo, which were expected to have both internal and international implications.[36]

Meanwhile, the British and the French mounted another offensive against early recognition. By the end of November, Foreign Office staff had told journalists that British recognition of Croatia and Slovenia would soon come to pass now that the deployment of peace forces in Croatia seemed likely. Recognition would probably even take place before Christmas, they said.[37] Apparently, Minister Hurd felt the need to explain his country's formal position once more declaring in *The Times* of 3 December that any Yugoslav republic that wanted to could gain independence: 'This is a matter of judgement and timing rather than principle.' As such, his position on record had shifted towards that of the French government, which had already accepted recognition on 9 October, although it questioned the timing of it. As a result of the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia would also want to gain independence soon, Hurd said in *The Times*. And this would threaten the peace in these countries. According to the British Minister, it was an illusion to think that the recognition of independence would stop the fighting. The West was not prepared to supply troops to protect the new states. Moreover, if recognition was pushed through too hastily, it would be impossible for the international community to demand adequate protection of minorities from the governments of the states that wanted to be recognized.[38]

The day Hurd's article was published in *The Times*, Mitterrand criticised the German government's intention in a personal conversation with Kohl. He told the German Chancellor that recognition would have no impact on the fighting in Yugoslavia.[39] As he had done a few weeks earlier, Kohl replied that internal pressure in his country left him no choice.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 5

The start of the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina: March 1992 – May 1992

4. The recognition of the multi-ethnic Bosnia-Hercegovina

On 6 April the ministers of the EC declared that as of the following day they would recognize Bosnia-Hercegovina. One day later the US did the same. Both the EC and the American government postponed the actual recognition, originally planned for 6 April, by one day out of respect for the memory of the Germany attack on Yugoslavia 51 years earlier.[1] In total 72 states recognized Bosnia-Hercegovina on 7 April. Actually it was a long time before Western governments actually established diplomatic contacts with the government in Sarajevo. The American government, for instance, first opened an embassy in the Bosnian capital on 4 July 1994 .

The Netherlands and Bosnia-Hercegovina decided on 15 December 1992 to establish diplomatic relations at the level of ambassador. To begin with this led only to the appointment of a temporary Bosnian *chargé d'affaires* in Brussels, who was also accredited with the Dutch government. The Netherlands conducted the relations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague. The government postponed the appointment of a Dutch ambassador or temporary *chargé d'affaires* in Sarajevo because the security situation and the communications would make proper functioning practically impossible. In the summer of 1994 the Eastern European department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered that the Dutch involvement in the rebuilding of Sarajevo justified the Netherlands following the example that had now been given by France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Italy, Austria, Croatia, the Vatican, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Iran and Turkey by also appointing an ambassador, or at least a temporary *chargé d'affaires*. The idea was that political reporting from the Bosnian capital could provide a useful supplement to that from Belgrade, Zagreb and by G.C.M. Baron van Pallandt, the ambassador to Albania, who was based in The Hague. [2] Nonetheless it was not until March 1996 that a Dutch diplomatic representation was opened in Sarajevo.[3]

The West, and the Netherlands in particular, was not only slow in appointing personnel to realize diplomatic relations following the recognition of Bosnia-Hercegovina. The West and the UN also neglected to enable or to organize the defence of the new state. At the start of 1992 the CIA had already warned that in the event of recognition of Bosnia a major international effort would be needed to counter Serb aggression and to keep the state together.[4] However, the new state of Bosnia-Hercegovina was affected by the UN arms embargo that had been imposed in September 1991 on all areas of the former Yugoslavia. By maintaining this embargo Bosnia was deprived of its legitimate right to defend itself from external aggression, a right that was granted to each state under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

The West abandoned Bosnia-Hercegovina not only militarily but also morally. On the one hand Western politicians argued in favour of a multi-ethnic state of Bosnia-Hercegovina, but on the other hand they strengthened the nationalist leaders in Bosnia and Serbia by conducting negotiations exclusively with them; they ignored the democratic forces that were striving for multi-ethnicity and that had pinned their hopes on help from the West.[5] When at the end of June the American

government set out its view to the Dutch government, via its embassy in The Hague, that the Bosnian government should not be pressured to negotiate directly 'with what in fact are extremist Bosnian Serbs who follow a policy of terrorism', the Dutch response was that there was 'little point in casting doubt on this. But however despicable the behaviour of Karadzic and his followers may be, they do represent the most important power factor on the Serb side'. [6]

Another illustration of the lack of support for democratic forces was the subsidy policy of the Dutch government. At the start of 1994 a memorandum was sent by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs about a subsidy for the Dutch organization Press Now, which provided support to independent media in the former Yugoslavia. The Dutch government found the aim a sympathetic one, but: 'For reasons of a political nature a reserved policy has been conducted to date regarding individual Dutch support for independent media in Serbia. The prevention of an undesirably exposed position has always stood in the way of aid other than in a multilateral context.' [7]

Bosnia in the Central and Eastern Europe Foundations of Dutch political parties

Another example of how Bosnia-Herzegovina was abandoned by the Netherlands was seen in the provision of grants to Dutch political parties for the promotion of pluriform societies in Eastern Europe. At the start of the 1990s the major Dutch political parties had foundations which maintained contacts with sister parties in Eastern Europe and which were able to provide these parties with some support in the development of a pluriform society. To this end they could utilize a grant scheme set up by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior for 'General Education and Training of Political Functionaries in Central and Eastern Europe'.

To facilitate this task, the political parties represented in Parliament received a basic sum of 50,000 guilders plus a sum of maximally 10,333 guilders per parliamentary seat. In addition the parties themselves supplied a relatively small sum. CDA (Christian Democrats), PvdA (Labour), VVD (Liberals), D66 (Democrats), GroenLinks (Green Left), RPF (party allied to the Dutch Reformed Church) and the Centrum Democraten (extreme right) utilized this scheme, which was extended for several years in succession as long as the political parties in Central and Eastern Europe were considered still to be in a state of development. At the time of the scheme's inception, the countries for which the grants were intended were Bulgaria, the GDR, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia – and Yugoslavia.

In the VVD the contacts with Central and Eastern Europe were handled by the D.W. Dettmeijer Foundation until 1992. In that year this foundation, as well as several other foundations of the VVD, was dissolved, after which the activities of the VVD with regard to Central and Eastern Europe were taken over by the Prof. mr. B.M. Telders Foundation and the Haya van Someren Foundation. In its contacts with Central and Eastern Europe, the VVD chiefly focussed on parties in countries which could be considered for rapid entry into the European Community, such as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia and – later – Slovenia. [8]

In contrast to the VVD, the Alfred Mozer Foundation of the PvdA and the Eduardo Frei Foundation of the CDA also directed considerable attention towards areas where the political (and economic) structure was less developed. In February 1993 the PvdA and the Alfred Mozer Foundation requested that the grant scheme be extended to Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. [9] In September of the same year the Eduardo Frei Foundation of the CDA made the same request for Serbia and Montenegro. However, Minister Dales turned them down flat by telling the foundations that they themselves should provide the required moral support and should supply the accompanying financial help from their own funds. According to the minister, this provided 'adequate opportunities for anticipating possible positive developments in both states in the near future'. [10]

In 1994 the geographic scope of the subsidy was finally extended to the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the countries of the former Yugoslavia. But an exception was made for countries where civil war was underway at that time, such as Bosnia. [11] In 1995 the political parties and their foundations nonetheless asked the Dutch government to extend their

efforts to the countries in a state of civil war as well. The government rejected this move because, it said, the political situation in these countries was underdeveloped. The foundations felt that this was precisely the argument for starting activities in these countries, but they failed to convince the ministry with this reasoning.[12]

In March 1996 Alfred Mozer Foundation (PvdA), the Eduardo Frei Foundation (CDA), the Haya van Someren Foundation (VVD), the Institute for Education and Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe (D66) and the Eastern Europe Training and Education Project (GroenLinks) once again asked that the grant scheme be extended to Bosnia-Herzegovina.[13] The Ministry of the Interior rejected this request because the current grant scheme was set to expire at the end of that year.[14] In the course of 1996 it was decided to extend the scheme by another year, but the Ministry of the Interior still did not consider it possible to alter the existing scheme in the requested direction. In the second half of 1996 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs then proposed an *ad hoc* possibility for providing support to sister parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This ministry now realized that the Netherlands also needed to make a contribution to the implementation of the Dayton Agreements. A situation thus arose in which a development explicitly forbidden by the Ministry of the Interior was promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[15]

It is not appropriate to examine this problem further within the confines of this report, but it is still worth describing because other aspects of the West's policy too, and thus also of the Dutch government, placed such emphasis on higher-level diplomatic involvement and on military involvement while neglecting the democratic and multi-ethnic potential contained in the Bosnian and Serbian societies. If the political goal of the West was to bring about a form of ethnic division in Bosnia, as seemed to be indicated by the Cutileiro Plan, then this omission was still comprehensible up to a point. But it was less understandable for a government such as that of the Netherlands which stressed the realization of a multi-ethnic society, against the dominant political trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Above all because the Netherlands took such a leading role in the high-level politics and, as will be seen, thus damaged its relations with traditional (alliance) partners, while these partners would certainly not have objected to the Netherlands making its own contribution at a lower level – an opportunity which, for instance, the Eastern Europe foundations of the Dutch political parties would have provided. It is never too late or too early for such political initiatives, even if here it was just to encourage groups in Bosnia who still upheld the principle of multi-ethnicity. The success of military intervention, including peacekeeping operations, is indeed highly dependent on the political and military developments in the region itself. And in Bosnia, as soon as the first skirmishes broke out in March 1992, this were certainly not positive.

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[1] ABZ DEU/ARA/00083. Van den Broek 59 to embassy in Belgrade, 07/04/93; Stojanovic, *Fall*, p. 140; Zimmermann, *Origins*, p. 194.

[2] ABZ, DEU/ARA/05293. Memorandum from DEU/OE to deputy DGPZ, 29/07/94, no. deu-609; Memorandum from DEU to PLVS, 11/08/94, no. 644/94.

[3] ABZ, DIE/2001/00023. Memorandum from Deputy DEU to AP and others, 27/11/95, no. DEU-995/95. Originally a temporary chargé d'affaires was active there. An ambassador was appointed in June 1996.

[4] Patrick Glynn, 'See No Evil', Mousavizadeh (ed.), *Book*, p. 135.

[5] See for instance the quote from June 1991 by the Serb writer Milo Dor at the start of *De verwoesting van Joegoslavië*: 'I think that pragmatism in Yugoslavia will win out under the pressure of the Americans and the European Community.' Or Milovan Djilas in March 1991: 'My greatest hope rests in Europe: I cannot imagine that Europe would stand for a mass slaughter of Serbs, Croats, Albanians in Kosovo, etcetera.' in: Rick Kueth, 'Van oude partizanen, de dingen die voorbijgaan' (Of old partisans, the things that pass) *Elsevier*, 23/03/91, p. 39. See also the appeal by Tanja Petovar, chairwoman of the Yugoslav Helsinki Committee to the West for 'a great deal of contact, not only between governments but also between independent groups of people', Nicole Lucas, *De stuiptrekkingen van een stervend systeem* (The twitchings of a dying system), *Trouw*, 04/07/91; Gied ten Berge/Mient Jan Faber, 'EG-ministers maken het nog bonter dan de Duitsers' (EC ministers go even further than the Germans), *de Volkskrant*, 19/12/91; Slavko Curuvija, 'Westen vergeet democraten Servië' (The West forgets Serb democrats), *de Volkskrant*, 28/01/92; S.L. Woodward, 'Redrawing Borders in a Period of Systemic Transition', Esman/Telhami (eds.), *Organizations*, p. 221.

[6] ABZ, DWH/ARA/00844, Circ. Van den Broek 386, 25/06/92.

- [7] ABZ, DPV/ARA/00782. FRY, assistance for independent media via Press Now, 19/01/94, NH-056/94.
- [8] See also Michiel Zonneveld & Jan van der Ven,, 'Subsidiegeld Oost-Europa split VVD' (Subsidy for Eastern Europe splits VVD), *Het Parool*, 17/09/92; 'VVD sust conflict over 'fraude' van Blaauw' (VVD calms conflict over 'fraud' by Blaauw) *NRC Handelsblad*, 13/05/93; 'VVD'er Blaauw op onverkiesbare plaats' (VVD politician Blaauw on non-electable standpoint) *Het Parool*, 13/10/93, VVD party leadership, documents of meetings, central committee, agenda item 12 of meeting of 10/10/94; agenda item 5B of meeting 25/05/95; agenda item 6 of meeting 06/06/95.
- [9] CDA Secretariat, Foreign Affairs Committee, 9316020, Alfred Mozer Foundation to Eduardo Frei Foundation, 25/02/93, no. 30.088 with appendix. J.M. Wiersma, deputy vice-chairman PvdA International Affairs, and B.J. van den Boomen, Director of Alfred Mozer Foundation to Dales and Van Rooij, 21/02/93.
- [10] CDA Secretariat, Foreign Affairs Committee, 93160596, Dales to W.K.N. Schmelzer, Chairman of Eduardo Frei Foundation, 13/10/93, BW93/2082.
- [11] Alfred Mozer Foundation, memo Arjen Berkvens to Wim van Gelder, q.v, re 'Subsidy scheme 'General Education and Schooling of Political Functionaries in Central and Eastern Europe''.
- [12] Alfred Mozer Foundation, memo Arjen Berkvens to Wim van Gelder, q.v., 'Subsidy scheme 'General Education and Schooling of Political Functionaries in Central and Eastern Europe''.
- [13] Alfred Mozer Foundation, J.W. Wiggers to the head of the Administration and Legislation department of the Ministry of the Interior, 28/03/96.
- [14] Alfred Mozer Foundation, Ministry of the Interior to Eduardo Frei Foundation, 11/04/96, BW96/624.
- [15] Alfred Mozer Foundation, memo Arjen Berkvens to Wim van Gelder, q.v., 'Subsidy scheme 'General Education and Schooling of Political Functionaries in Central and Eastern Europe''.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 5

The start of the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina: March 1992 – May 1992

5. The start of the war

In the last full week of March, in and around the towns of Bosanski Brod in the north, Jajce and Mostar in the centre and Neum in the south of Bosnia, fighting broke out between the JNA and Serb militias on one side and Croat and Muslim militias on the other. These encounters, which sometimes involved prolonged mortar and artillery bombardments, cost dozens of lives. Fighting had already broken out at the start of the month in Bosanski Brod, an industrial town with a population of 33,000, consisting of 43 per cent Croats, 35 per cent Serbs and 12 per cent Muslims. At this time Serb fighters attempted to take a bridge over the River Sava in order to prevent troops reaching the town from Croatia. Local Croats resisted this attempt with the support of the regular Croatian Army. Following a ceasefire of several weeks the JNA and Serb militias once again opened fire, and looting took place in the Croat quarter of the town. Croats took revenge on Serbs in the nearby village of Sijekovac, resulting in several deaths and the burning of houses. On Sunday 29 March several hundred Croats and Muslims tried to flee the town during a lull in the fighting. All men aged between 18 and 55 in this group were however prevented from leaving by the Patriotic League,^[1] the paramilitary grouping of Bosnian Muslims (see Chapter 3).

After Karadzic had said on 31 March that those parts of the police force controlled by the Serbs would take no further orders from the Bosnian government,^[2] Izetbegovic mobilized the territorial defence force and the police reserve of Bosnia-Hercegovina on 4 April. Of course, he could only do this for those parts of Bosnia where Muslims and Croats held authority. By 15 April at the latest the militias, which had shot up like mushrooms all over Bosnia, should allow themselves to be incorporated into the territorial defence force. The Patriotic League was also commanded to put itself under the command of the territorial defence force. When Izetbegovic gave this mobilization order, he declared in a speech on radio: 'Citizens of Sarajevo, sleep peacefully tonight, there will be no war.' (*Narode, spavaj mirno, rata nece biti.*)^[3] Izetbegovic had been making such statements for the past half-year,^[4] but this time the reassuring effect failed to work. The Bosnian Serb leaders demanded that the President withdraw the order immediately. Izetbegovic refused to do this.

During this weekend members of the different ethnic groups set up barricades at various points in Sarajevo. On Sunday 5 April fighting broke out in the suburbs. Explosions were heard all over the city. Nonetheless there were still many people in the Bosnian capital who resisted the growing ethnic tensions. Following a call from the peace movement, the trade unions and the television station, between 60,000 and 100,000 demonstrators gathered in front of the Bosnian parliament to show their rejection of the nationalist parties. They demanded new elections, waved portraits of Tito and chanted slogans against the 'murderers'. But the demonstration was brutally disrupted by gunmen of the SDS, Karadzic's party, who were positioned on the roof of the Holiday Inn hotel that accommodated the headquarters of the SDS. Several demonstrators were killed. According to various observers, members of the SDA, Izetbegovic's party, also fired on the demonstrators.^[5] If this is true, it was the last act in the joint dismantling by the SDS and the SDA of the desire for a pluriform society in Bosnia.

Following this shooting Muslim fighters stormed the SDS headquarters in the Holiday Inn hotel, where they arrested a number of gunmen. The SDS politicians made themselves scarce. Then Bosnian Serbs bombarded the old – i.e. Muslim – quarter of the city with shells. In the night of 5/6 April the JNA, commanded by Colonel-General[6] Milutin Kukanjac, took Sarajevo's airport.

On 7 April, the day that the European Community and the United States recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bosnian Serb parliament decided definitively to implement the Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was to be based in Pale, a ski resort just outside Sarajevo. The SDS withdrew its two members, Koljevic and Plavsic, from the collective presidium of Bosnia and asked all other functionaries still active in Bosnian political bodies to follow their example. As reason for their departure from the Bosnian presidium, Koljevic and Plavsic cited Izetbegovic's mobilization order for the territorial defence force. From this time onwards Koljevic and Plavsic formed the presidium of the Republika Srpska. Karadzic would first join this on 12 May and would then immediately become the *de facto* president of the Bosnian Serb republic. But before this was to happen, the presidium of the Republika Srpska declared on 15 April that there was an immediate threat of war and ordered mobilization of the territorial defence force throughout the territory controlled by the republic. All those subject to military service were ordered to report to the local headquarters of the territorial defence force.[7]

Between March and June the Bosnian Serb forces, supported by the JNA and paramilitaries from Serbia, took control of a large part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The territorial goals of the Republika Srpska were Northern and Western Bosnia (around Banja Luka), Eastern Bosnia (the Drina Valley), Eastern Herzegovina (to the east of the River Neretva) and the Posavina Corridor. According to the 1981 census, the population mix in the north-west of Bosnia was 63% Serb, 15% Muslim and 10% Croat. Eastern Bosnia, separated by the Drina, bordered on Serbia and in the strategic planning of the Serbian military formed a buffer zone for the Serbian motherland. The Posavina, the Sava Valley, was of great strategic importance to the Serbs due to the link it provided with the Serb areas in Croatia. It has already been mentioned that talks between Croats and Serbs on a division of Bosnia-Herzegovina had failed precisely on the question of who should control this latter area, around the town of Brcko. The valley was also important because within Bosnia it was to connect the north-western and the eastern areas of the Bosnian Serbs. Fighting for possession of this valley, known as the Posavina Corridor, would continue throughout the war. Just to the north of the valley, at the start of the war, there was a small area separated from the rest of Bosnia that was held by the Croats. They knew they could rely on the support of the Patriotic League and the Green Berets. This area included the town of Bosanski Brod, on the border of Croatia and Bosnia. On 5 April the Croatian Army moved into the town.

Apart from the Sava Valley, the interests of the Bosnian Croats were located chiefly in West-Herzegovina (to the west of the Neretva). It was thus possible to divide the general spheres of interest in Herzegovina with the Serbs, with the exception of the town of Mostar which lay on the Neretva and was to be heavily contended, all the more so because the Muslims wished to control it as well. In April 1992 fighting broke out here involving all three ethnic groups. This fighting was to last almost two years. It became clear that the Croats were prepared to push through their claims in West-Herzegovina by force of arms when, at the end of March and the start of April, Croat forces operating from their stronghold in the town of Tomislavgrad (Duvno) fought for possession of the strategically important Kupres Pass (see map in Part I, Chapter 3, Section 8 of this report), where the JNA had taken up positions in the previous months. During talks between the political leaders the Serbs had in fact agreed to Croat domination of West-Herzegovina, but this area still contained many military bases and installations that the JNA was not prepared to give up without a fight. Moreover the Kupres Pass provided access to Central Bosnia, where the mix of the various ethnic groups was considerable.

The armed forces: the creation of the ABiH

On 8 April the Bosnian Croat leader Mate Boban instituted the Croat Defence Council, *Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane* (HVO), as the military branch of the Croat Nationalist Party HDZ in Herzeg-Bosna, the name

for the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina claimed by the Croats. The HVO was a Croat militia originally consisting of soldiers who had gained their first battle experience in Croatia. Since the Bosnian government, at the start of the war, had to direct all its attention to the defence of Sarajevo, the HVO was given a free hand as long as it attacked the Bosnian Serb forces. The government in Sarajevo expected that in the course of time the HVO would place itself under the command of the Bosnian territorial defence force, but this never happened. The HVO had a strength of between 35,000 and 45,000 and could count on the support of about 15,000 troops of the regular Croatian Army, the *Hrvatska Vojska* (HV).^[8] Moreover the HVO depended heavily on the Croatian Army for its supplies. During the first six months of the war the HVO supported the still-weak Bosnian government army. Finally, the Croat armed forces also contained paramilitaries such as the Croatian Defence Force, the *Hrvatske Obrambene Snage* (HOS), the armed wing of the Croatian Party of Rights, the *Hrvatska Stranka Prava* (HSP), which wanted to see Croat territory extended to the Drina.

After Izetbegovic had mobilized the territorial defence force, seven of the nine regional staffs and 73 of the 109 municipal staffs declared their loyalty to his government.^[9] On 8 April Izetbegovic placed the leadership of the territorial defence force in the hands of Colonel Hasan Efendic, a Muslim. His appointed deputy was the Serb Jovan Divjak, while the appointed Chief of Staff and Head of Operations was the Croat Stjepan Siber. The appointment of Efendic was a blow for Sefer Halilovic, one of the leaders of the Patriotic League, who had felt that the territorial defence force should be subordinate to the Patriotic League and not the other way around. Another problem in the eyes of Halilovic was that the Patriotic League consisted mostly of supporters of the SDA, while the army was expressly Bosnian instead of being a Muslim army. As a result, members of the Patriotic League had to place themselves under the command of Serb officers who shortly before had still been on their secret arrest lists. A reconciliation between the two groups was soon achieved, however, when Halilovic was given command of the new army's Operations Centre. Other leading figures from the Patriotic League were kept happy with important posts at the Ministry of Defence.

Efendic issued an order that officers of the JNA had until 20 April to join the territorial defence force. If they did not do this they would be regarded as the enemy. In these days about a hundred officers of the JNA went over to the Bosnian armed forces.^[10] These included several later key players, such as the future Chief of Staff of the Bosnian Army Enver Hadzihasanovic and also Rasim Delic, at that time fairly unknown but to become the commander of the government army (the ABiH) in the summer of 1993. But generally speaking few officers shifted from the JNA to the Bosnian government, resulting in highly deficient training of the government troops in the early days.^[11] On 27 April Izetbegovic demanded that all federal troops should leave Bosnia.

As early as 14 April Efendic had issued instructions for the defence of the sovereignty and independence of Bosnia, including the recommendation that weapons depots should be seized and garrisons blockaded. These instructions were even more optimistic than those of the Patriotic League from the end of February (see Chapter 3). According to Efendic's instructions, the liberation of Bosnia should be achieved within 45 days at the latest.

Besides the territorial defence forces, the Patriotic League and the *Zelene Beretke*, the Bosnian armed forces consisted chiefly of troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, numbering some 30,000 men and led by Commander Dragan Vikić. On 24 April it was established that the Bosnian armed forces already numbered more than 100,000 men. However, this was not as significant as might seem because there was a serious shortage of weapons.

On 23 May Izetbegovic relieved Efendic of the command of the Bosnian armed forces, telling him that the army needed a younger commander. According to Efendic himself the real reason was that he had a Serb wife. The official explanation was that as of 20 May the territorial defence force had ceased to exist and thus also the post held by Efendic. Moreover, it was said, after almost 45 years he was entitled to a pension. On 5 July 1992 the collective presidium of Bosnia-Herzegovina announced the formation of the *Armija Bosne i Hercegovine* (ABiH) as the sole official army force of the Bosnian state. The appointed commander was Sefer Halilovic, meaning that his dream of holding the highest position in the Bosnian armed forces had now been achieved after all. At the age of 40 Halilovic was

indeed considerably younger than Efendic, but he was also much less experienced. He had never been to higher military college and he did not have a particular reputation as a strategist. According to many he thanked his appointment chiefly to his membership of the SDA.[12]

The ABiH rapidly developed a corps structure that was linked to at first four and later six regions. The Bosnian government army had to be built up almost from scratch, but there was a strong motivation in the population to join its ranks. As a result the Bosnian government army could be formed around the many tens of thousands of men who volunteered for service in April.[13] In early 1993, according to its Deputy Commander Divjak, the army comprised around 200,000 men, not all of whom however were armed. In 1994 the government army reportedly reached a size of 250,000 men.[14] Gow assumes an operational size of 40,000 troops in early 1993. A year later this size had doubled, while there were then 120,000 men available in reserve.[15]

Despite the arms embargo, the ABiH managed to obtain light weapons from abroad. Furthermore an armaments industry was set up on the territory of the Bosnian government in which 15,000 people were reported to be working at the start of 1994. The materiel produced here included rifles and shells.[16] Important armaments factories were located in Sarajevo, Gorazde, Vitez, Konjic, Zenica and Tuzla. In the two years between the start of the war and early 1994, the Bosnian government is reported to have achieved a production of 20,000 automatic rifles, 100,000 mines, 50,000 hand grenades and 11 million rounds for small arms.[17] During the siege of Sarajevo, the city was even able to achieve an annual production of 40,000 82 mm mortar shells.[18] However, the lack of heavy weapons would remain a constant hindrance for a more offensive strategy by the Bosnian government army.

In the course of the conflict mercenaries fought for all three parties. The Serbs received assistance chiefly from Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians and Greeks. At the start of 1993, for instance, 70 Russian specialists appear to have been active on the Serb front at Srebrenica.[19] On the Croat side the foreign auxiliaries were mostly adventurers and figures of extreme right-wing persuasion. A large proportion of these came from Germany, Great Britain and Sweden.[20] In Central Bosnia men from Muslim countries came to fight, and were referred to as *mujaheddin*. In all cases there seem to have been no more than a few hundred up to maximally 2000 persons of each nationality.[21] The highest reports include 2500 Russians on the Serb side at the start of 1993[22] and several thousand Iranians on the Bosnian side in the summer of 1992.[23] In both cases the numbers seem to have been exaggerated as a result of war propaganda.

The conflict around Sarajevo

In the months of April and May the defence of Sarajevo still relied to an important extent on persons with a criminal background, such as the former pop singer Musan Topalovic ('Caco'), who had become a friend of Izetbegovic during the latter's imprisonment in 1980s, Jusuf Prazina ('Juka') and Ramiz Delalic ('Celo II'), who has already been discussed due to his suspected part in the shooting of the Serbian wedding guests on 1 March. These criminals formed part of the Green Berets, which had strong links with the government in Sarajevo and the Bosnian government army (the ABiH).[24] However, they repeatedly committed breaches of the Geneva Convention.[25] They 'lifted' men from the streets and forced them to dig defence lines at the front. The indispensability of these criminal elements in the first months of the war made them virtually immune to the law, even when they committed acts about which the Bosnian state was less happy. They gained control, for instance, of the food supply and aid facilities in Sarajevo. Celo became commander of the 109th Mountain Brigade. Topalovic was appointed as commander of 10th Brdska Brigade. Their units successfully defended Mount Trebevic to the south of Sarajevo, but at the same time they were notorious for their misdeeds. Topalovic intimidated the non-Muslim population of Sarajevo: he had defenceless Serbs and Croats kidnapped, tortured and murdered. Hundreds were killed in this way. Then he had the bodies of the victims dumped in Kazani, a ravine on the front line.[26] In fact Muslims also became victims of his actions. His followers kidnapped rich residents of Sarajevo in order to extract high ransoms, they participated in extortion and they raped women. As time went on Topalovic accepted the authority of

the army headquarters less and less, and heeded only the links with the SDA. Izetbegovic is said to have been a regular visitor to Caco's headquarters.[27]

When a new Bosnian government took office under the leadership of Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic in late 1993, with respect for human rights as a key element of its programme, figures such as Topalovic were finally dealt with. On 26 October army troops and police surrounded his headquarters. During the storming of the building 18 people were killed, including nine soldiers and policemen. Topalovic was arrested and killed the same night at the headquarters of the First Army Corps. 'Shot while attempting to escape' was the official explanation. Delalic was arrested at the same time.

Alibabic, the chief of police of Sarajevo at the time, was convinced that Izetbegovic and his party had used Topalovic to create a mono-ethnic army and a pure Muslim state.[28] In 1996 Izetbegovic gave his personal permission for a ritual reburial of Topalovic, which turned into a demonstration by 25,000 people. When General Jovan Divjak protested at this display being staged for someone who had probably been responsible for the deaths of many Croats and Serbs, Izetbegovic wrote back to him that up to October 1993 he had no knowledge of the serious crimes for which Topalovic had been responsible: 'Until then I thought that all his actions had been no worse than making people dig trenches and bothering people.' [29] Divjak knew that this was not true. As early as 27 May 1993 he had written the President a letter in which he summarized the crimes of Topalovic in detail. In September 1993, following the action against Delalic and Topalovic, the Minister of Internal Affairs Bakir Alispahic declared that he had been made to wait for months for top-level permission before being allowed to conduct this operation.[30] Prazina later went over to the HVO and was eventually discovered murdered in Belgium.[31]

The defenders of Sarajevo, which is situated in a valley, found themselves confronted with Serb troops who occupied most of the hills around the city from which they bombarded the city with their superior firepower. The first heavy bombardments took place on 21 April. Serb groups then began with attacks on Ilidza and Grbavica, suburbs of Sarajevo, but the defenders of the city were partially able to prevent this loss of territory.[32]

After heavy artillery bombardments of Sarajevo had taken place on 1 May, the following day Bosnian Serb troops penetrated into the suburbs of Sarajevo; in the weeks that followed heavy house-to-house fighting took place. The attack was carried out simultaneously with an attempt to oust Izetbegovic. He landed at Sarajevo's airport on 2 May following a visit to Lisbon and was then taken prisoner by the JNA unit stationed there. It hoped to exchange the Bosnian President for the JNA commander of Sarajevo, General Kukanjac, and 400 men of the JNA who were surrounded in their barracks in the centre of the city by troops of the territorial defence force. Weeks of negotiations had already taken place to facilitate the departure of these troops from the city, but Sefer Halilovic was only prepared to allow this if they left behind their weapons. Kukanjac was not prepared to agree to this.

At the same time there seem to have been plans to use the imprisonment of Izetbegovic to allow Fikret Abdic to take over power. Abdic was a Muslim who was known to favour an agreement with the Serbs. In the elections to the presidium in 1990...

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[1] 'Croaten en Islamieten ontvluchten strijd Bosnië' (Croats and Muslims flee from conflict in Bosnia) *de Volkskrant*, 30/03/92.

[2] Amnesty International, *Abuse*, p. 7.

[3] Biography of Izetbegovic, Gale Research Company, 1996.

[4] Burg & Shoup, *War*, p. 78; M. Boroagovic and S. Rustempasic, 'The white paper on Alija Izetbegovic', http://www.xs4all.nl/~frankti/Bosnian_congress/izetbegovic_white_paper.html, consulted on 17/02/00. They date a similar statement to January 1992.

[5] X. Bougarel, 'Bosnia and Hercegovina - State and Communitarianism', Dyker & Vejvoda (ed.), *Yugoslavia*, p. 102; VN, S/1994/674/Appendix VI, pp. 152-154; MacKenzie, *Peacekeeper*, p. 136.

[6] This is a rank comparable to lieutenant general.

- [7] ICTY (IT-98-33), D73/9, Decision no. 03/11/92 by Presidency of the RS.
- [8] Detrez, *Sloop*, pp. 280-281; Calic, *Krieg*, p. 99.
- [9] The following passage on the history of the creation of the Bosnian Army is based on the serial by Sefko Hodzic, 'Kako je nastajala armija Bosnië i Hercegovine', *Oslobodenje*, 15/04 t/m 10/05/1997.
- [10] Hartmann, *Milosevic*, p. 280.
- [11] Jovan Divjak, 'The First Phase, 1992-1993: struggle for survival and genesis of the Army of Bosnia-Hercegovina', Magas/Zanic (eds.), *War*, p. 161.
- [12] 'Bez hapsenja Radovana Karadžica i njemu slicnih definitivno se ne može očekivati nikakav napredak', *Ljiljan*, 12/11/97, pp. 7-9; interview A. Makar, 16/06/00 and confidential interview (5).
- [13] Jovan Divjak in Magas & Zanic (eds.), *War*, p. 267.
- [14] Jovan Divjak, 'The First Phase, 1992-1993: struggle for survival and genesis of the Army of Bosnia-Hercegovina', Magas & Zanic (eds.), *War*, p. 162.
- [15] Gow, 'Forces', p. 2.
- [16] VN, S/1994, 674/Appendix III, p. 29.
- [17] Calic, *Krieg*, p. 102.
- [18] Rusmir Mahmutcehajic in Magas & Zanic (eds.), *War*, p. 263.
- [19] Cekic, *Aggression*, pp. 240-241.
- [20] Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 249. For the Dutch figures in this category refer to Chapter 2.
- [21] For divergent figures see Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 240; Calic, *Krieg*, p. 100; Dzamic, *Psi*, pp. 206-207; Gow, 'Year', p. 3; Vego, 'Army', p. 66; VN, S/1994/674/Add.2(Vol. I), 28/12/94, Appendix III; ABZ, 910 Yugoslavia, part 4, 'Informal meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Gymnich) in Brocket Hall (VK), 12-13 September 1992', appendix to secure fax no. 15 from Foreign Affairs /DEU to Washington embassy, 24/09/92.
- [22] Cekic, *Aggression*, p. 241.
- [23] Sahara, 'World', p. 388.
- [24] United Nations, S/1994/674/Add.2(Vol. I), 28/12/94, Appendix III.A, II.B.1.(b). For Prazina see also Hans Moleman, 'Sarajevo viert feestje bij vertrek laatste Joegoslavische militairen' (Sarajevo celebrates departure of the last Yugoslav military), *de Volkskrant*, 06/06/92.
- [25] United Nations, S/1994/674/Add.2(Vol. I), 28/12/94, Appendix III.A, II.B.1.(d).
- [26] On these practices by 'Caco' see for instance Othon Zimmermann, 'Caco', moordenaar/held', ('Caco', murderer/hero) *Algemeen Dagblad*, 06/12/97.
- [27] Othon Zimmermann, 'Caco', moordenaar/held', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 06/12/97.
- [28] Othon Zimmermann, 'Caco', moordenaar/held', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 06/12/97.
- [29] Othon Zimmermann, 'Caco', moordenaar/held', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 06/12/97.
- [30] J.F. Burns, 'New Horror for Sarajevo: Muslims Killing Muslims', *The New York Times*, 31/10/93.
- [31] See also 'Power-starved Sarajevo faces prolonged shortage', Agence France Presse, 05/01/94.
- [32] Raymond van den Boogaard, 'Servische militie in aanval in Sarjevo', (Serb militia in attack on Sarajevo) *NRC Handelsblad*, 21/04/92; idem, 'Om Sarajevo wordt fel gevochten' (Fierce fighting around Sarajevo), *NRC Handelsblad*, 22/04/92; idem, 'Sarajevo is binnen drie dagen een luguber oord geworden' (Sarajevo becomes a dismal place within three days) and 'Nietsontziende woestheid kenmerkt strijd in Sarajevo' (Battle in Sarajevo marked by ruthless fury) *NRC Handelsblad*, 23/04/92; 'Moslims bij Sarajevo op de vlucht gedreven' (Muslims at Sarajevo forced to flee) *NRC Handelsblad*, 25/04/92; 'Servische strijders vallen Sarajevo aan' (Serb fighters attack Sarajevo) *de Volkskrant*, 22/04/92; 'Servische' wijk in Sarajevo onder vuur' (Serb district in Sarajevo under fire), *de Volkskrant*, 23/04/92.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 5

The start of the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina: March 1992 – May 1992

6. Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia

While the attention of the West was mostly directed towards the developments around the capital Sarajevo, there was considerable activity by Serb paramilitary groups elsewhere in Bosnia in the months from April through to June. Serb paramilitaries were chiefly active in the north-west and east of Bosnia, in towns such as Brcko, Doboj, Prijedor, Bratunac, Bijeljina, Foca, Visegrad and Zvornik. They allowed journalists and representatives of international aid organizations to enter the areas where they were operating only in very small numbers. Since telephone and telex links were also interrupted, the media had to rely mostly on accounts by Displaced Persons and they could present news only with delay and great caution. Insofar as news did emerge, to begin with it was mostly from Eastern Bosnia.

Bosnian Serb crisis staffs or war councils were set up in all towns in East and Northwest-Bosnia; these usually consisted of the chief of police, the commander of the local military unit and the head of the SDS. They had often been able to acquire the weapons of the local police and/or the territorial defence force, thus enabling them to act against the Croat and Muslim population in their town and the surrounding villages. Furthermore the practice became established whereby local political leaders invited, or even paid, paramilitaries such as Arkan to act in their municipality, possibly in cooperation with the local Serb militia.[1]

Despite such local initiatives the actions by these paramilitary groups were primarily concerted by political and military authorities. Research has repeatedly shown that this was not a matter of independently operating, local warlords, as was often thought in the West. These paramilitaries could indeed be seen to operate within the existing power relationships.[2] Insofar as concretely established the signs point towards Belgrade, and in particular to President Milosevic.[3] The Serb paramilitary units were correspondingly deployed mostly in the areas claimed by the Serbs, but where they still encountered large groups of Muslims or Croats, and in the area where the Serbs needed to create a continuous region between Serbia and the Serbian centres in Croatia.

In Bosnia the ethnic cleansing took two forms. First of all the classical method, already described, which had already applied in Croatia before and which aimed to put the population of a certain place to flight within days, if not hours. In addition there was a slower variant, used in three types of situation. Firstly, in places where the Serbs had come to power relatively easily, from within the local community. From their positions of power they exerted gradual pressure to make the Muslim population leave. Secondly, Croats or Muslims were sometimes so many in number that a rapid Serb cleansing was impossible. And thirdly, the Serbs knew all too well that it would be unwise to apply open, large-scale cleansing when the eyes of the world were upon them. An example of the slow variant was provided by Banja Luka, where the SDS had come to power through a local coup. After this the process went roughly as described. To begin with Muslim men were dismissed from positions of authority and later from every independent position. Moreover, Muslims were called up to serve in the Bosnian Serb army. When they refused to enlist they were dismissed from their job. Since the job was often linked to an apartment or house – a legacy of the Communist past – those who refused

military service not only lost their job but the home for their family as well. Sometimes at this stage people 'disappeared', either murdered or sent to camps. Possessions such as cars were confiscated.

A good illustration is provided by the decision taken by the Serb war council in the small town of Celinac near Banja Luka in September 1992. It imposed a curfew of 4pm to 6am on non-Serbs. The decree also forbade them to gather in catering establishments and other public places; to bathe and swim in rivers; to hunt and to fish; to move to another town without permission; to carry a weapon; to travel by car; to gather in groups of more than three people; to have contact with relations outside the town; to use any communication resources other than the telephone at the post office; to wear uniform; and to make property transactions without permission.[4]

The case of Banja Luka proved that the slow variant of cleansing could also be effective: at the end of 1993 just 40,000 Muslims were still there compared to the 350,000 who had lived there before the war.[5] In both kinds of cleansing the Bosnian Serb aggressors often forced the Croats and Muslims before their departure to sign declarations that they were leaving their homes voluntarily and waiving ownership of all possessions that they left behind.[6]

Even more than had been the case in Croatia, the streams of Displaced Persons that appeared in Bosnia in April and May were not a side-effect of the war but rather the intentionally achieved result, because the Bosnian Serbs were trying to 'cleanse' areas of Muslims and Croats. Men and women were often separated from one another during the cleansing actions. Men in particular were often held for shorter or longer periods in camps, schools, sports halls and many other temporary detention centres. The conditions under which this took place were often appalling. There was a shortage of food, water, hygiene and space, people were mistreated, tortured, murdered, and there was sexual abuse particularly of women.[7]

In April and May the JNA, paramilitaries and militias together drove the Muslims out of virtually all of Eastern Bosnia, from the towns Bijeljina, Zvornik, Bratunac, Visegrad and Foca. Ultimately enclaves remained around Srebrenica, Zepa, Cerska and Gorazde, where Displaced Persons from the surrounding areas sought refuge. A brief summary is given below of the events in several East-Bosnian towns in the month of April. The cleansing actions in Northwest-Bosnia are dealt with in the following chapter.

On 1 April Arkan entered Bijeljina in the north-east of Bosnia with his unit. This town of about 100,000 inhabitants had a population made up of almost 60 per cent Serbs and more than 30 per cent Muslims. Arkan's Guard, which now comprised more than a thousand men, had been renamed the Arkan Tigers because they kept a live tiger as a mascot.[8] In Bijeljina the *Arkanovci* started the process of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia with the execution of 27 Muslims on 1 April.[9] Following the cleansing the Arkan Tigers could expect their reward in the form of mass looting. Reports of the execution of the 27 Muslims prompted Izetbegovic to send Biljana Plavsic to the town to institute an investigation. Instead of doing this she gave her notorious kiss to Arkan and praised him as a true Serb hero. After the *Arkanovci* had carried out their dirty work with the approval of the JNA, they left the town in the hands of the local SDS committee, which continued the repression against the remaining Muslims so that they too ultimately fled.

At the end of March units of Seselj had already arrived in Zvornik, a town on the Drina where the population was over 60 per cent Muslim.[10] The town occupied a strategic position on both the Belgrade-Sarajevo line and the Belgrade-Tuzla line. Seselj's men warned the Muslims in the town and the immediate surroundings that they had ten days to hand in their weapons. On 7 April units of Seselj, accompanied by some of Arkan's men and the *Beli Orlovi*, Draganovci and a large number of smaller groups, arrived in the neighbouring village of Grbavci, where they killed Muslims who had not handed in their weapons. The next day the JNA, together with paramilitary units and supported by the Serb territorial defence force, attacked Zvornik; during the fighting it was not possible to make any clear distinctions between the groups. A Muslim unit managed to defend the town for several days but was unable, partly due to lack of ammunition, to withstand the artillery bombardments, mostly coming from tanks on the Serbian side of the Drina.

Following the fall of Zvornik the paramilitary groups were given a free hand while the JNA kept the town surrounded.[11] The paramilitary groups were reportedly led by Marko Pavlovic, who was reported to be a member of the Serbian state security service. The *Arkanovci* committed the most crimes. Torture, rape and murder were the order of the day for more than a week. Houses of Muslims were plundered and then set on fire. Jose Maria de Mendiluce, the highest representative of UNHCR in the region, arrived in Zvornik while the Serb paramilitaries held sway and described later what he observed: 'I saw kids put under the treads of tanks, placed there by grown men, and then run over by other grown men (...) Everywhere, people were shooting. The fighters were moving through the town, systematically killing all the Muslims they could get their hands on. It was an intoxication (...)' [12] In the following weeks too, until July, serious mistreatment of Muslims continued incidentally in and around Zvornik, this time mostly by Seselj's Cetniks. The remaining Muslims were then deported, either to Serbia or to the Muslim area around Tuzla.

On 5 April the first shells were fired at the more southerly Visegrad, a town of 20,000 inhabitants with a Muslim majority. On the same day helicopters of the JNA landed there. The next day *Arkanovci* attacked the town together with the Uzice Corps of the JNA, Seselj's Cetniks, Beli Orlovi and local Serbs. At the same time a member of the Patriotic League threatened to blow up the dam on the Drina near Visegrad.[13] Muslims then fled in panic, for fear both of the Serb paramilitaries and a flood, while the Serbs headed for higher ground. On 14 April units of the Uzice Corps entered the town, after which the SDS took over government of the municipality. The Muslims were encouraged to return; the JNA would guarantee their safety and President Izetbegovic had ordered that the dam should be left intact. Many Muslims followed this call and, with the exception of a few whose names were on Serb lists, were allowed back into the town. After this peace seemed gradually to return to Visegrad. At the end of May, however, the JNA started a gradual withdrawal. Then paramilitary groups arrived in the town again, including men who seem to have been from the Uzice Corps but had changed uniforms. Mass murders, looting and arson then followed. Part of the population was deported or killed in concentration camps.[14]

On 16 April, following days of bombardment by the Uzice Corps of the JNA, Serb units took Foca, a town where the numbers of Muslims (51.6%) and Serbs (45.3%) had been virtually balanced up to then. Following the fall of the town, paramilitaries conducted large-scale plundering. A few days later, when foreign aid providers were allowed to visit the battered town, they wondered where the population had gone.[15] The place resembled a ghost town.[16] The Serbs, who were now in control after the capture of the town, had killed the local elite and everyone whom they believed to be a member of the SDA. The Muslims who had been unable to flee were captured, the men and women separated and interned in separate camps. In the meantime the town had ceased to be called Foca and had been renamed Srbinje.

On 6 and 7 May Serb troops took the town of Brcko without much resistance. They herded the non-Serb men together and issued verdicts on them during 'trials' lasting a few minutes. Hundreds of men are said to have been killed in this way.[17] So just a month after the start of the war the Serbs had conquered Brcko and the nearby village of Doboij, meaning they had created a corridor between the Serb areas in Northwest-Bosnia and Eastern Bosnia. In mid-May however this corridor came under heavy attack from Croat and Muslim forces, after which only a narrow strip remained.

New administrative constellations in Bosnia

At about the same time, on 6 May, Karadzic and Boban made territorial agreements on Bosnia-Herzegovina during a meeting in the Austrian town of Graz: Serbs and Croats were to divide up Bosnia and leave only a small part of the republic to the Muslims.[18] However, a definitive agreement once again failed to materialize due to disagreement on the Posavina Corridor, the ownership of Mostar and the border between the Serb and Croat areas in Herzegovina.[19] The talks between the Croat and Serb leaders of Bosnia were not however without significance. When in mid-May the defenders of Sarajevo made an attempt to attack the Serb troops in the rear at Ilidza, they found that a Croat unit stationed at Kiseljak stood in their way.

The Croats were well aware that they held a key position in the conflict and were prepared to enter into frequently changing alliances. On 21 May representatives of Croatia and Bosnia signed a political and military cooperation agreement in Zagreb. The Bosnian Croats of the HDZ accepted the political hegemony of Izetbegovic, in exchange for which the SDA accepted the presence of the military arm of the HDZ, the HVO, on a large part of Bosnian territory. This agreement was followed by a defence pact on 18 June and a treaty of friendship and cooperation on 21 July 1992. All this did not prevent the Bosnian Croat leaders from declaring their own 'Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna' with its capital in Mostar. Mate Boban became the head of this new autonomous area, within which Boban and his followers exerted authority over army, police and education. The region had its own flag which was derived from the Croatian one and the residents used the *kuna*, the Croatian currency. The Bosnian Croats viewed this development as a step towards separation from Bosnia; in many respects the area functioned thereafter as a part of Croatia.

In this time the HVO experienced a large influx of recruits from the Bosnian Muslims who lived in the area it controlled. An important part of this recruitment took place, with the knowledge of the government, through the Muslim organization *Zmaj od Bosne* (Dragon of Bosnia). In Hercegovina the proportion of Muslims in the HVO was the lowest (20 per cent), in Central-Bosnia it was 40 per cent and in the Posavina area it was no less than 80 per cent. Conversely, at the start of June 1992 the Bosnian territorial defence forces, shortly before they were converted into the Bosnian government army, consisted of 18 per cent Croats and 12 per cent Serbs.

Elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia too, issues of new authority and administration were being dealt with. On 10 December the Badinter Commission had declared that Yugoslavia was in a state of dissolution. Serbia and Montenegro, however, had not submitted a request for recognition to the EC as had the four other former republics, namely Bosnia-Hercegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia, in December 1991. Indeed, Serbia and Montenegro took the position that instead of the Federation of Yugoslavia being dissolved, they were in fact continuing it, while the other republics had seceded. The background to this situation was the issue of who would get the assets of the Yugoslavian State. If Serbia and Montenegro were together to be regarded as the legal successor of Yugoslavia, then they would be entitled to the corresponding possessions. The same would however not apply, if Milosevic had his way, to the liabilities: according to the regime in Belgrade, the issue of the state debts should be handled by a commission set up to oversee the distribution of these among the former parts of Yugoslavia. Furthermore Serbia and Montenegro, as the legal successor to Yugoslavia, could continue to occupy the position in international organizations previously held by that country. Moreover, Serbia and Montenegro, by not asking the EC for recognition, had prevented conditions being set for them with regard to the protection of minorities – conditions that the other republics had had to satisfy.

If the idea of a continuation of the State of Yugoslavia, albeit in a more modest form, were to be abandoned and it were to be assumed that Yugoslavia had disintegrated, then the six former republics should have issued a claim for the division of the possessions of the dissolved federation. In that case Serbia and Montenegro, possibly jointly, would have to reapply for a place in international organizations. This question of state succession was a thorny problem which the EC preferred to leave well alone. The ministers of the community thus took the position that the parties involved should solve it for themselves during the Yugoslavia Conference. They still had no desire to undertake 'derecognition', the reverse action to recognition. In a certain sense it actually suited the EC that the issue was unresolved. As long as there was something resembling a central Yugoslavian authority, they could retain their ambassadors in Belgrade and maintain contacts with the Yugoslavian mission to the UN in New York.^[20]

Following the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia by the European Community, the Milosevic regime had in the meantime decided to establish a 'new' or 'third' Yugoslavia which would consist of at least Serbia and Montenegro. Milosevic and his supporters said at that time that they hoped all of Bosnia too would form part of the 'third' Yugoslavia. If not, then in any case they wanted the 'Serb' parts of Bosnia to form part of it.^[21] On 27 April 1992 the federal assembly of the former Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia accepted the constitution for a new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to comprise Serbia and Montenegro. The new federation claimed to be the successor to the old

Yugoslavia and to take that country's place in international organizations. In Serbia and Montenegro this was referred to as a third Yugoslavia.

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- [8] This is illustrated in Haviv, *Blood*, p. 71.
- [9] Shocking photographs of the action of the Arkan Tigers in Bijeljina in: Haviv, *Blood*, pp.56-61. For more information about the events in Bijeljina see Duijzings' Appendix, *Geschiedenis en herinnering in Oost-Bosnië*.
- [10] For a report on the events around Zvornik see Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, 'Operations'. See also Sremac, *War*, p. 95 and Duijzings' Appendix, *Geschiedenis en herinnering in Oost-Bosnië*.
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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 5

The start of the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina: March 1992 – May 1992

7. The response of the international community

The large majority of the international community did not however recognize the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) as the legal successor to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). On 11 May the foreign ministers of the EC stated that Serbia was the major aggressor in Bosnia and that withdrawal of federal troops from Bosnia-Hercegovina was a condition for, at the least, reducing the bloodshed. The EC states decided to withdraw their ambassadors from Belgrade until further notice, and shortly after this the United States, Norway, Sweden and Austria followed suit. The EC ministers also proposed suspending Yugoslavia as a member of the CSCE. This move was not taken for the time being due to the opposition of Russia but the CSCE did decide shortly afterwards to exclude Serbia, which held the Yugoslavian seat at this organization, from participation in the decision-making on the crisis in the former Yugoslavia until the end of June. Furthermore the EC ministers threatened further economic sanctions and the exclusion of Yugoslavia from other international organizations. The position taken by the EC ministers meant international isolation of the regime in Belgrade. After this a total freeze on diplomatic relations was repeatedly mooted. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not in favour of this, however, chiefly because the military attaché in Belgrade was a useful contact for the Ministry of Defence and the intelligence services, and his presence was also important for the Dutch UNPROFOR troops.[1]

On 4 July the Badinter Commission declared that the process of dissolution in which the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had been engaged in was now at an end. In other words, the FRY could not be the legal successor to the SFRY, because this no longer existed. There was thus no continuity and the FRY could thus also not take the place of the old Yugoslavia in international organizations. On 22 September the General Assembly of the United Nations was to accept Resolution 47/1 which also established and declared that if the FRY wished to form part of the organs of the UN it must submit a corresponding request.[2] Nevertheless, even after this the EC countries decided to maintain their embassies in Belgrade and the Yugoslavian embassies in their own capitals for practical reasons, to enable contacts with the 'new Yugoslavia'.[3]

The actions of the Serbs in Bosnia had thus, in a little over a month since the outbreak of the war, led to a hardening of the EC's attitude towards Serbia. Until shortly before, events had seemed likely to take a different course. All the efforts of the EC and the US seemed in fact to be aimed at keeping the Belgrade regime happy. During the General Council in Luxembourg on 6 April the French Foreign Minister Dumas, against the will of Genscher but with the support of Van den Broek, had arranged for the recognition of Bosnia-Hercegovina to be accompanied by efforts to lift the sanctions against Serbia. The French line was intended to prevent an isolation of Serbia, because this would only encourage Serbia to intervene on the side of the Serbs in Bosnia.[4] It was only by linking the lifting of sanctions to a number of strict conditions that Genscher, who was spending his last days as Foreign Minister, was able to prevent the implementation of this plan.[5] At the end of April the head of the ECMM mission also stressed the need to 'dose' the international pressure on Serbia: too much would

be counterproductive and lead to a 'fortress mentality' that would make Serbia even more intractable for the international community.[6]

In mid-April the American Principal Assistant to the Secretary of State, Johnson, had travelled to Sarajevo. Izetbegovic asked him for NATO air attacks against Bosnian Serb positions. But Johnson told the Bosnian president that he should not expect military intervention from external parties.[7] Shortly after this, in Belgrade on 19 April, Johnson told Milosevic that the American government was prepared to consider recognition of Serbia and Montenegro as the state of Yugoslavia, on the condition that Belgrade would refrain from supporting and approving the aggression in Bosnia. If Belgrade continued to do this, then the United States would make efforts to isolate Milosevic's regime politically and economically.[8] The response was far from encouraging. General Zivota Panic, who was to succeed Adzic a few weeks later as Chief of Staff, told him that Serbia had 'borne the Turkish yoke' for five centuries, 'so it can certainly stand a little isolation'.[9]

At the start of the war in Bosnia the EC (and the US as well) thus had to change its policy within the space of a few weeks and shift to a course that shortly before had been rejected as counterproductive. According to Van Walsum isolation was now the only weapon that the international community had and moreover the only weapon to which Milosevic was sensitive.[10] Another remaining option, of course, was the deployment of an international force in Bosnia. As described, for budgetary reasons the UN Secretariat had no desire to send a peacekeeping force to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Van den Broek continued however to urge UN planning in this direction, with an eye to eventualities in Bosnia. He requested the Dutch Permanent Representative in New York, Van Schaik, to consult on this with his colleagues from the other EC member states and from the US. Moreover the Dutch minister hoped that the presence of the UNPROFOR headquarters in Sarajevo would exert a moderating influence on the parties.[11]

One of the reasons for locating the headquarters there was to take up a neutral position between Zagreb and Belgrade. Besides this, Sarajevo was viewed as safe. However, almost immediately after establishing the headquarters in Sarajevo the leadership of UNPROFOR found itself in the midst of fighting. 'It was the only known case in military history', wrote the British war reporter Martin Bell ironically, 'where a headquarters staff received messages of sympathy and concern from the front-line troops in the field.'[12] In the meantime UNPROFOR had no mandate to intervene in the situation in Bosnia. The situation was to some extent comparable to the one previously experienced by the ECMM headquarters in Zagreb, which was also set up outside the actual conflict zone and which suddenly found itself in the middle of a conflict for which it had no mandate.

On 7 April the UN Under-Secretary-General Goulding announced in discussions with the Security Council that the United Nations was considering increasing its involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Three days later in Geneva the Bosnian Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic asked Boutros-Ghali to send peacekeeping troops to Bosnia. However, the UN Secretary-General told Silajdzic that he would do better to ask the EC; the United Nations wanted to confine itself to the peacekeeping operation in Croatia. A few days later Izetbegovic repeated the request to Goulding, after the ceasefire arranged by the EC had immediately been broken. Notably, Izetbegovic declared on this occasion that he once more advocated a division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into cantons. His only special requirement here was that the accompanying map be drawn by experts from abroad.[13] In the following weeks it appeared that Boutros-Ghali had little desire to send a UN peacekeeping force without a clear mandate into an area where peace had not been achieved.[14]

On 23 and 24 April the Security Council convened for consultations on the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This took place following formal requests by Algeria and Austria and calls by Germany, the Netherlands and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.[15] The Security Council passed a declaration by its chairman in which all parties were called upon to observe the ceasefire of 12 April and support was expressed for the mediation efforts of the EC, which were now being undertaken by Carrington and Cutileiro.[16] A fact-finding report by Vance on 24 April did indeed establish a serious deterioration of the situation in Bosnia, but at the same time remarked that in view of the limited resources of the UN and the widespread nature of the violence a UN peacekeeping operation in Bosnia

was impossible. Boutros-Ghali supported this position.[17] Nonetheless Boutros-Ghali made a gesture by announcing that as per 1 May, 41 UN observers would be sent to the Bosnian towns of Medjugorje, Mostar, Stolac and Trebinje, although earlier plans had provided for this only once the United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia had been demilitarized.[18] In a conversation with Mitterrand the UN Secretary-General also promised to discuss with the Security Council the possibility of sending observers who would investigate the possible deployment of a peacekeeping force.[19]

At the start of May Goulding and his colleague Shashi Tharoor visited Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb. The emphasis of their visit came to rest on the deteriorating conditions in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Around this time the ECMM observers left Bosnia because their safety was in danger. The UNPROFOR Commander Nambiar explained to Goulding and Tharoor that he was now hardly in a position to lead the operation in Croatia because he and his staff were almost fully occupied with the problems in Bosnia. Moreover the freedom of movement of the staff was seriously curtailed by the bombardments.[20] He wished to transfer his headquarter to Belgrade or Zagreb. The Deputy Commander Morillon advocated that in this case a symbolic presence should still be maintained in Sarajevo.[21] At the end of his visit Goulding indicated that he did not currently see a role for the United Nations in Bosnia, because the UN was already stretched to its limits. According to him the EC should take a more active role. Goulding was also not in favour of a symbolic presence of UN troops who would have the task of protecting humanitarian missions in Bosnia, which were subject to considerable risks.[22]

Following this report, on 12 May Boutros-Ghali told the Security Council that although the situation was 'tragic, dangerous, violent and confused' it was not suitable for peacekeeping, because the required agreement of the parties was lacking and thus a workable mandate was not possible.[23] Three days later however, on the urging of Belgium, France and Great Britain, the Security Council empowered the Secretary-General through Resolution 752 to once again investigate whether a peacekeeping force could be sent to Bosnia. He was also asked to look for ways of protecting humanitarian convoys. In the same resolution the Security Council called on the JNA to withdraw from the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This also applied to 'elements of the Croatian Army'. Finally, all irregular forces in Bosnia should be dissolved and disarmed. In the view of Boutros-Ghali, Resolution 752 marked the start of the disaster of the UN's Bosnian adventure.[24] On 30 May he again attempted to convince the Security Council that the dissolution and disarming of the irregular forces in Bosnia was only possible within the framework of a general political solution for Bosnia. If this did not come about, then an international military force would have to take on the job.[25]

In the meantime, the UNPROFOR headquarters had left Sarajevo in two convoys on 16 and 17 May. A little less than a hundred soldiers, mostly French but also with a few Dutch troops, stayed behind. They continued to offer mediation to the warring factions, to supervise the exchange of imprisoned, wounded or dead soldiers and to undertake other humanitarian tasks.

In order to preserve impartiality Nambiar promised that from now on the UNPROFOR headquarters would alternate between Belgrade and Zagreb, starting in Belgrade. The UNPROFOR headquarters thus set itself up in this city. But after sanctions had been announced against Serbia at the end of May and the diplomatic staff in Belgrade had been reduced, the UN Secretariat no longer found it wise for UNPROFOR to remain in Belgrade. Firstly the UN Secretariat felt that UNPROFOR would seem weak if it continued there at full strength while most of the ambassadors had departed, and moreover it feared reprisals against the UNPROFOR headquarters. Nambiar was therefore directed to relocate to Zagreb, which was done at the end of July.[26]

On 22 May the United Nations recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina as its 177th member state (Resolution 46/237 of the General Assembly). With the resolution of 15 May and the recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a member state the United Nations took the position that the war in Bosnia was an international conflict, with the aggression in fact originating from the regime in Belgrade. All following UN resolutions would continue this line of reasoning. As already remarked, the UN did not however take the next logical step, namely lifting the arms embargo against the new state to enable it to defend itself against an armed attack. Not to mention the possibility that the UN might go so far as

to take on a trusteeship for Bosnia, as was also advocated at the time.[27]

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- [25] Review of International Affairs, (1992)1005-6(1 June/1 July), p. 14; Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished*, p. 41.
- [26] Morillon, *Croire*, pp. 87-88.
- [27] see Sharp, *Balkans*, pp. 2 and 12.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 6

Emotionalization of the debate following reports about the camps ('Omarska'): June 1992 – August 1992

9. Trnopolje: the famous pictures

'Ironically, the first television images that shocked the world came from Trnopolje, the 'best' camp. No one ever saw the worst camps when they were at their worst.'^[1]

When the British journalists were held up by red tape in Belgrade for several days, they took the opportunity to visit two of the camps in Serbia which were on the list of 94 plus 11 and to film there: the recreation centre at Loznica, where according to the list 1380 prisoners were detained and Subotica, where there were said to be 5000. However, both of these turned out to be purely refugee camps, in which Serbs were also accommodated. On 3 August the British journalists were able to fly from Belgrade to Pale. There they managed to obtain permission from Karadzic, who in the meantime had returned from London, to visit Omarska and Trnopolje. A visit to a prison in the vicinity of Pale, at the invitation of Karadzic, failed to supply proof of the existence of death camps.

On 5 August the ITN team and Vulliamy reached Banja Luka, from where they were taken to Omarska and Trnopolje under Bosnian Serb military escort. Omarska made an unpleasant impression on the British reporters, but they found no incontrovertible evidence that it was an extermination camp. However, there were several buildings to which the British journalists were not given access. What Marshall and her fellow travellers did not know was that almost immediately after the appearance of Gutman's article about Omarska on 2 August, the Bosnian Serb authorities had decided to shut down the camp as soon as possible. When the ICRC was permitted to visit the camp on 12 August, one week after the British journalists, there were 'only' 173 prisoners left. By the time Vulliamy and the ITN team arrived, most of the prisoners, like those of Keraterm, had been taken to the Manjaca and Trnopolje camps,^[2] which was to give the British journalists' trip a twist which had not been intended by the Bosnian Serb authorities. After the visit to Omarska on 5 August they had only one more opportunity to find the proof they were looking for: Trnopolje.

The camp at Trnopolje covered a large area on which several buildings stood, including a school. It was originally not a prison camp but a transit camp for women, children and older men, mainly from the district of Prijedor and in particular from the town of Kozarac, which had 15,000, mainly Muslim, inhabitants.^[3] After the Bosnian Serb army had shelled Kozarac in the spring, soldiers had told the Muslim inhabitants that they would be safe if they went to Trnopolje, where the primary school had been set up as a camp.^[4] Groups of men who had been imprisoned in Omarska and had been classified by the Bosnian Serb camp leaders there as 'not dangerous' were also taken to this camp.^[5] Shortly before the arrival of the ITN team, prisoners from Omarska and Keraterm who had to be removed from the eye of world opinion after Gutman's articles had also been brought here to Trnopolje. So at the beginning of August there were several thousand people at Trnopolje.^[6]

The camp was guarded mainly by Serbs from the direct vicinity. Some of those at Trnopolje, including some men of fighting age, had themselves chosen to stay in the camp because the situation

outside the camp was even more dangerous.[7] Vulliamy recorded the story of a man who had tried to reach Trnopolje, but had been picked up by soldiers on the way and taken to Omarska.[8] Several people who had left the camp to revisit their houses or farms did not return, so that those in the camp thought it was safer to stay there. Marshall was later to say in her report that the people who had been brought to the camp did not really know themselves whether they were prisoners or refugees.[9] The American journalist Peter Maass, who visited Trnopolje a few days after the ITN team, observed that apart from former prisoners of Omarska and Keraterm the inmates of the camp were mainly women and children from the direct vicinity, and that they were there voluntarily:

‘Yes, voluntarily. It was one of the strangest of situations in Bosnia – people seeking safety at a prison camp. Trnopolje was no picnic, but the known brutalities dished out there were preferable to the fates awaiting Bosnians who tried to stay in their homes.’[10]

Although the situation in the camp was much better than in the other camps in north-west Bosnia,[11] this does not mean that the Trnopolje camp offered complete protection to its inmates. There were incidental cases of rape[12] and on one evening a gang referred to as El Manijakos is said to have carried out mass rape. According to a report by Amnesty International issued in October 1992 on serious violations of human rights in Bosnia between April and August 1992, reports of rape reaching this organization came mainly from the camp at Trnopolje.[13] The Yugoslavia tribunal was later to establish that ‘[b]ecause this camp housed the largest numbers of women and girls, there were more rapes at this camp than at any other’.[14] Men were also tortured and murders took place in the camp, mainly among the local Muslim elite.[15] People from the camp were sometimes allowed out of the camp for half an hour or an hour to look for food. If they were given permission to do this, they always had to leave something of value behind in the camp. If they came back too late, they were beaten up or killed. If they did not come back at all, they were shot dead as soon as they were found.[16] Diphtheria was also rife in the camp.[17]

The British journalists visit the camp

‘In war reporting access is everything, or nearly everything.’[18]

In Trnopolje, unlike Omarska, the ITN team was allowed to film everywhere. In the school building the team filmed blankets on the floor and belongings marking off sleeping places. According to pictures which were never broadcast, the ITN team talked to a nineteen-year-old Serb guard called Igor, the son of the camp commander cum Red Cross Official (!) Pero Curguz.[19] Igor, who had been stationed in Knin since 1991, had been appointed as bodyguard of camp commander Slobodan Kuruzovic a few days previously. He told the team that the Bosnian Serb army brought food and water for the people in the camp and asked the film crew to talk to a group of people standing in the shade of a tree behind a low fence. Igor explained that the group included some friends of his who were staying at the camp and a former teacher of his.

‘Do you want to live together again?’, asked the ITN team. ‘I want’, answered Igor, ‘now a very big problem.’ Then the interviewer asked one of the men behind the low fence, without barbed wire, Azmir Causevic, who had been introduced as a friend of Igor’s: ‘Is he a guard?’ Answer: ‘Yes.’ ‘Is he your friend?’ Answer: ‘Yes.’ He said that they used to play in the street together. ‘Are you prisoners?’ ‘We are not in jail.’ Then another friend of Igor’s arrived on the other side of the fence and shook Igor’s hand. The film crew asked him: ‘What are you doing here? What is this place?’ But the man they addressed did not seem to understand. Then the ITN team turned to Igor again: ‘Are you here to keep people in?’ ‘No, I have a commander. He says I am here to protect, first me and these people.’ Then the cameraman filmed some of the little tents the people in the camp had set up to protect themselves from the blazing sun.[20]

The Serb camp commander cum Red Cross official Pero Curguz told the Britons that new inmates had arrived at the camp that day. They were a group from the Keraterm camp. At the medical

centre the British journalists asked the interned doctor Idriz Merdzanic: 'Have there been beatings?', at which he nodded his head. He did not want to answer the next question, 'Many?' Later at an unguarded moment he gave the British journalists an undeveloped film with pictures of men's tortured upper bodies.[21]

Then the camera crew made its way to the southern side of the camp. There was a small field there with a transformer house, a barn and farm equipment. Between this field and the northern side of the camp there was a fence made of chicken wire and – from chest height up – barbed wire. Along the other sides of the field where the men who had been transferred from Keraterm and Omarska had been taken there was a wall, a low fence, or no boundary at all between the site and the road going past it, but there were armed Serbs on guard (see map of the camp in this section).[22] The Britons stepped through a gap in the fence. In the camp itself, on the other side of the barbed wire, a crowd of curious people assembled, including those who had recently arrived from the Omarska and Keraterm camps. Penny Marshall first had a conversation with a Muslim on the other side of the fence called Mehmet, who spoke a little English. Later, in the bulletin which went on air, he would hardly appear at all, but in the film he was clearly visible next to the person who was to become the main figure of the ITN broadcast. Mehmet told Marshall that everything was 'very fine, nothing wrong, but it's very hot'.[23]

Then one of the Britons pointed to a person who was coming forward from the background, a man with his T-shirt in his hand, whose ribs were clearly visible in his bare upper body.[24] The cameraman zoomed in on him. This was to become the familiar picture of the emaciated Muslim Fikret Alic. The pictures also show clearly that there were three strands of barbed wire only at the top of the fence from behind which the cameraman was filming; below them was chicken wire. Then Marshall began a conversation with Alic.

On 6 August the British *Channel 4 News* broadcast the pictures at 7 pm, followed three hours later by ITN's *News at Ten*. In the pictures broadcast on television the emaciated Alic was the central figure. Both broadcasts bore the character of eyewitness accounts, by Penny Marshall and Ian Williams respectively. In their commentaries, Marshall and Williams said that these people were refugees who had lost their homes and belongings, but that there was no first-hand evidence of atrocities in the camp. Later a sharp controversy would arise as to whether or not the pictures had been doctored; this will be discussed at greater length in section 11.

However, the text was not entirely free of suggestion. Marshall began her report by saying 'The Bosnian Serbs don't call Omarska a concentration camp', thereby implying that others might well have a different opinion. Williams said that he had visited 'seven alleged camps which were on the original Bosnian list of alleged concentration camps.' Of five it could be said that 'they are not concentration camps, at most they are refugee collection centres', but there was 'grave concern' about 'severe mistreatment' in two of the others. Again, it seemed to be implied that Omarska and Trnopolje were in fact concentration camps.

Williams's report was followed on ITN by a background story entitled 'Crimes of war?', in which black and white pictures of prisoners of war were shown and it was explained that war crimes had been prohibited after the horrors of the Nazi era. Then American politicians were asked for their reactions to the ITN films of Omarska and Trnopolje. They included the presidential candidate Bill Clinton, who reacted by saying: 'you can't allow the mass extermination of people and just sit by and watch it happen'.[25] In a lengthy interview Democrat and concentration camp survivor Tom Lantos said that 'those horrendous pictures' reminded him of 'the concentration camps that the Nazis had during World War Two, minus the gas chambers (...)The civilised world stood by during the early 1940's because they didn't know what was going on. Well, we now know what is going on.' In ITN's *News at Ten* the influential American senator Alfonso d'Amato made similar statements.[26] Lantos also appeared on the programme and said that by 1992 the world should be able to distinguish the Churchills from the Chamberlains.

Comparisons with Jews and Nazis

'We are not paid to moralize.' [27]

The impact these pictures made as they went around the world was enormous. After seeing just 45 seconds of uncut ITN footage by satellite, Tom Bettag, producer of the American television network ABC's programme *Nightline* decided to scrap the programme planned for that evening in favour of one featuring the ITN pictures. 'We knew those pictures would have enormous impact. It has clearly changed the political climate', he was to say scarcely 24 hours later. [28] 'They are the sort of scenes that flicker in black and white images from 50-year-old films of Nazi concentration camps', wrote the *Daily Mail* the morning after the broadcast. [29] This was 'footage reminiscent of scenes from Nazi concentration camps', wrote Gutman's paper *Newsday*. [30] Above the photo of Alic on its front page, the *Daily Mirror* placed the heading 'Belsen 92', and the *Star* 'Belsen 1992'. With the pictures of Serb 'concentration camps', everything suddenly became "'crystal clear" in the West. Metaphorically speaking, the Serbs became the Nazis, and the Muslims became the Jews of World War II'. [31]

This was a reversal of the alliances that had existed until then. The regime in Belgrade had constantly emphasized that in the past there had always been close ties between Serbs and Jews and that in their historic role as 'victims' the lot of the Serbs was very similar to that of the Jews. [32] After the Jews, the Serbs were believed to be the people who had suffered most during the Second World War. It was not without reason that the nationalist Dobrica Cosic had been one of the founders of the Association of Serb-Jewish Friendship. In the United States, Serbs had run an aggressive campaign in an attempt to win the support of the Jewish community for their side, realizing that it was the best organized ethnic lobby in the country. [33]

Traditionally, Belgrade considered Israel, Russia and Greece as its best friends. The state of Israel had in fact always taken a strongly pro-Serb position. [34] In the autumn of 1991 Serbia had successfully placed a large secret arms order in Israel. [35] It was not until 5 August 1992 that Israel had decided to offer humanitarian aid to Bosnia. [36] On the same day Deputy Minister Yossi Beilin had broken the silence observed by the Israeli government since the outbreak of the hostilities. He then sharply condemned the reports about the camps, but added at once that Israel would never forget the special ties which had existed in the past between Serbs and Jews. [37]

The day after the pictures of Trnopolje were broadcast, the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said that the Jews, who remembered the Holocaust, were particularly afflicted by the reports, though he immediately added that in comparison with the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War, the murders in the Balkans were 'on a very small scale'. [38] Nevertheless, it was a remarkable reaction from a government and a nation which during practically the entire conflict from 1991 to 1995 had painstakingly avoided offending the Serbian regime and its henchmen, on the basis of the incorrect and unjustified view that during the Second World War the Serbs, unlike the Croats and the Muslims, had been on the side of the Jews. [39] This statement of Rabin's also reflected the divided reactions of the Jewish community, in which on the one hand Jewish organizations said that they observed the same indifference on the part of the world community as at the time of the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War, [40] while on the other hand someone like Simon Wiesenthal thought that any comparison with the Nazi extermination camps was completely misplaced. [41]

In the United States the Jewish mood turned against Serbia as a result of the reports and pictures of the camps. James Harff, director of the PR firm Ruder Finn regarded this about-face as the greatest success in enhancing the image of his customers in Zagreb and Sarajevo. [42] In the past, Tudjman had made anti-Semitic remarks and Izetbegovic was initially not an obvious protégé of the Jewish community. All this had now changed. After Gutman's articles, on 5 August two hundred demonstrators led by the Anti-Defamation League and the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors held a protest march in front of the United Nations building in New York, with the support of twenty American Jewish organizations. The national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham H. Foxman, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, pointed out to the demonstrators that what was going on in Bosnia was not the same as what had happened during the Holocaust. But in his opinion there were so many similarities that an international military force should be sent if necessary.

[43] Maynard Wishner, chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council called on Boutros-Ghali to begin at once with mobilizing 'whatever U.N. peacekeeping forces are appropriate'. [44] Nobel prize winner Elie Wiesel wrote a letter informing the demonstrators that Jews in particular, who had such vivid memories of persecution, should take action in the free world against the systematic torture and murders. [45] On 5 August Harff also managed to persuade the B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress to put an advertisement in *The New York Times* under the heading 'Stop the Death Camps'. [46]

On 7 August the *ITN Lunchtime News* again devoted attention to Trnopolje. This time the British television company showed pictures of Dutch, Turkish and American broadcasts in which the camps were compared with photos of Nazi concentration camps. ITN quoted from the commentary of the ABC broadcast: 'Faces and bodies that hint at atrocities of the past. But this is not history, this is Bosnia. Pictures from the camps: A glimpse into genocide.' and: 'The Dutch talked of concentration camps. In Muslim Turkey they said ITN's pictures resembled Hitler's camps and brought the greatest disgrace to mankind. And the Germans said the pictures were reminiscent of World War Two.' Against a background of British morning newspapers and the familiar picture of Alic behind barbed wire, ITN reported that 'today's British press was unequivocal in its interpretation of the pictures, adding more pressure on the government to take action to intervene in the Yugoslav crisis.'

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[1] Maass, *Neighbor*, pp. 41-42.

[2] Gutman, *Witness*, pp. xiii and xxxii; Ian Traynor, 'We moesten over lijken en hersenen stappen' ('We had to step over corpses and brains'), *de Volkskrant* 07/10/92; Van Cleef, *Wereld*, pp. 137-138. In that same month the Bosnian government had quoted a figure of 11,000, eyewitnesses a figure of 8000, Amnesty International, 'Bosnia-Herzegovina. Gross abuses of basic human rights' (AI Index: EUR 63/01/92), p. 23; R. Gutman, 'Deadly Transfer. Many reported killed, missing in move from Serb camp', *Newsday*, 26/08/92.

[3] Cf. Van Cleef, *Wereld*, pp. 95-96.

[4] Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 66.

[5] See for example Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 67; Vulliamy, *Seasons*, p. 103.

[6] According to the ITN bulletin there were 2000 prisoners there when Penny Marshall visited the camp. During a visit six days later, the ICRC counted approximately 4000 internees, Amnesty International, 'Bosnia-Herzegovina. Gross abuses of basic human rights' (AI Index: EUR 63/01/92), p. 23.

[7] See for example Vulliamy, *Seasons*, p. 105.

[8] Vulliamy, *Seasons*, p. 102.

[9] Nightline, *ABC News*, 06/08/92.

[10] Maass, *Neighbor*, pp. 41-42.

[11] United Nations, S/1994/674, Appendix, clause 171. For the nature of the camp see also 'Trnopolje detention camp. Helsinki Watch Report, October 1992 - February 1993.

[12] R. Gutman, 'Bosnia Rape Horror', *Newsday*, 09/08/92; Gutman, *Witness*, p. 64; Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 66.

[13] Amnesty International, 'Bosnia-Herzegovina. Gross abuses of basic human rights' (AI Index: EUR 63/01/92).

[14] Quoted in Ed Vulliamy, 'We are all guilty', *The Observer*, 11/05/97. See also the tribunal's charge against Simo Drljaca and Milan Kovacevic, case no. IT-97-24-I.

[15] Trnopolje detention camp. Helsinki Watch Report, October 1992 - February 1993. According to the Yugoslavia tribunal's charge against Slobodan Kuruzovic, commander of the camp at Trnopolje, hundreds of men were tortured and murdered there, Hartmann, Milosevic, p. 288. Cf. Van Cleef, *Wereld*, pp. 96-97, 251, 254. According to the main text of the Bassiouni report: 'Rapes, beatings and other kinds of torture, and even killings, were not rare.', United Nations, S/1994/674, Appendix, clause 171. According to an appendix of the same report a large number of men were murdered. This allegation does not include any indication of time, United Nations, S/1994/674/Add.2 (Vol. I), 28/12/94, Appendix III.A, IV.A.32. Sells, *Bridge*, p. 19 classifies Trnopolje along with Manjaca and Batkovic as concentration camps as opposed to the 'killing camps' Omarska, Brcko-Luka, Susica and Keraterm: 'killings and torture were common, but the majority of detainees did survive'. Report of murders also in Gutman, *Witness*, p. 85; Rathfelder, *Sarajevo*, p. 67. Report of the torture of a man in the Trnopolje camp in United States Senate, *Cleansing*, p. 23.

[16] Supplemental United States Submission of information to the United Nations Security Council in Accordance with Paragraph 5 of Resolution 771 (1992) and Paragraph 1 of Resolution 780 (1992), released on October 1992.

[17] 'Trnopolje detention camp. Helsinki Watch Report, October 1992 - February 1993'.

[18] Bell, *Way*, p. 162.

[19] For father Curguz's curious double function see also Van Cleef, *Wereld*, pp. 249-251.

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- [18] Bell, *Way*, p. 162.
- [19] For father Curguz's curious double function see also Van Cleef, *Wereld*, pp. 249-251.

- [20] Information about the footage which was not aired has been taken from <http://www.srpska-mreza.com/lm-197/deichmann-press.html>, 'ITN vs Deichmann and Truth – Report on Jan. 31 press conference'.
- [21] Nightline, *ABC News*, 06/08/92; T. Deichmann, 'Es war dieses Bild, das die Welt in Alarmbereitschaft versetzte' ('It was this picture that put the world on alert'), *Novo* (1997)26 (January/February). The photos were published in the *Daily Mail* on 07/08/92; 'ITN's Penny Marshall tells how she made the world wake up', *Sunday Times*, 16/04/92.
- [22] Ed Vulliamy, 'Poison in the well of history', *The Guardian*, 15/03/00; Eric Alterman, 'Bosnian camps: a barbed tale', *The Nation*, 28/07/97.
- [23] This paragraph is based on the account of Phillip Knightley, who saw the uncut ITN tapes, 'Es stellt sich heraus, dass der Stacheldraht nur ein Symbol war' (It becomes clear that the barbed wire only a symbol was), *Novo*(1997)27 (March/April).
- [24] Photos taken by Ron Haviv prove that this man, Fikret Alic, was by no means the only emaciated man in the camp', *Blood*, pp. 87-89.
- [25] Don Oberdorfer & Helen Dewar, 'Clinton, Senators Urge Bush to Act on Balkans', *The Washington Post*, 06/08/92.
- [26] See also 'Nightline', *ABC News*, 06/08/92.
- [27] James Harff, director of PR firm Ruder Finn, quoted in Nadja Tesich, 'New and old disorder', *NATO*, p. 188.
- [28] Quoted in: R. Ciolli, 'Bosnia Reports Prompt Outrage. Prison camp images drive home urgency', *Newsday*, 08/08/92.
- [29] 'The Proof', *Daily Mail*, 07/08/92.
- [30] R. Howell, 'Outrage. At UN Pressure For Armed Reply', *Newsday*, 07/08/92. Similar utterances in Sandra Sanchez, 'Horror in Serbian prison camps', *USA Today*, 07/08/92.
- [31] Mestrovic, *Balkanization*, p. 51.
- [32] Levinsohn, *Belgrade*, pp. 15-17, 53, 259-260, 273; Sremac, *War*, pp. 30 and 61; Daniel Kofman, 'Israel and the War in Bosnia', Cushman & Mestrovic (eds.), *Time*, p. 93.
- [33] Carol Matlack & Zoran B. Djordjevic, 'Serbo-Croatian PR War', *The National Journal*, 14/03/92.
- [34] See also Daniel Kofman, 'Israel and the War in Bosnia', Cushman & Mestrovic (eds.), *Time*, pp. 91-92.
- [35] Gajic Glisic, *Vojska*, pp. 23 and 47.
- [36] Gwen Ackerman, 'Israel Breaks Silence, Offers Aid to Distressed Yugoslavia', *The Associated Press*, 05/08/92.
- [37] Gwen Ackerman, 'Israel Breaks Silence, Offers Aid to Distressed Yugoslavia', *The Associated Press*, 05/08/92.
- [38] R. Howell, 'Rabin Calls On World for Action', *Newsday*, 08/08/92. See also Hugh Orgel, 'Israeli cuts Bosnia mission short as Rabin demands end to atrocities', *The Ethnic NewsWatch. Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 11/08/92.
- [39] Cf. Igor Primoratz, 'Israel and genocide in Croatia', Mestrovic (ed.), *Genocide*, pp. 195-206.
- [40] G. DeWan, 'Newsday Student Briefing Page on the News', *Newsday*, 11/08/92. See also 'A Demand for Action', *The Ethnic NewsWatch. Northern California Jewish Bulletin*, 07/08/92; 'A Terrible Throwback', *The Ethnic NewsWatch. Baltimore Jewish Times*, 07/08/92; Nancy Hill-Hotzman, 'Balkans: Jewish groups react to reports of tortures and murders', *Los Angeles Times*, 08/08/92; Cohen, *War*, p. 122.
- [41] F. Bruning, 'Human-Rights Probe of Serbia Urged', *Newsday*, 14/08/92. For a more detailed survey of the Jewish and Israeli attitude to Serb war practices in the early 1990s see Cohen, *War*, pp. 122-128; Primoratz, *Israel*.
- [42] Jacques Merlini, 'Da haben wir voll ins Schwarze getroffen.' 'Die PR-Firma Ruder Finn', Bittermann (Hg.), *Serbien*, pp. 155-156.
- [43] 'Jewish Community Rallies for Action to End Atrocities in Bosnia', *U.S. Newswire*, 05/08/92.
- [44] Debra Nussbaum Cohen, 'Jewish groups express outrage over atrocities in Bosnia', *The Ethnic NewsWatch; Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 05/08/92.
- [45] Cheong Chow, 'US Jews calling on Bush, UN action for camps', *The Boston Globe*, 10/08/92.
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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 6

Emotionalization of the debate following reports about the camps ('Omarska'): June 1992 – August 1992

10. The consequences of the pictures in the Netherlands: a stronger call for intervention

Dutch newspaper readers, radio listeners and television viewers were not entirely dependent on foreign coverage of the war in Bosnia. Dutch journalists such as Raymond van den Boogaard, Dick Verkijk, Harmen Roeland and soon Willem Lust as well were on the spot when the war began. Nicole Lucas was still in Belgrade as a correspondent for *Trouw*, and Theo Engelen in Ljubljana for *NRC Handelsblad*. The last article from Belgrade by Ulrike Rudberg, who had been a correspondent for *De Volkskrant* in the Serbian capital since 1988, appeared in that paper on 7 July 1992.[1]

The Dutch journalists in the region were also much more inclined to take a stand in the conflict in Bosnia than during the war in Croatia the previous year. Harold Doornbos, correspondent for Zuid-Oost Pers and Radio 1, commented: 'It is not that I would defend the Bosnian government, but in the broad political spectrum they are in the right. It has been a war with a clear aggressor.' [2] Herman van Gelderen, who worked for RTL Nieuws, thought that it was 'completely understandable' that he supported the Bosnian Muslims, considering how they had been victimized: 'Besides, the Croats were on the wrong side in the Second World War and the Serbs were communists. In that sense you do have prejudices and I had little affinity with those two parties. That may be a subconscious factor in your reports.' [3] At the end of 1992, radio reporter Dulmers took a strange decision for a reporter: he decided not to report the unloading of weapons destined for Croats and Muslims from an Iranian plane at the Zagreb airport, which constituted a violation of the UN embargo: 'At that time the relations [between the conflicting parties] were so lop-sided that I thought it was relevant not to report it.' [4]

From June on reports on refugees from Bosnia also started to feature in the Dutch press. Articles appeared about the refugee camps and buildings in Croatia, where by the beginning of June more than a quarter of a million refugees from Bosnia had already been received. The topic led to graphic descriptions of gym halls where the air conditioning was unable to dispel 'the stifling stench', of the insufficient number of showers and toilets and of excrement lying around.[5] The refugee stories were a godsend to the journalists in the region, who had always found it very difficult to describe the complexity of the conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Thanks to the refugees, the war even came closer. Dutch journalists scoured the asylum seekers' centres in their own country in search of newsworthy stories. The human interest element in the reports on the former Yugoslavia rose.[6] In the NOS news bulletins supplementary reports on human suffering made their appearance at the same time as the streams of refugees[7] and the current affairs programmes on television also devoted a great deal of attention to the refugees.[8]

When the Dutch media sent reports of their own from Bosnia, almost all of them came from Sarajevo. Of the three major daily newspapers, *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Volkskrant* and *Trouw*, it was *Trouw* that made the most exceptions to this pattern. For example, after Mostar was proclaimed capital of Herceg-Bosna, the Croat community in Bosnia, Nicole Lucas sent reports from there. One of her reports on that city opened with the sentence: 'Only the old bridge, from which daredevils used to

jump down into the Neretva for a few cents, does not need to be removed from the travel books.' [9] Sixteen months later that bridge too was bombarded into rubble. Another report in *Trouw* about the situation elsewhere in Bosnia was a short article pointing out to the reader that although it had been the siege of Sarajevo that had led to the most indignation in the West up to that point, the East Bosnian town of Gorazde, where 70,000 people had been packed together under heavy artillery fire for three months, was 'possibly the symbol of the greatest horrors of the conflict' and looked like becoming a second Vukovar. [10] In Gorazde, according to a Bosnian observer who was quoted, there was by then 'nothing left to destroy'. [11] From the end of July on, reports by the British war correspondent Maggie O'Kane appeared in *De Volkskrant*, providing information about the fortunes of the encircled town of Gorazde and about Foca, which had been 'cleansed'. [12] On 31 July her article about the concentration camps, which had appeared two days previously in *The Guardian* and had caused such an uproar, also appeared in *De Volkskrant*. [13]

Up to the end of July, in the written media there was no significant pressure to intervene in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A commentary by a senior editor in *NRC Handelsblad* on 16 June still voiced the opinion that it was 'almost hopeless' for the outside world to undertake anything in the former Yugoslavia: 'conferences mean time gain for conflicting parties and sanctions make warring leaders popular rather than controversial in their own countries'. According to this newspaper, an intervention force would soon be compelled to fly for safety itself. 'The conclusion is that the outside world cannot influence conflicts such as that in the former Yugoslavia (...), except by giving the conflicting parties the opportunity to talk and to offer humanitarian aid. Apart from that the outside world – unfortunately – is helpless.' [14]

De Volkskrant had struck a note in favour of intervention a few days earlier. If the sanctions had no effect, then according to an editorial of 13 June the time for military intervention was approaching. *De Volkskrant* took a stand against the idea that for troops from other countries Sarajevo was not worth dying for because there were no vested interests. 'It reminds one,' the newspaper reprimanded supporters of this idea, 'of the discussion just before the Second World War about dying for Danzig, the free city claimed by Nazi Germany. That was not necessary either, the European democracies thought at the time. That conclusion was morally reprehensible and turned out to be politically short-sighted. The same is true of Sarajevo today.' [15] The newspaper supported the EC decision made in Lisbon at the end of June: 'The international community will not be able to put an end to the civil war by means of military action. The situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its three population groups and different militias, is too complicated for that. But the international community does have the moral duty to rescue the 300,000 inhabitants of Sarajevo, if necessary with the help of military force.' [16] A month later an editorial in *De Volkskrant* said it was 'understandable' that the major powers did not want to deploy ground troops to intervene in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but according to the newspaper they could try to eliminate the Serb artillery from the air. And they should also ensure a complete sea and air blockade. [17]

There were few opinion articles in the major Dutch newspapers in the months of June and July 1992. Those that did appear were often by foreigners. It is striking that in this phase Serbs were allowed to voice their opinions in the Dutch opinion pages, complaining about the UN embargo. [18] *De Volkskrant* even gave ample space to the foreign affairs adviser of the Yugoslav president Cosic, Svetozar Stojanovic, stating only that the author was 'a Serbian sociologist'. [19] Stojanovic said that it was 'incomprehensible that of all peoples the Serbs, who had lived through a horrific genocide, now had to sacrifice itself for higher interests and yield voluntarily. Was it not much more the case that a people which has undergone a lot like this had earned a special status and special guarantees from the international community?' [20]

On 3 July it was again Hylke Tromp who called for intervention. He declared himself against a step-by-step approach, beginning with military supervision of humanitarian convoys. In his opinion the politics of Belgrade needed to be changed and this would only be possible if the same overwhelming force was used as that used against Iraq a year earlier. He thought it was not impossible that Milosevic would then make the best of a bad job and yield before military operations actually began. [21]

Hylke Tromp's brother Bart thought that if the West did not undertake military intervention, the war in the former Yugoslavia would escalate into a third 'real Balkan war which would eclipse the preceding ones in size, duration and consequences'. [22]

The existence of camps in the framework of ethnic cleansing was initially ignored in the Netherlands, as elsewhere. For example, *Volkskrant* reporter Hans Moleman had seen long lists in Sarajevo of missing Muslims who had been killed or imprisoned in camps. He did nothing about them. 'Somehow or other everybody ignored those lists. Why was that? I think because as a journalist there you spent the whole day organizing things, to survive as a journalist and to write your stories of that moment. At that time you didn't have the perspective.' [23] EO reporter Emerson Vermaat knew of another reason why journalists like himself did not visit the camps: 'Even if you knew where they were. You just didn't get there. Your guide is scared and he charges four hundred German marks a day and that is a lot for the budget.' Moreover, the EO reporter was hampered by the prejudices of his editors. Programme maker Feike ter Velde was not so interested in crimes against Muslims, he told Vermaat: 'Those Serbs are Christians too, aren't they? Must you take the side of the Muslims?' [24] The stand taken by the EO editors was unique. At other newsrooms in the Netherlands the war in Bosnia was 'a handle (...) for all sorts of moral views', but certainly not in favour of the Serbs. According to *NRC Handelsblad* correspondent Raymond van den Boogaard there were times when the editors regarded any query as to the Muslims being in the right as 'suspicious'. [25]

The reports about the camps had not escaped the notice of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but their reaction was extremely cautious. On 4 August the management of the Information Service had suggested to Van Walsum, Director-General of Political Affairs should say that officials of the Ministry in contacts with the press – if asked – that the Dutch government was 'deeply concerned' about the press reports of human rights abuses in 'prison camps in the former Yugoslavia'. However, it was added that there were no data 'which can be regarded as conclusive evidence'. According to the draft statement, the government appealed to 'the parties in the conflict' to give the UNHCR and the Red Cross access to the camps. The draft's absolute neutrality with respect to the conflicting parties was at least as remarkable as the cautious wording. [26]

This was soon to change. On the same day, 4 August, the NOS television news bulletin broadcast an interview with the Bosnian UN Ambassador Muhamed Sacirbey, in which he said that Serbs were torturing Croats and Muslims in 'concentration camps'. [27] The next day the CDA MP Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, who had seen the television pictures from his holiday accommodation in North Brabant (Netherlands), requested a debate with the Ministers Van den Broek, Ter Beek, D'Ancona (Welfare, Health and Culture) and Junior Minister Kosto (Justice), the last two because they shared responsibility for the relief of refugees. De Hoop Scheffer thought that interrupting the summer recess 'pales into insignificance in relation to the barbaric situation in the region concerned, as expressed in phenomena such as concentration camps, ethnic cleansing and apartheid politics.' [28] He wanted to exchange ideas with the government about the deployment of Dutch armed forces in UN operations 'to alleviate the unfathomable human tragedy in the Balkans'. [29] In his opinion, the Dutch government should be prepared to co-operate with 'unorthodox solutions'. [30] However, he was opposed to deploying ground troops, which would have to consist of half a million troops who would have to operate in wooded and mountainous territory, in a complex conflict with numerous parties. 'Besides, the war has strong religious overtones. You can't solve it.' [31]

One of the topics De Hoop Scheffer wanted to raise in the debate with the government was the possibility of creating 'places of refuge (...) in the region itself'. [32] This idea was beginning to find wide support among Dutch politicians. On 4 August, even before the interview with Sacirbey was broadcast, PvdA MP Valk had argued in favour of solving the refugee problem by creating 'safety zones', on the lines of those for the Kurds in northern Iraq. [33] In the same broadcast Frits Bolkestein, leader of the VVD parliamentary party in the Parliament, had said in response to reports of the existence of concentration camps in the former Yugoslavia that if sending international observers could not put an end to these abuses, the United Nations would have to intervene actively: 'Surely you cannot accept the fact that people are slaughtering each other on a large scale without trying to do anything about it.' [34] Valk did not want to rule out the use of force in setting up the safe zones. [35] On

7 August, the day after the ITN pictures had been broadcast, Ria De Bruijn Beckers, chairman of the GroenLinks (Green Left) parliamentary party in the Parliament, said she was in favour of deploying military resources to create safety zones, and also referred to the Kurds in northern Iraq. She was also in favour of using military force to ensure the safety of food convoys and to liberate the concentration camps.[36]

The pictures in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands Gutman's article about the Omarska and Brcko camps, published in *Newsday* on 2 August, attracted a great deal of attention.[37] However, in *NRC Handelsblad* Peter Michielsen warned that caution should be observed. Reports about 'concentration camps' where Serbs were detaining thousands or possibly even tens of thousands of civilians, and where torture, starvation and summary executions were said to take place, had been circulating for many months, he wrote. 'That the concentration camps are there has no longer been doubted by anyone for a long time', but there was no concrete proof of brutalities having taken place in them.[38] Notwithstanding the lack of proof, it may be regarded as striking that the *NRC Handelsblad* had not previously devoted any attention to the reports about camps.

On 7 August many newspapers placed photos from the ITN broadcast on their front pages.[39] It can be safely said that there was a huge increase of attention for the war in Bosnia. For example, the time devoted to the former Yugoslavia in the current affairs programmes on Dutch television soared after the ITN pictures. In the preceding period the subject of Yugoslavia was raised six times per month in these programmes, whereas in August 1992 this was suddenly 19 times (see Table 1). In the major newspapers more than twice as many articles appeared in August as compared with the average per month over 1992.[40]

Table 1: number of times attention was devoted to the former Yugoslavia in current affairs programmes on Dutch television, 1991-1993[41]

2 nd half 1991	35	September 1992	11
January 1992	-	October 1992	6
February 1992	2	November 1992	2
March 1992	2	December 1992	8
April 1992	4	January 1993	8
May 1992	6	February 1993	13
June 1992	6	March 1993	7
July 1992	6	April 1993	5
August 1992	19		

According to Kees Schaepman, journalist of the weekly *Vrij Nederland*, 'the desire to teach the ex-Yugoslavs, and especially the Serbs, a lesson, only really flared up after the television pictures of thin men behind barbed wire. Concentration camps!' [42] In retrospect, Dutch politicians and civil servants also believed that 'the pictures of Omarska' (which were really of Trnopolje) had been of great influence on public opinion with respect to the conflict in Bosnia. According to the then vice-premier Wim Kok they had 'a tremendous catalytic, galvanizing effect'. [43]

The pictures came as a shock, often bringing memories of the Second World War to the surface. For example, for Bishop Bär of Rotterdam, and Bishop of the Army, they evoked memories of the time he himself had spent in a Japanese camp during the Second World War. He said on the radio that the 'civilian internment camps (...) just [had to be] removed by the international community with all its might'. [44] In *HP/De Tijd*, Gerard Driehuis spoke of 'the Dachau-like pictures from the Serb concentration camps'. [45] The SGP (one of the Christian parties) MP B.J. van der Vlies found it 'shocking (...) to have it confirmed by real pictures through the media that not so very far from our country concentration camps have been set up again'. And at the very moment, he wrote in the party paper, that there was an invitation lying on his desk from the PTT (Dutch Post Office) to attend the ceremony marking the issue of a postage stamp commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the first

deportation trains from the camp at Westerbork.[46]

In the *Nederlands Dagblad* a photo collage from the Second World War was placed to accompany an article about the crisis in Yugoslavia, with the caption: 'The atrocious misery of the concentration camps of the Second World War: category once but never again'.[47] The article pointed out that before the broadcast of these pictures, Dutch public opinion had been fairly unmoved by television images of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. 'Just like the weather and sports, they were part of the ritual of news bulletins.' What was going on in Somalia and the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, for example, was no less terrible, said the paper, 'until last week Auschwitz, Birkenau and Sobibor loomed on the screen again.' According to the paper, the pictures had touched on Dutch feelings of guilt in relation to minorities, caused by the Second World War. It may have been 'a very sound feeling, but it has very little to do with the actual situation in Yugoslavia. It strikes at the self-image of the West – and of the Netherlands in particular – as a model of peacefulness, progressiveness and tolerance.'[48]

Stichting 40-45, an organization involved in providing aid for people who had been in the resistance and war victims, wrote a letter to the government because of the similarities between the pictures shown and the experiences of the Second World War. Social workers employed by this organization were confronted with problems their clients had with the pictures. The deputy director of the organization, Koolster, hoped that at least there would be a rapid solution to the problems in Yugoslavia, because this...

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[1] Ulrike Rudberg, 'Wat heeft u eigenlijk bij ons in Belgrado te zoeken?' ('What are you actually doing here in Belgrade?'), *de Volkskrant*, 07/07/92.

[2] Quoted in: Karskens, *Pleisters*, p. 263.

[3] Quoted in: Karskens, *Pleisters*, p. 263.

[4] Karskens, *Pleisters*, p. 263.

[5] Raymond van den Boogaard, 'Ondanks de air conditioning stinkt het' ('In spite of the air conditioning, it stinks'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 11/06/92. See also Nicole Lucas, 'Laat ons, we hebben te veel meegemaakt' ('Leave us alone, we've been through too much'), *Trouw*, 01/07/92.

[6] See for example Alfred van Cleef, 'Ik wil niet doden en ik wil niet gedood worden' ('I don't want to kill and I don't want to be killed'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 13/06/92; id., 'De trein rijdt weg en niemand zwaait' ('The train is leaving and nobody is waving'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 21/07/92; 'Het gezin Alihagic heeft alleen nog wat foto's' ('The Alihagic family has only a few photos left'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 27/07/92; Harm van den Berg, 'Bosniërs overnachten in bus' (Bosnians spend the night in coach'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 29/07/92; id., 'Vluchtelingen Sheila niet gerust op vertrek uit Bosnië' ('Refugee Sheila feels anxious about leaving Bosnia'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 30/07/92; Anneke Visser, 'Ik ben ongelukkig want mijn vader is nog aan het front' ('I am unhappy, because my father is still at the front'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 03/08/92; Jan Sloothaak, 'Berooid en vermoeid, maar veilig in Zeewolde' ('D

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 6

Emotionalization of the debate following reports about the camps ('Omarska'): June 1992 – August 1992

11. Doubts about the images from Trnopolje

'Es war dieses Bild von diesem Stacheldraht, und diese ausgemergelten Männer, das Alarmglocken in ganz Europa läuten liess. Ich glaube, wäre der Bericht ohne dieses Bild vermittelt worden, wäre die Wirkung längst nicht so stark gewesen, obwohl sich nichts an den Fakten geändert hätte. [It was this image of barbed wire with these emaciated men that caused the alarm to be sounded all over Europe. I think that if they had reported the news item without this image, it would not have had such an impact, even though the facts would have been exactly the same][1]

My mother got that boy with the pan to walk past four times because she wanted to make a symbol.

True pictures are nonsense. Only amateurs think they have to be natural. A professional can go a long way towards creating a scene.' [2]

Six months after the images from Trnopolje media expert Jaap van Ginneken said in the Nieuwslijn programme, broadcast by the Dutch TV channel Veronica, that the images recorded proved nothing about the existence of concentration camps, let alone extermination camps: 'All you know is that a man is standing there with an emaciated torso behind barbed wire. That is what you see. You still don't know what it means'. [3] Indeed, there was some room for doubt.

Ed Vulliamy went to Trnopolje as a newspaper journalist with the ITN team. On 7 August, the morning after the ITN programme, *The Guardian* published his account. The story in no way radiated the sensation that the pictures from Trnopolje were giving rise to in the other media at that same time. Literally Vulliamy wrote the following: 'Trnopolje cannot be called a "concentration camp" and is nowhere as sinister as Omarska: it is very grim, something between a civilian prison and transit camp. The Yugoslav Red Cross has a small station here, and there are meagre cooking facilities.' Vulliamy also quoted Fikret Alic in his article: 'It is a prison camp, but not a PoW [Prisoner of War] camp. We are not fighters. They came to our village, Kozarac (...) they put us on the buses and brought us to Kereter [Keraterm] for a while, and then here.' Vulliamy further reported that a few other people had come voluntarily to the camp to escape the fighting going on around their villages. 'Here is complete confusion – political and physical. The camp is a ramshackle fenced-in compound around a former school. The men stand stripped to the waist, in their thousands, against the wire in the relentless afternoon heat (...)' He quoted the Bosnian Muslim Inar Gnoric, who told him that though conditions in the camp were certainly hard, it was safer there than in the surrounding neighbourhood: 'We are refugees, but there are guards and the wire fence'. Vulliamy also reported in his piece that there were

camps where, according to the Bosnian Serb authorities, Muslims were holding Serbs prisoner.

[4]

Consequently Vulliamy was not very happy with the way the ITN report was received by other newspapers. He later complained that the day after the ITN images had appeared on the screen he had to give 54 television and radio interviews in the course of which he had to spend more time stating that Omarska was neither an Auschwitz nor a Belsen than in telling about the atrocities he had actually discovered in the camps.[5] When an American radio station called him and he thought he could hear background noises from an NSDAP gathering in Nuremberg and the announcement 'There are still extermination camps', he put the phone down.[6] A few weeks after the broadcast Ian Williams, a member of the ITN team, said; 'The power of the images seemed to be two steps ahead of the proof they were supposed to provide'.[7] A year after the programme Penny Marshall also said that she had had a great deal of difficulty in removing the sensational side from her reporting about Trnopolje: 'I bent over backwards, I showed guards – Bosnian Serb guards – feeding the prisoners. I showed a small Muslim child who had come on his own volition. I didn't call them death camps. I was incredibly careful, but again and again we see that image being used'.[8]

The American journalist, Peter Maass, who visited the camp a few days after the ITN team and Vulliamy, saw no barbed wire. 'A few thousand Bosnians were penned in, not by barbed wire but by the roaming presence of armed guards and the knowledge they had nowhere to flee to. The entire countryside was in the hands of the Serbs.'[9] Nor did Penny Marshall see any barbed wire on her return to the Trnopolje camp a week after her first visit; she wrote that it must have been removed in the meantime.[10] But Maass too saw emaciated people. 'I was surprised at the mere fact that they still could talk. Imagine, talking skeletons!'[11] He was of the opinion that the emaciated individuals were former prisoners from Omarska and Keraterm.

The (Bosnian) Serb authorities were shocked at the enormous public relations damage that the ITN reports had caused abroad.[12] But after the images had been broadcast, attitudes in the West were still not so black-and-white that there was nobody prepared to state their doubts. The first to do so was the American journalist Peter Brock who, following a procedure much loved by the protagonists in the conflict, [13] tried to swap the ethnic labels. He stated that the emaciated figure behind the barbed wire in the ITN film was not a Muslim but a Serb.[14] It was easy enough to disprove his statement. Alic had escaped to Denmark, where he arrived as a refugee. Then Brock said that he had been mistaken and that his statement had referred to a thin man pictured in *Newsweek* of 17 August 1992. According to Brock this man was the Serbian Slobodan Konjevic, arrested for plundering, who looked so thin because he had been suffering from tuberculosis for ten years.[15] The *Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* was, however, able to trace this man too. He was the Muslim Ilijas Garibovic, who meanwhile had moved to Switzerland.[16] But that was not the last word to be said on the subject of the Trnopolje camp.

In 1996 the UN Tribunal for The former Yugoslavia sat several times, with Dusan (Dusko or Dule) Tadic in the dock. Tadic was a Bosnian Serb who had taken part in ethnic cleansing in Prijedor and Kozarac. He had been arrested in Germany in February 1994 and handed over to the Tribunal in The Hague. He was eventually found guilty of murder, torture and ill-treatment in Omarska and of the deportation of people to the Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje camps. There was only one witness who alleged that Tadic had also been responsible for atrocities in Trnopolje. This witness, originally designated as witness L, was a certain Dragan Opacic. In the course of the trial, however, the prosecutor had to withdraw Opacic as a witness because it had become clear that his allegations were not based on fact. According to Tadic's defence counsel, M. (Mischa) Vladimiroff of the then law firm Vladimiroff and Spong, this witness was acting on instructions from the Bosnian police.[17]

The ITN images were also used in the courtroom. On 6 and 7 June Vulliamy was called as witness for the prosecution and he was asked to comment on the unedited film material shot by ITN. In the interests of the defence Vladimiroff wanted an expert to underline the media's interest in Tadic prior to his trial in order to prove that witnesses might have been influenced by earlier press reporting. To this end he called Thomas Deichmann, a free-lance journalist from Frankfurt and co-founder of the

magazine *Novo*, that called itself an advocate of value-free debate 'in einer Zeit der Risikoscheu und des Kulturpessimismus', conformism, (self)censorship and state control,[18] but was, in fact, a Trotskyite magazine with a limited circulation.[19] Deichmann had been trained as an engineer but had gone into journalism at a later stage and had had experience with media research. In the German magazine *Die Woche* he had earlier sown doubts about the claim by a Croatian woman who said that she had been raped in camp Omarska but who, according to Deichmann, was a member of the Information Service of the Croatian government. That article had been a direct attack on Gutman, the journalist who put out the first reports on the concentration camps. The article was published at a time when the German government was wondering whether to hand Tadic over to the Yugoslavia Tribunal in the Hague and, after some savage attacks in the initial stage, ended with words that placed serious doubts on the usefulness of publication: '*Möglicherweise wurde sie tatsächlich vom Lagerleiter in Omarska und anderen Wachposten vergewaltigt. Doch Zweifel an ihrer Glaubwürdigkeit sind angebracht*' Maybe she was indeed raped by camp commanders in Omarska and other guards. But doubts have arisen about her credibility).

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 6

Emotionalization of the debate following reports about the camps ('Omarska'): June 1992 – August 1992

12. Increasing readiness to initiate military intervention before the Trnopolje images

With these four schools of thought as background, we will now examine the influence of the television images of Fikret Alic in the Trnopolje camp on public opinion and policy. Here the main emphasis is on the situation in the Netherlands, but where possible comparisons are made with what was happening in other countries. Three aspects are dealt with. First, the question of the extent to which, prior to the broadcast of the images, public opinion in the West had been charged with emotion and whether this had been accompanied by comparisons between the Serbs and the Nazis. The second aspect is the extent to which there were individuals questioning the strong reactions to the images. And, in the third place, the question of the influence of the images on the actions of politicians in the West. Here influence is defined as a mechanism that moved politicians to do something that they would not have done had the images of Trnopolje not been shown on television. Some of the matters in the previous paragraph will receive special attention, such as the role of parliament as mediator between public opinion and government, any impotence on the part of politicians demonstrated by the ITN documentary and the follow-up to that in the media and, finally, the question as to whether the media set the agenda of the public and political debates.

Well before the ITN programme went out on 6 August a break in the trend could be seen in American journals as regards the amount of interest shown by the printed press in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. As early as in June 1992 the number of articles about the war published in the main printed media had more than doubled in comparison to previous months. This trend continued quietly in July and August and then subsided somewhat.[1] Not only did the quantity increase but the content of the articles also changed. Many American commentators expressed their indignation at the lack of activity on the part of European leaders with regard to Yugoslavia, but also criticized their own President Bush, who allowed his re-election campaign to take pride of place over a more active attitude to Yugoslavia.[2] Something similar was happening in Europe. As early as the end of June American journalists concluded that public indignation in Europe regarding the events in Bosnia was growing as a result of 'a barrage of television images' that illustrated the Serb attacks on Sarajevo with bloody pictures.[3]

The resultant ethnic cleansing and streams of refugees led to pressure on Western governments to do more. In the United Kingdom, prior to the broadcast of the ITN film, the former Labour Foreign Minister Lord Owen, the Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown and former premier Margaret Thatcher had criticized the then Prime Minister, John Major, for what they saw as too little effort to stem Serb aggression in Bosnia.[4] Owen, who was very impressed by Maggie O'Kane's 29 July article had, for instance, written an open letter to Major the following day in which he drew a comparison with camps in 'the early stages of the Nazi holocaust'. He called for NATO air attacks on artillery, tanks, armoured cars and aircraft in the former Yugoslavia.[5] This produced a reaction from Major in which he stated that the British government's efforts were focused on humanitarian help and on

exerting pressure on the warring factions to negotiate, followed by the announcement 'This may take time'.^[6] This answer did not, at any rate, satisfy Major's predecessor, Margaret Thatcher. In an article in *The New York Times*, published on 6 August before the ITN broadcast of the same date, she called ethnic cleansing a combination of cruelties that Hitler and Stalin had used on other peoples. She therefore argued for the lifting of the weapons embargo imposed on the Bosnian government and for NATO military action against Serbia. Alliance aircraft should, she said, bomb objects such as bridges over the Drina and Serb military convoys and the heavy guns stationed around Sarajevo and Gorazde.^[7]

Spoken and written words about the activities of the Serbs in terms referring to the Third Reich and the Second World War were also apparent before the ITN broadcast. Oostlander, writing in the *NRC Handelsblad* as early as 11 May said that there was little difference between the regime of Karadzic and that of Hitler. In that month he called for a surgical military strike on the part of the WEU, without ground troops, against the Serb 'national socialists', since that was the only language they would understand.^[8] In other newspapers too comparisons were drawn with fascism and the Second World War.^[9] In a broadcast put out by the Dutch television programme *NOS Laat* on 27 July the vice-chairman of the *VluchtelingenWerk* (Refugee Work) organization made several comparisons between the circumstances of the refugees from Yugoslavia and the fate of refugees from Hitler's Germany in the 1930s, following which presenter Charles Groenhuijsen closed the subject saying that it was typical of the problem that his studio guest had had to refer several times to the Second World War.^[10] Two days later Minister H. Schoor of the German federal state North Rhine-Westphalia did the same in the TV programme *NOS Laat*.^[11] 'More and more the actions of the Serbs in Bosnia are being compared to Nazi practices in the Second World War', wrote *NRC Handelsblad* on 5 August.^[12]

The Dutch media had also argued for more effective action on the part of the West in Bosnia prior to the broadcasting of the images from 'Omarska'. Examples of this were, for instance, the pleas for some form of military intervention voiced by De Kok, Oostlander, Faber and the brothers Tromp. The interventionist core-piece by Voorhoeve and Van den Doel also appeared before the ITN broadcast: on 5 August. On 29 July the editorial in *Trouw* called for WEU and NATO intervention with the use of force to create the desired situation in the former Yugoslavia rather than leaving the territory to its fate.^[13]

As early as the beginning of July the *Legerkoerier* noted that 'minds' were slowly turning to thoughts of military intervention.^[14] While the majority of (former) army staff were still resisting the idea of military intervention, there were some among them who began to feel some sympathy for action. Retired general Govert Huyser, for instance, who had advised against intervention in June because of the lack of a clear goal and an obvious enemy,^[15] was now wanting to go further. He thought an action involving a hundred thousand men plus tanks and artillery would be advisable. From Sarajevo they should deal 'a rapid, hefty blow' and liberate the prison camps. At the same time barracks, weapon depots and communications centres of the Yugoslavian Army and the Ministry of Defence in Belgrade should be taken out. In brief: 'The military command structure should be completely paralysed'.^[16] At the end of July Van Eekelen also called for a massive intervention on the part of WEU ground troops to protect aid convoys and actually return fire.^[17]

At the end of July the former military attaché in Belgrade, retired Brigadier General De Vogel, who in 1991 had still been hesitant about interference in Croatia (see Chapters 2 and 3), revealed himself as a supporter of limited intervention in Bosnia. This should be based on air strikes on Serb targets and on the barricading of the Yugoslavian navy in the bay of Kotor. He did not support large-scale use of ground troops: 'Otherwise you land in the morass of a civil war where friend and enemy can scarcely be distinguished one from the other'.^[18] Comparisons between Yugoslavia in the Second World War, Vietnam and Afghanistan, he said, came immediately to mind.^[19]

The debate on intervention heated up particularly in the week prior to the television transmission of the images from Trnopolje, with the ranks of the interventionists on the increase^[20]. The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' played an important part here with a great number of publications and interviews with Voorhoeve and Van den Doel. At the beginning of

July Dick Leurdijk, Clingendael's UN specialist, had also called for precision bombing of military targets in Serbia and on the Serbian militia in Bosnia-Herzegovina.[21]

On 4 August the historian Hermann Walther von der Dunk wrote in the *NRC Handelsblad* criticizing 'the hollow rhetoric' of the West in the face of the crimes committed in the name of Greater Serbia. Without solid military intervention, he wrote, the ethnic cleansing and murders on the part of the Serbs would not be halted. In his view the Netherlands occupied a special position among the countries of the West because of its 'loud-mouthed cowardice' whose origins were to be found in the country's pre-war policy of neutrality and its post-war slavish attitude towards the United States.[22]

On 5 August the dailies and weeklies offered a wide spread of contributions to the intervention debate. Not only did Voorhoeve and Van den Doel publish their views in *De Volkskrant*, but editor André Roelofs concluded on the same day in the same morning daily that limited military intervention, at least taking out the Serbs' heavy arms and possibly creating safe havens, now seemed inevitable.[23] On 5 August *NRC Handelsblad* contained several contributions on the subject of military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. The editorial on that day was the first in which *NRC Handelsblad* made an unbridled plea for immediate military intervention: 'Each day that passes means so much less to protect'. [24] In his contribution that day columnist Henk Hofland called it a 'scandal' that the West was doing nothing about the 'brutal behaviour' of the Serbs in Bosnia.[25] And also on that day *NRC Handelsblad* published a contribution of two authors on the question of whether the West was willing and able to intervene.[26]

It was clear that the press was one of the initiators of the intervention debate. For example *De Groene Amsterdammer*, in its 5 August issue, published the results of a discussion on intervention organized by the paper between Hylke Tromp, General De Vogel, the Utrecht professor of human rights Peter Baehr, and the publicist Paul Scheffer. Tromp was, as could be expected after his previous statements, a supporter of large-scale military intervention since 'further muddling through' would lead to a second Vietnam.[27] Scheffer did not wish to exclude military intervention but, he said, the aims would have to be clear: was it about stopping the ethnic cleansing or getting rid of Milosevic? Baehr was of the opinion that international law did not allow for military intervention and that Tromp's argument of systematic violation of human rights would imply interventions in all parts of the world. Moreover, he and Scheffer believed, there was the risk of more people being killed because of the escalation that would follow intervention.

Also on 5 August the Nijmegen polemist Leon Wecke called for limited intervention: 'Perhaps the failed peacekeeping force should be called back and we should bomb the Serb mortars in the Sarajevo hills in order to get them to stop their messing about'. In addition he called for action to liberate the prison camps, provided – of course – that they existed, which would not surprise him in view of the nature of the conflict. He was opposed to sending ground troops. There was no readiness on the part of the West to supply sufficient men. The situation on the ground was too complex. It was better to let the war be fought to a standstill since then at least would the balance of powers be set.[28]

On the morning of 6 August *Trouw* thus correctly commented that the call for military intervention was becoming louder. The paper gave the following reasons: the reports of starvation in besieged towns in Bosnia, ethnic cleansing and deportation, the floods of refugees and the 'concentration camps' where torture was practised.[29] The paper claimed that the politicians' readiness to intervene was growing at the same pace as the flood of refugees.[30]

It was not only among the speech-making elite, who filled the opinion and commentary pages of the Dutch press, that one could speak of an increasing preparedness to undertake some kind of action in the interests of Yugoslavia, a preparedness that was leading to growing preference for military intervention. The *VluchtelingenWerk* association for refugees indicated that incoming telephone calls showed growing involvement, with private individuals calling to offer shelter for refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Since mid-July the organization had been receiving ten to fifteen such calls a day.[31] The *Mensen in Nood* (People in Need) foundation in Den Bosch, that had started collecting clothing offered by private individuals for Yugoslavia on 29 July, said that on the first day the phone had not stopped ringing right from the start.[32] But the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council

(IKV) – just like Pax Christi – proved unable to mobilize people. Either they were on holiday or they were watching the Olympic Games in Barcelona, stated secretary Mient Jan Faber.[33] Foreign affairs commentator J.L. Heldring therefore asked in the *NRC Handelsblad*, with reference to the large-scale demonstrations that the IKV had succeeded in organizing in previous years against the placing of medium-range missiles and against the Gulf War, where the demonstrations were now.[34]

An AVRO/Nipo poll on 6 August, the day the ITN images were shown, provided proof of what the silent majority was thinking. The poll showed that 22% of those questioned were already closely following the reports from Yugoslavia, 56% reasonably closely and 18% scarcely at all. It further emerged that 83% of the Dutch population supported a more generous attitude towards the admission into the Netherlands of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Of this representative sample of the Dutch population 87% agreed with Dutch participation in military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. Two-thirds of those questioned said that they would maintain this view even if Dutch soldiers were killed. More than 60% of the respondents even wanted military action designed to put a complete stop to the war in the former Yugoslavia.[35]

In so reacting, the Dutch population went much further than the ‘humanitarian help with a military fringe’ under the UN umbrella which, at the time, was as far as the Dutch parties of the coalition government – CDA, PvdA and VVD – were prepared to go.[36] Nonetheless support among members of parliament for harder action seemed to be growing even before the ITN footage was broadcast. *NRC Handelsblad* summarized the mood among parliamentarians on 6 August, a few hours before the programme went out, as follows: ‘The senseless violence must at some time be brought to an end; and if it cannot be negotiated, then by the use of force’.[37]

The conclusion is therefore justified that broader public opinion in the Netherlands was far and away in favour of military intervention even before the showing of Trnopolje images and was even in favour of very strong action. A debate about intervention had already started. The parliamentarians too had shifted in that direction, though less far than public opinion.[38] The parliamentary debate that took place on 12 August had already been requested by De Hoop Scheffer before the ITN programme was broadcast, following claims made by Sacirbey about the existence of camps. During the debate on 12 August it became apparent that the members did not think that the government had gone far enough in adopting a position towards Bosnia-Herzegovina. And yet this was more an optical than a fundamental difference. There had been a basic readiness on the part of the Dutch government, even before the summer, ‘to do something’ to contribute towards a solution in the former Yugoslavia that could be regarded as just. The question as to whether the international community and, more specifically, the Netherlands should do something about the war in Bosnia had not been, as the then vice-premier Kok later put it, ‘not really relevant’ for the Dutch government:

‘The question of whether we should do something or not, that is: are we going to let this slip away, as it were, - an incident in history in which we have no involvement and for which we have no responsibility - this question has roughly speaking never been subjected to critical discussion – in the sense of: surely we can leave it to others to deal with.’[39]

In late July/early August there was, nonetheless, some sort of bottom-up movement to get the Dutch government to do more, and this was apparent in the readiness of local councils, housing associations and private individuals to offer accommodation and thus exert pressure to admit refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The movement started, however, before the images from Trnopolje were broadcast. It had been partly set in motion by information in the press about the existence of the camps but, as far as can be judged, also by reports of ethnic cleansing, floods of refugees and the bombing of Sarajevo. Comparisons with the situation under the Third Reich and during the Second World War were also not uncommon. In that sense the Trnopolje pictures added to Breedveld’s ‘formula’ that news is that which confirms an expectation in a surprising manner.

- [1] Sadkovich, *Media*, p.111.
- [2] See, for instance, William Pfaff, 'Before Any Intervention, Clarify the Political Goal', *International Herald Tribune*, 18/06/92; idem, 'Europe Can't Afford to Appease Serbia', *International Herald Tribune*, 03/08/92; Anthony Lewis, 'Joegoslavië laat Bush falen als president zien' ('Yugoslavia shows Bush's failure as president'), *de Volkskrant*, 04/08/92; Daniel Johnson, 'Europe's bloodstained lies', *Times*, 05/08/92.
- [3] Stanley Meisler & Duyle McManus, 'Allies talk of using force to aid Sarajevo', *Los Angeles Times*, 26/06/92.
- [4] See, for instance, Hans Nijenhuis, 'Wil het Westen ingrijpen?' (Does the West want to intervene?), *NRC Handelsblad*, 05/08/92.
- [5] Owen, *Odyssey*, pp.15-16.
- [6] Owen, *Odyssey*, pp.19-20.
- [7] Margaret Thatcher, 'Stop the Excuses. Help Bosnia Now', *The New York Times*, 06/08/92. Margaret Thatcher appeared in print in almost identical terms, 'Nog even en het is te laat voor een actie tegen Servië' ('Just a little longer and it will be too late for a campaign against Serbia'), *de Volkskrant*, 10/08/92.
- [8] Arie Oostlander, 'De onverantwoordelijkheid van Europa' ('The irresponsibility of Europe'), *CD/Actueel*, 23/05/92, p.21.
- [9] Ten Cate, *Eén*, pp.106-107.
- [10] NOS Laat, 27/07/92.
- [11] NOS Laat, 29/07/92.
- [12] Hans Nijenhuis, 'Wil het Westen ingrijpen?' *NRC Handelsblad*, 05/08/92.
- [13] 'Vluchtelingen (1) and (2)', *Trouw*, 29/07/92.
- [14] Wiebren Tabak, 'Het collectieve geweten van de wereld' (The collective conscience of the world), *Legerkoerier*, 07/07/92, p.22.
- [15] Generaal b.d. Govert Huyser, 'Interventie in Joegoslavië is niet realistisch' ('Intervention in Yugoslavia unrealistic'), *Limburgse Courant*, 10/06/92.
- [16] Laurent Heere, 'Militaire actie in Bosnië onvermijdelijk' ('Military campaign in Bosnia unavoidable'), *Rotterdams Dagblad*, 06/08/92; idem 'Tijd van praten is voorbij' ('Time for talking is over'), *Haagsche Courant*, 07/08/92.
- [17] Bart Tromp, 'Derde Balkanoorlog is in voorbereiding' ('Preparations for third Balkan war underway'), *Het Parool*, 01/08/92.
- [18] Max Arian and Joke van Kampen, 'Te wapen' (To arms), *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 05/08/92, p.4.
- [19] J.C.A.C. de Vogel, 'Een strategie voor militair ingrijpen in Joegoslavië' ('A strategy for military intervention in Yugoslavia'), *Vrij Nederland*, 25/07/92, pp.10-11.
- [20] See Ten Cate, 'Eén' ('One'), p.105.
- [21] Wiebren Tabak, 'Het collectieve geweten van de wereld', *Legerkoerier*, 07/07/92, p.22.
- [22] H.W. von der Dunk, 'Lauwheid omdat Balkan niet in politiek schema past' ('Tepidity because Balkans do not fit into political programme'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 04/08/92.
- [23] André Roelofs, 'Kunnen we nog blijven zuchten en protesteren?' ('Can we carry on sighing and protesting?'), *de Volkskrant*, 05/08/92.
- [24] 'Ingrijpen noodzakelijk' ('Intervention necessary'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 05/08/92.
- [25] 'Sterven voor Sarajevo' ('Dying for Sarajevo?'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 05/08/92.
- [26] Hans Nijenhuis, 'Wil het Westen ingrijpen?' and Peter Michielsen, 'Kan het Westen ingrijpen?', *NRC Handelsblad*, 05/08/92.
- [27] Max Arian and Joke van Kampen, 'Te wapen', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 05/08/92, p.4.
- [28] Hans Leber, 'Laat ze de oorlog uitvechten' (Let them fight their own war), *Twentsche Courant*, 05/08/92.
- [29] 'Interventie vergt offers (1)' (Intervention translates into casualties), *Trouw*, 06/08/92.
- [30] 'Interventie vergt offers (2)', *Trouw*, 06/08/92.
- [31] J.A. Hoeksma, vice-chairman of the VluchtelingenWerk association in NOS Laat, 27/07/92; 'Particulieren bieden hulp bij opvang Bosniërs' (Private individuals offer help in receiving Bosnians), *NRC Handelsblad*, 29/07/92.
- [32] 'Particulieren bieden hulp bij opvang Bosniërs', *NRC Handelsblad*, 29/07/92.
- [33] 'Particulieren bieden hulp bij opvang Bosniërs', *NRC Handelsblad*, 29/07/92.
- [34] J.L. Heldring, 'Waar blijft het protest' ('Where's the protest?'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 28/07/92 and 'Schijnheiligheid troef' ('Hypocrisy laid bare'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 31/07/92.
- [35] Radio 2, AVRO, *Radiojournaal*, 09/08/92, 1.04pm; De Boode & Everts, 'Ontwikkelingen', pp.187-188; Nederlanders keuren militair ingrijpen in ex-Joegoslavië goed' ('Dutch approve of military intervention in ex-Yugoslavia'), *de Volkskrant*, 10/08/92. Six months later 66% of those interviewed in a NIPO poll were still of the same mind, 'Slachtoffers aanvaardbaar bij actie in ex-Joegoslavië' ('Casualties acceptable in campaign in ex-Yugoslavia'), *de Volkskrant*, 02/02/93. This opinion was diametrically opposed to Wecke's opinion that support would dwindle if there were more victims, Hans Leber, 'Laat ze de oorlog uitvechten', *Twentsche Courant*, 05/08/92. See also L. Wecke, 'Als er veel soldaten sneuvelen is het uit met steun voor de actie' ('If a lot of soldiers fall, support for the campaign will crumble'), *Trouw*, 23/02/93.
- [36] Van den Broek in NOS TV news, 07/08/92; De Hoop Scheffer and Valk in Radio 2, *Avro Radiojournaal*, 09/08/92, 1.04pm; Blaauw and De Hoop Scheffer in TV, *Nederland 3*, *NOS Laat*, 11/08/92, 10.30pm; 'Kamerleden terug van vakantie voor Joegoslavië-debat' ('MPs back from vacations for debate on Yugoslavia'), *de Volkskrant*, 06/08/92; Rob Meines, 'Verdeeldheid over ingrijpen in Bosnië' (No unanimity on intervention in Bosnia), *NRC Handelsblad*, 06/08/92.
- [37] Rob Meines, 'Verdeeldheid over ingrijpen in Bosnië', *NRC Handelsblad*, 06/08/92.

[38] Cf. 'Groeiende verdeeldheid over ingrijpen in Bosnië' ('Growing willingness among politicians to intervene'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 10/08/92.

[39] Interview W. Kok, 08/05/00.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 6

Emotionalization of the debate following reports about the camps ('Omarska'): June 1992 – August 1992

13. Opponents of intervention after the images of Trnopolje

In many ways the influence of the images of Trnopolje can be put in perspective. In the first place there were some who continued to object to the emphasis that many media were placing on the Bosnian conflict, at the expense of interest in the civil war in Somalia. In the United States, in the days following the broadcasting of the Trnopolje images, commentary appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and a broadcast by ABS News which defended this position earlier adopted by Boutros-Ghali.[1] Minister Pronk in the Netherlands expressed similar thoughts. The sociologist Jacques van Doorn, writing in *HP/De Tijd* of 21 August, called the conflict in Bosnia a major drama in European terms but modest in terms of – for instance – the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Cambodia, East Timor and various African countries. He did not think anything could be achieved by a military intervention on the part of the United Nations or the European Community since it is national interests that prevails in those international organizations. Bosnia, he said, was like a house on fire. 'Looking on helplessly is insufferable, but it has become too risky to enter the house (...) It means that we have to wait until the flames die out for lack of fuel, a prospect that is scarcely acceptable. Thus the discussion will drag on and with the courage of despair sporadic attempts will be made to save what can be saved.' [2]

Secondly, focusing again on the debate in the Netherlands, even after the showing of the Trnopolje images, there remained opponents of intervention. They warned against a lack of long-term aims for Bosnia, the lack of military means for an effective approach, the difficulties posed by the terrain, the many-sided character of the enemy, the risk of a guerrilla war and tensions within the EC and NATO should too many disagreements arise between countries for and against intervention.[3] In addition, according to some writers, modesty suited the Netherlands in the international debate on intervention. For example, professor of social history Henri Beunders referred to the pro-intervention calls made by Voorhoeve and Van den Doel as 'remarkable, if not superficial'. [4]

According to foreign affairs commentator G.B.J. Hiltermann in *de Telegraaf* the otherwise ever-careful Clingendael institute had turned into 'a pugnacious political non-think tank'. He warned of the guerrilla war that would be waiting for a Western intervention force in the 'scarcely accessible terrain', in the same way that life had been made difficult for Hitler's '37 divisions'. [5]

The journalists Frans van Deijl and Auke Kok reacted in *HP/De Tijd* to Voorhoeve's proposals to have the Serb 'concentration camps' liberated by commandos. According to the two journalists the Dutch commandos were not the Rambo-types capable of doing such a thing. They were trained mainly as observers and reconnaissance troops. Commandos from other countries could perhaps liberate the camps without too much difficulty, but would then find themselves in dangerous enemy territory with the freed detainees. Van Deijl and Kok reckoned that 400,000 soldiers would be required to ensure safe conduct for the convoys 'and even then success is not guaranteed'. Thus it was a 'mission impossible'. [6] According to the two journalists the chances of success of any air support were doubtful because of the probable presence of anti-aircraft missiles, that could be fired from the shoulders of Serbian 'wild

men' operating around Sarajevo. And should the West be prepared to use military means to deliver an ultimatum to all the warring factions, they would have to anticipate 'a death toll that would far surpass the consequences of the clean war against Iraq - 100,000 victims'. [7]

In his response Beunders qualified the small piece' by Voorhoeve and Van den Doel published in *De Volkskrant* on 5 August as 'an example of *Gesinnungsethik* that places good intentions above consequences'. As possible consequences of the proposals made by Voorhoeve and Van den Doel Beunders saw conflict escalation, internationalization, a rift in NATO, the WEU or the EC, while it was not possible to indicate what the final aim was to be in Bosnia. Ethnic cleansing using peaceful methods, for instance, could lead to long-term irredentism. And thus Beunders called for 'caution, especially for a small country such as the Netherlands', whose concrete military contribution Voorhoeve and Van den Doel had been unable to specify. Voorhoeve, whose doctoral dissertation was entitled *Peace, Profits and Principles*, should have known better, claimed Beunders: 'The self-preservation of a small country such as the Netherlands, dependent on trade and surrounded by large neighbours, requires us not to march at the front in military interventions but to provide humanitarian help and to continue to bang the drum for diplomatic solutions'. The call for military intervention, stated the Rotterdam professor, came from people unable to stand impotence and wanting to do something without being prepared to think about the consequences. In view of the limited capabilities of the Netherlands, he called for 'an exercise in impotence'. [8]

H.J. Neumann, chairman of the CDA (Christian Democrat) Foreign Affairs Committee, expressed the opinion that the politicians needed to think about the consequences both of doing nothing and of military intervention. As regards the latter, he felt that both government and parliamentarians had better seek the advice of military experts and experts on the region. [9] In *Trouw* the parliamentary journalist Willem Breedveld wrote that military intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina was 'not only a question of morality or justice but above all a matter of effectiveness and efficiency': 'It is like a fire brigade commandant, from whom you cannot and may not expect that he should send his men blindly into a burning house'. First the risks and consequences have to be weighed, not only for his own men but also for the neighbouring buildings. He warned Dutch parliamentarians that the strong moral awareness that the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia could not be allowed to form a precedent did not give them *carte blanche* to ignore the promptings of their intelligence. [10] The editorial in *NRC Handelsblad* had disagreed with this position a few days before: 'The military strategist and the diplomatic politician may in their wisdom decide that all that can be done is hose down the neighbouring buildings, but the agitated citizen wants to get into the burning house to save whatever he can'. The *NRC Handelsblad* commentator agreed that foreign policy based only on conviction and not on the consequences of political and military action was irresponsible, but in his view, there was more. The West's own interests were at stake. Every day that passed without intervention undermined the authority of the EC and NATO. [11] According to some, this affected not only the image of NATO in the eyes of the world but also in the eyes of citizens in the member states. 'The Yugoslavia question', wrote columnist Hofland in *NRC Handelsblad*

'is by no means any longer confined to the civil war and the question of blame. It has become a European question because it shows the extent of the gap between peoples and governments. The political elite doubts its electorate because they do not know to what extent the people are prepared to have their peaceful and comfortable lives taken away. The electorate doubts the decision-making capacities of the politicians because the latter have already demonstrated that they are unable to put a stop to a bloody crisis that horrifies everyone'. [12]

The political philosophers Ido de Haan and Tsjalling Wierstra reacted violently to the 'realists' who were against intervention. They stated that the realists first created their own facts and then used them as a basis for preferring non-intervention. And this, they said, was some kind of 'moral perversity': 'If this sort of despicable attitude is supposed to represent high-ground morality, then it is clear that a sense of reality is perhaps good but not the sort of thing you can leave to realists'. [13]

These animated reflections demonstrated the tensions existing between the supporters of intervention and those in favour of doing nothing. The comparisons with guerrilla-like and bogged-down situations such as Yugoslavia in the Second World War, Vietnam and Lebanon and the calculations that stated that a hundred thousand soldiers or more would be the minimum requirement for intervention failed to impress the interventionists but simply increased their feelings of impotence, an emotion that came back time and time and again in the pages of the newspapers in August 1992. [14] It was scarcely possible for the two parties to convince one another. For those who wanted more action than politicians or military regarded as possible 'politics stinks (...) through the deodorant of caution', as Hofland put it. [15] A stalemate had developed in which the arguments on both sides were used again and again. A debate in which alternatives to military intervention would be sought did not take place and it was remarkable how, for instance, the limited readiness of the Dutch government to accept refugees was completely banished to the background. Exceptions were the professor of modern history at the University of Amsterdam, M.C. Brands and the reporter with RTL 4 Nieuws, Michiel Bicker Caarten, both of whom said that they thought that military intervention made no sense, because the aim was unclear, but at the same time pointed out that the Netherlands most certainly could do something by accepting refugees. [16]

The majority of the best-known opinion-makers in the Netherlands, when confronted with the question 'intervention: yes or no?' began to be more clearly defined as being pro-intervention. In favour were particularly: Voorhoeve, Van den Doel, Leurdijk, the brothers Tromp, Wecke, Oostlander, Faber, Van Eekelen, Huyser, De Vogel, Bleich, Von der Dunk and Hofland. Against were: most of the military, Beunders, Brands, Van Doorn, Koch, Hiltermann, Michielsen, Scheffer and Jan Marijnissen, chairman of the Socialist Party. [17] In addition Van den Doel, Huyser and De Vogel had shifted from an anti-interventionist point of view to an opinion calling for intervention.

Nuances in images

A third remark that places the effect produced by the ITN images of Trnopolje in perspective relates to the effect they had on the visualization of the conflict by people themselves. While it has been shown, on the one hand, that even before 6 August comparisons had been made between the actions of the Serbs and events under the Third Reich, after that date there were individuals who criticized this analogy. Moreover it continued to be said, at least in the Netherlands, that the Serbs were not the only guilty ones in the conflict. The Dutch press, for instance, made little use of the term 'concentration camps'. In general the Dutch media stuck to the term 'prison camps'. [18] It is known that the editorial staff of *NRC Handelsblad* consciously did everything they could to avoid the use of the term 'concentration camp'. [19]

Vulliamy and the ITN journalists themselves were not alone in rejecting the comparison drawn between the images of Trnopolje and the Second World War concentration camps. Stephen Engelberg and Chuck Sudetic, for example, writing in *The New York Times*, said that the camps were part of the series of measures aimed at removing other ethnic groups from the territory claimed by the Serbs. They were not meant as places of extermination. Nor did the murders that occurred there have the systematic character of the Third Reich's extermination camps. Many deaths were caused by drunken Serb soldiers beating their victims. Sometimes small groups were executed. And detainees died from sickness, hunger and bad hygiene. According to the reports they had, some hundreds of detainees had died in the camps and not the 17,000 that the Bosnian authorities had started to report. And thus they refused to use the word 'genocide'. [20] The American weekly *Time* expressed itself in similar terms. According to Western diplomats, quoted in the magazine, most of the camps were 'harsh but not murderous detention sites where enemies, civilian and military, are warehoused before expulsion or exchange'. [21]

In *NRC Handelsblad* Peter Michielsen wrote that there was no question of the camps being extermination camps. 'One should bear in mind that the stories of abuse originated with individuals who had been *set free*, not with people who had escaped. How many Jews were let out of Auschwitz?' [22] Arie Elshout and Bert Lanting wrote in *Het Parool* that no matter how reprehensible

their behaviour might be, the Serbs were not pulling in members of other ethnic groups from all over the former Yugoslavia to a camp in order to destroy them. They preferred to see them leave.[23] The editor in chief of *Vrij Nederland* Rinus Ferdinandusse did, however, want to draw a comparison with the Second World War, but not the usual one: 'They are not mass extermination camps, but handy storage sites such as each party constructs when wishing to isolate another. The Netherlands too put its members of the fascist NSB and the SS in a camp, and that is a black page in our history. But during and because of war no human standards apply'.[24]

As in other countries, the reports about the camps caused the Serbs to be highlighted in the Netherlands as the major violators of human rights. In almost 80% of the headlines and opening paragraphs where *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Telegraaf*, *Trouw* or *De Volkskrant* reported in August 1992 on human rights violations in Bosnia, such as camps, ethnic cleansing and deportation, a link was made to the Serbs, in something over 10% to the Croats and in more than 4% to the Muslims.[25] But it would seem, however, that this is not essentially different from the situation before the images were broadcast. It is only the frequency of the total number of reports on human rights violations – and thus on the Serbs' responsibility – that shows a rise. It is, in fact, remarkable how there was still space in the Dutch newspapers after 'Trnopolje', especially in the opinion-forming contributions, for voices putting into perspective the Serb violations of human rights either by questioning their nature and extent or by highlighting the behaviour of other parties in the conflict. Among the latter the Croats were indeed second worst.

Mient Jan Faber, who travelled through South Serbia in early August and visited the refugee camps there, declared on his return to the Netherlands that he supported military intervention to protect helpless people but that intervention should also take place 'at places where the Muslims operate under the banner of hard religious nationalism', and Faber had understood from UN military personnel 'that it is extremely difficult to enter into agreements with the Muslims because they do not stick to their word'.[26] In the NOS newscast he declared that Serbs, Croats and Muslims were all guilty of serious human rights violations.[27]

For the cultural anthropologist René Grémaux, who had resided several years in Yugoslavia for study purposes and was to become a trainer at the Dutch *Centrum voor Vredesvraagstukken* (Peace Research Centre) it was not even a question. In his opinion Europe had been 'for months in the firing line of a propaganda war waged by Croats and Muslims using the big guns'. He rejected the black-and-white picture of 'Serb attackers' and 'Bosnian defenders' that dominated the judgement of politicians and military via the media. He gave the Serb authorities carte blanche for future wrongdoing by stating: 'If the demonization of everything Serbian predominates and increasingly determines the policy pursued by international bodies, we should not be surprised if Serbs behave in accordance with the image we have accorded them'. He turned against the characterization of the Serb detention centres as concentration camps, though he did admit that one should have no illusions about the treatment meted out to the detainees 'and certainly not in the case of those with blood on their hands'. They were presumably 'ordinary camps (...) which belong to the usual horrors of war'. He preferred to place the Serbs and the Jews on the same level: 'The understanding shown for Israel's use of force in order to prevent Jews ever again going like lambs to the slaughter is quite evidently not shown to the Serbs'.[28]

Dutch journalists did their own limited research into camps in Bosnia and the results were relatively harmless for the Serb image. The NOS newscast on 7 August carried an interview, from the Willem I barracks in Den Bosch, by Betty Lamers with a Bosnian woman refugee who had been in the Trnopolje camp. She declared that she had not been beaten there.[29] On the same day the NOS newscast showed pictures of a Serb internment camp in Butmir, where the inmates looked reasonably well. Karadzic was given the opportunity to say that human rights had not been violated in the Serb camps and that any reports that this was the case could be ascribed to Muslim propaganda.[30] Raymond van den Boogaard also took a look at this place and described it as: 'The Serb prison with probably the best imaginable conditions in Bosnia'. The Muslims he found there were not underfed. Their main problems were boredom and isolation.[31] After the images of Trnopolje the NOS television news repeatedly showed images of other Serb camps such as Manjaca, Omarska and Bosanski Brod. Each time it appeared that the prisoners looked well.[32] A few days after the broadcast

of the Trnopolje film the journalist Ewoud Nysingh (*De Volkskrant*) was the first to succeed in visiting a camp of the extremist Croatian Defence Force (HOS) in Capljina, south of Mostar, where Serbs were held prisoner. The prisoners, who looked thin, did not dare to talk to Nysingh because of the presence of the Croatian Major General Blaz Kraljevic. Nysingh did not learn much from his visit and in the end was afraid that his presence was endangering the lives of the prisoners.[33]

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- [1] Strobel, *Policy*, p.138.
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- [13] Ido de Haan & Tsjalling Swierstra, 'Realisten praten in Balkan-debat recht wat krom is' ('Realists in debate on the Balkans argue what is wrong is right'), *de Volkskrant*, 28/08/92.
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- [16] M.C. Brands, 'Militair ingrijpen vereist heldere doelen' ('Military intervention requires clear objectives'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 07/08/92; Michiel Bicker Caarten, 'Servië is geen nazi-Duitsland' ('Serbia is no Nazi Germany'), *de Volkskrant*, 07/08/92.
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- [19] Appendix Jan Wieten, *Srebrenica en de journalistiek*, pp.55-56.
- [20] Stephen Engelberg & Chuck Sudetic, 'Conflict in the Balkans: In enemy Hands', *The New York Times*, 16/08/92.
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- [24] Rinus Ferdinandusse, 'Nederland grijpt in' ('The Netherlands intervene'), *Vrij Nederland*, 14/08/92.
- [25] Appendix Scholten & Ruigrok & Heerman, *In Sarajevo wordt geschoten*, pp.195-196.
- [26] 'Faber bepleit militair ingrijpen ter bescherming burgers' ('Faber urges military intervention for protection of civilians'), *de Volkskrant*, 08/08/92.
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- [31] Raymond van den Boogaard, 'Butmir, Sevische gevangenis dient als modelinstelling' ('Butmir, Serbian prison serving

as a model institution'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 15/08/92.

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Part I

The Yugoslavian problem and the role of the West 1991-1994

Chapter 6

Emotionalization of the debate following reports about the camps ('Omarska'): June 1992 – August 1992

14. The somewhat longer term after Trnopolje: the Netherlands is willing, but the rest of the world ...

Not only had the 'public' visualization of the situation and public opinion been strongly influenced before the ITN images went out across the world, other things were going on in the field of policy. On 6 August, prior to the ITN programme, the EC for instance demanded that the Bosnian-Serb authorities allow Red Cross observers to visit the camps.[1] And after the programme the influence on policy outside the Netherlands – two UN resolutions, the making available of 1,800 British and 1,100 French troops – was not great. Resolution 770, which permitted the use of force accompanying humanitarian aid, in fact expressed the viewpoint already adopted by the EC during the Lisbon summit, after which Mitterrand's visit to Sarajevo removed the reason. In *The New York Times* of 8 August readers were told that while it was true to say that on television, in newspapers and in magazines pressure was being applied to European politicians to do more about the Serb aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there had not yet been any demonstrations in the major European cities and the European leaders were showing little appetite for firmer action.[2]

The pictures from Trnopolje seemed to have practically no effect on American policy. Bush stated forcefully that he refused to have his policy set by emotions called up by the images. On 8 August he declared: 'I don't care what the political pressures are. I am not going to get bogged down in some guerrilla warfare'. [3] The American president did not argue with the fact that 'the shocking brutality of genocide in World War II, in those concentration camps, are burning memories for all of us, and that can't happen again'. And the American government would continue to insist that the international community be given access to the camps. But at the same time he also said that everyone calling for the American military to be sent in was not carrying his presidential responsibilities. 'Before one soldier is committed to battle, I want to know how that person gets out of there', stated the American president.[4]

Bush knew that he had the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who confirmed that support via the chairman's assistant, Lieutenant General Barry R. McCaffrey, when he announced to the Senate that if the West wished to do more than supply humanitarian aid the line between peace-keeping and peace-enforcement would soon be crossed.[5] McCaffrey said that 400,000 soldiers would be needed for peace-enforcement and he sketched in powerful terms the difficulties that an army of this size would encounter: 'You are dealing with 23,000 square miles of a country slightly larger than South Vietnam. It is four times bigger than Northern Ireland, with 200,000 armed people in it, and so if you ask me how long it would take to subdue those combatants or disarm them, or deter them, it would be a tremendous military challenge on broken-up ground and forested terrain'. [6]

Even Clinton went no further in his criticism of Bush than to insist on sending in air power, a call that earned him blame on the part of the media for wanting to 'combat genocide on the cheap'. [7] But a few days after the ITN images had been broadcast the Senate did agree, by 82 votes to 13, to the use of military means by the UN to get the humanitarian aid into Bosnia and to the insistence that the

camps be opened for international inspection. But Bush's announcement in May to Boutros-Ghali that the American government, with an eye to Congress and the electorate before the presidential elections in November, would give no more money to the UN, remained in force, which meant that large-scale use of UN military in Bosnia was in effect made impossible.[8]

Probably the most tangible contribution to American policy made by the indignation that arose through the reporting on the Bosnian-Serb camps was the readiness shown by the American government to agree to the establishment of a commission of experts to collect evidence for a possible war tribunal.[9] However the intention to set up a commission of this type had already been there before the transmission of the ITN images.[10]

Even though after the reports about concentration camps the American newspapers and weeklies gave considerably more space to the war in the former Yugoslavia than in the previous eighteen months,[11] this scarcely had any effect on the American government's preparedness to contemplate military action. As stated by the American diplomat Zimmermann: even if American television had broadcast round-the-clock reports of Serb atrocities the Bush government would not have budged.[12] American policymakers declared that all they had done after the Trnopolje pictures had been shown was give the *impression* that they were doing something.[13] National security adviser Scowcroft said of the media storm following the ITN images: 'We just sort of rode it out'. [14] Gutman too was of the opinion that his contributions and that of ITN about the camps had had 'zero' effect on American policy.[15] The American public was more inclined to follow its president than the media. It was only in a poll held on 6 August that supporters of Bush's policy towards Yugoslavia and its opponents were in balance (38% each). Subsequent polls in August, however, showed a majority for those in support of the presidential policy. In fact, from August the public continued to follow the president, first Bush and then Clinton, whether he was more or less inclined to intervene.[16]

In the United Kingdom public opinion was even more tepid than in the United States.[17] After the enormous reverberations caused by the Trnopolje images in the morning papers on 7 August, the effect quickly ebbed away. In any case, in the period up to September 1993 the British newspapers gave even more space to opinions against than for intervention. And although Bosnia took pride of place on British television, a great deal of attention was also paid to other disaster areas, especially Somalia and the Sudan, sometimes Angola and Georgia. According to Young the variety and quantity of attention was fatal rather than stimulating for pro-intervention public opinion.[18]

According to Prime Minister Major himself the wide spectrum of opinions in his country ensured that there was no proposal of a serious alternative to the fairly cautious attitude of his government to intervention in the former Yugoslavia.[19] Scarcely a word of opposition to the Major government's cautious policy was uttered by his own Conservative Party.[20] An important exception was Margaret Thatcher, who believed that the West should guarantee multi-ethnicity in Bosnia or lose its credibility. For her it was clear that the international community was dealing with Serb aggression and not with civil war. She called not only for military intervention but also for a lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the Bosnian government. At the time of the Serb attack on Srebrenica in early 1993 she advanced, in her usual powerful manner, that this was happening 'in the heart of Europe and we have not done any more to stop it. It is in Europe's sphere of influence. It should be in Europe's sphere of conscience'[21] Her statements sometimes even made some on the left long for her return as leader. However her successor, John Major, hit back hard by saying that as regards Bosnia nobody had the monopoly of care or conscience. And the British Minister of Defence, Rifkind, dismissed Thatcher's statements as 'emotional nonsense'. [22] During the entire period of the war in the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995 the British parliament paid relatively little attention to the situation there. It took almost six months after the declarations of independence by Croatia and Slovenia before the British parliament dealt with the Yugoslavia question on 12 December – at half past three in the morning. After that there was scarcely any opposition to government policy either. During the entire conflict in Bosnia the Labour Party was opposed to military intervention.[23] Despite very solid reports from Bosnia itself most of the newspapers in the United Kingdom were just as reluctant to take up a clear anti-government position.[24]

In France a clique of intellectuals, journalists, artists and other opinion-makers appeared to be exerting major influence on the government through debates.[25] Unlike in the Netherlands, however, the French parliament was in a weak position. The role of the representatives of the French people in determining policy on peace operations could even be said to have been 'non-existent'. At best the French parliament served as a sounding board for the government in this area of policy.[26] The French parliament could therefore not act as a sounding board for public opinion.

The German public was very involved in the developments in the former Yugoslavia. In late 1992, for example, 85% of the German population were of the opinion that the question of Yugoslavia was the most important international problem of the day.[27] However there was at the same time a somewhat widespread feeling that for constitutional and historical reasons German troops would not be called upon.

The British and French governments continued to oppose any form of military intervention. They were prepared to do no more than place more emphasis on humanitarian aid than had already been the case since Mitterrand's solo visit to Sarajevo.[28] Moreover the governments of both countries, just like the United States, referred to the Security Council in matters of action – and they were all members of the Council with the right of veto.[29]

The Major government, true enough, had made 1,800 troops available, but under strict conditions. The offer of 1,800 men had been a compromise 'between what is militarily desirable and what public opinion was demanding'.[30] Prior to the ITN broadcast Prime Minister Major had adopted the stance that the situation in the former Yugoslavia was such that solutions imposed from outside were impossible[31] and he did not waver from that opinion. The Minister of State of the British Foreign Office Douglas Hogg stated to the assembled press on 13 August during a visit to Sarajevo that he had made it clear to the Bosnian government 'that there was no cavalry over the hill. There is no international force coming to stop this'.[32] The British military would be going primarily to protect the humanitarian convoys. The basic principle was 'to do all in our power to limit the conflict'. The British government was not prepared to do more. The American and British Chiefs of Staff had calculated that it would take 400,000 troops – three times the size of the British army – to keep the three warring factions apart.[33] British experts had calculated that an intervention force of no more than 60,000 troops would cost an annual amount of GBP2.5 billion.[34] The British Minister of Defence, Rifkind, also let it be known that as soon as British troops were fired on the contingent would be withdrawn.[35] The British point of view remained that in Bosnia there was no question of 'objectives worth dying for'.[36] Moreover it took until the end of October, almost two-and-a-half months, before the troops promised by the United Kingdom arrived in Bosnia.

Nor did the UN take more action after the images. The deputy commander of UNPROFOR, General P. Morillon, warned against military intervention immediately after the broadcast. It would, he said, cost more than a hundred thousand dead and wounded.[37] On 12 August Boutros-Ghali wrote in a letter to the Security Council that the safety of the UN troops already present in the former Yugoslavia would be threatened if there should be military intervention.[38] A day later the French president Mitterrand declared that not a single member of the Security Council was considering a military intervention and the French government would not propose it: 'ajouter la guerre à la guerre ne résoudra rien' ('adding another war to the war will not solve anything').[39]

As early as 6 August the North-Atlantic Council had given the Military Committee the green light to examine possible ways of putting troops in. There were three options on the table: reinforce the monitoring of economic sanctions; monitor the handing in of heavy weaponry; military support for the aid transports.[40] A decision was to be taken a week later. But on 14 August the NATO Secretary-General Wörner announced that his advisers needed a further ten days to study various scenarios. The images of Trnopolje, therefore, had not led to a feeling of urgency even within NATO. A NATO diplomat told the press that there was still a long way to go before NATO really would send troops to Bosnia. 'And it might even never come to that.'[41]

This delay irritated both the Dutch government[42] and the Dutch parliamentarians. They complained that NATO could have suspected from the Lisbon summit that a resolution was about to be

adopted that would permit the use of force for humanitarian ends. Why, then, did they need so much time? Blaauw, for example, was 'saddened' and 'embarrassed' by this 'blow in the face not only for the prestige of the UN and the Security Council but also of NATO'. He advised Lubbers and his colleague Major to make a visit and take with them his soul-mate Kohl: 'And then the Conservative-Christian-Democrat family can get round the table and discuss how we are to solve this problem in Europe.'^[43]

In the NATO discussions held in Brussels there was a heavy option on the table: send 115,000 soldiers to escort transport convoys from Split to Sarajevo. The Netherlands let it be known that lighter options should be considered, even though it realized that this would bring greater security risks.^[44] Since that also represented the standpoint of other countries, the North-Atlantic Council ordered the military to elaborate a plan based not on holding a route but on escorting aid convoys. The WEU was also engaged in similar planning at the time. Both organizations calculated that five to six thousand troops would suffice for a light option of this type. The international community would then have to accept the fact that the guards at the roadblocks in Bosnia would decide whether and at what rate the convoys would be allowed to pass through.^[45] On 25 August the NATO Council gave its approval to this option.^[46] It was a pretty slim result.

Keep quiet, unless...

Discussions in NATO and the WEU were going too slowly, a fact noted not only by Dutch parliamentarians but also on 20 August by the Dutch Ministerial Council meeting.^[47] And thus Minister Van den Broek and Premier Lubbers launched the plan to implement military operations, outside NATO and the WEU but with UN permission, to protect humanitarian aid to Bosnia.^[48] Van den Broek's list included Belgium, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Turkey. With this intention the government, that had still been feeling parliamentary pressure on 12 August, surpassed parliament in dynamism. Now the members of parliament began to be somewhat wary. Parliament fully approved of Van den Broek's plan as long as it was only designed to put pressure on NATO and the WEU, but as soon as it became reality, said CDA, PvdA and VVD members, the United States should be added to the list.^[49] Surprise was also expressed in the *Vrede en veiligheid* (Peace and security) working party of the CDA's Foreign Policy Committee at this 'forceful' language on the part of the government.^[50]

Van den Broek's intention was 'not wrong', wrote the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 'but the question is whether the tone is not a little too shrill in contrast to the contribution that our country can really make. If Great Britain, France and Italy fail to adopt this line, our pluckiness will look a little ludicrous'.^[51] 'If nobody apart from France and a couple of other countries participate, Dutch readiness could perhaps seem a little gratuitous', wrote Jaap Jansen in the *Elsevier* weekly. 'Or is the Netherlands about to take up arms without further thought and will the Royal Netherlands Army be providing Europe's mercenaries?'^[52]

Almost immediately after Van den Broek's plan was announced an historic interview with the Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army, Brigadier General Willink, was published in both *De Telegraaf* and *Het Binnenhof*. He stated that the Netherlands would be unable to supply fighting units because it was impossible to send conscripts unwilling to go.^[53] This led many organs of the press to comment that it would be better for the Dutch government to leave aside the rhetoric.^[54] In fact on 6 August *Trouw* had already asked the question of whether the Dutch parliamentarians had sufficient oversight of the consequences of intervention, especially the sacrifice in terms of Dutch lives, and whether they were prepared to accept such consequences. Was that not the case, the politicians would do better to keep quiet, no matter how embarrassing that might be.^[55] The retired Brigadier General E.P.B. Tomasso, ex-commander of the Dutch UN battalion in Lebanon, expressed similar sentiments. The only solution in Yugoslavia, he said, was massive intervention. Were 'we, spoiled Europeans' not prepared to do such a thing, 'we should stop right now with that very noncommittal philosophizing about military intervention in the hell's kitchen of the Adriatic'.^[56]

'The Netherlands is faced with (...) the question of how to get the military fist to the spot where the political mouth has been shouting in strong terms for some time now', was the conclusion reached by the editorial in *NRC Handelsblad*.^[57] But the start to an answer had already been given. On 22 August in an interview with *Trouw* Minister Pronk had shown himself to be a supporter of military intervention going beyond the protection of aid convoys. The military, he said, should take a look at how best an intervention could be organized. 'As an amateur' the minister himself was not a good judge of this. But he did think that as soon as possible his colleague Ter Beek should be able to make available an airmobile brigade for rapid intervention.^[58] This idea was enthusiastically supported by Rob Meines in *NRC Handelsblad* and Kees Lunshof in *de Telegraaf*.^[59] It prompted Ter Beek to remark that Pronk had good insight into the future of the Royal Netherlands Army.^[60] This put the Airmobile Brigade in the interventionists' sights.

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- [46] 'Serviërs en moslims stellen zich hard op' ('Serbs and Muslims take a hard line'), *Trouw*, 26/08/92.
- [47] See also Van den Broek in Radio 1, *VARA*, Friday edition, 14/08/92, 5.05pm, where he said that he did not know whether other countries or organizations were at that stage, but that he had put in a strong plea that the WEU and NATO should consider the implementation of the recent Security Council resolutions.
- [48] Ewoud Nysingh, 'Bosnische president wordt grote verliezer in Londen' ('Bosnian president will be the big loser in London'), *de Volkskrant*, 25/08/92; 'Nederland kondigt initiatief Bosnië aan als besluitvorming in Navo nog lang duurt' ('The Netherlands announces Bosnian initiative – if decision to be taken within NATO takes much longer'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 21/08/92.
- [49] 'Kamer wil Van den Broeks plan voor actie in Bosnië eerst zien' ('Lower House wants to see Van den Broek's plan for campaign in Bosnia first'), *de Volkskrant*, 22/08/92.
- [50] CDA-secretariaat, Commissie Buitenland, werkgroep Vrede en veiligheid, 1992, H4.184, agenda point 3, report of the working party, 24/08/92.
- [51] 'Krijgshaftige dadendrang' ('Bellicose thirst for action'), *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 21/08/92.
- [52] Jaap Jansen, 'Vragen van leven en dood' ('Questions of life and death'), *Elsevier*, 22/08/92.
- [53] Guido van de Kreeke, 'Zandhaas heeft weer toekomst' ('Foot-slogging has future again'), *De Telegraaf*, 22/08/92; Rik in 't Hout, 'Generaal Wilmink onthult: 'Nederland niet in staat snel troepen te leveren' (Generaal Wilmink discloses: 'The Netherlands is incapable of contributing troops quickly'), *Het Binnenhof*, 22/08/92.
- [54] Solo-actie uit den boze ('Solo campaign absolutely forbidden'), *Algemeen Dagblad*, 22/08/92; the former commander of the first army corps, retired Lieutenant General W.J. Loos in Remco Meijer, 'Een harde job' ('A hard task'), *Elsevier*, 22/08/92, pp.31-32; J.L. Heldring, 'De Brezjnev-doctrine van Jan Pronk' ('The Brezhnev doctrine of Jan Pronk'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 25/08/92; Guikje Roethof, 'Krijgshaftig: Hoe wil Ter Beek eigenlijk aanvallen' ('Bellicose – How does Ter Beek actually want to attack?'), *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 02/09/92.
- [55] 'Interventie vergt offers (2)', *Trouw*, 06/08/92.
- [56] E.P.B. Tomasso, 'Bittertafelstrategen' ('Cocktail strategists'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 14/08/92.
- [57] 'Het Nederlandse Leger' ('The Royal Netherlands Army'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 27/08/92.
- [58] Willem Breedveld & Louis Cornelisse, 'Jan Pronk bekeerd: Soldaten tegen Servië' ('Jan Pronk for, soldiers against Serbia'), *Trouw*, 22/08/92.
- [59] Rob Meines, 'Ander Nederlands defensiebeleid vergt nog meer durf van politici' ('A different Dutch defence policy requires even more nerve from politicians'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 29/08/92; Kees Lunshof, 'Politiek kleineert risico's in Bosnië' (Political circles play down risks in Bosnia), *de Telegraaf*, 25/08/92. See also A. van Staden and J.B. Veen, 'Defensie is nog steeds een grabbelton' ('Department of Defence is still a lucky bag'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 01/09/92.
- [60] 'Ook de PvdA weet het niet' ('Even the PvdA is uncertain'), *Trouw*, 31/08/92.

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3. The beginning of the war, April 1992

After the majority of the Bosnian population, that is to say the Muslims and Croats, had voted for independence in the referendum, the European Community recognized the independence of Bosnia on 6 April 1992; this referendum and everything related to it was considered in detail in Chapter 5 of Part I. The referendum was held without the approval of most of the Serb population who had boycotted it. The recognition that was about to be granted at the end of March/beginning of April led to large-scale animosity in Eastern Bosnia where paramilitary forces from Serbia, known as the 'Arkan Tigers' took over Bijeljina. Subsequently, the Yugoslav Federal Army (JNA) along with a large number of paramilitary groups started an offensive along the Drina, to gain control of the area that bordered on Serbia. Within a few days the attack on Zvornik and Visegrad was also begun. Zvornik was taken quickly, but the conquering of Visegrad was more difficult. Nonetheless, the JNA and other Serbian warring groups had seventy percent of Bosnian terrain under their control within a few weeks. Local SDS crisis committees were set up everywhere to plan and coordinate the ethnic cleansing. The normal pattern was for the JNA to take over strategic roads and intersections and then to fire at Muslim settlements, whereupon paramilitary groups would enter the village and plunder it. The population was terrorized, killed or chased out.

The primary goal of the Drina campaign was to gain control of Eastern Bosnia on the border of Serbia to assure that all of the 'Serb' areas in Bosnia could be coupled to one another and to Serbia. The main objective was, just as during the Serbian revolt at the beginning of the nineteenth century to obtain one, large, linked Serbian area in which Eastern Hercegovina, Romanija and the Bosnian Krajina would be connected to one another and to Serbia. That was only possible if Eastern Bosnia, which was dominated by the Muslims, also came into Serbian hands (see map in section 1). Thus, it is no surprise that the first large military campaign in Bosnia was along the Drina and was intended to obtain complete control over this area. The following objective of the Serbs was to cleanse these areas of their Muslim population.

War reaches Srebrenica

After the most important cities in Eastern Bosnia were brought under Serbian control, the next step was to conquer the smaller towns and villages where the majority of inhabitants were Muslims, so as to consolidate the hold on the area. It was only in this stage that the war reached Bratunac and Srebrenica. In Bratunac first of all, Serbian pressure led to a formal division of the municipal police on 9 April. Now that there was a Muslim and a Serbian police force, war psychosis began slowly to take hold. Next, the TV masts were blown up so that the populations of Srebrenica and Bratunac could no longer receive the Bosnian channels nor the federal Yugoslavian channel, Yutel (set up under the Markovic Government), only Serbian channels.

On 10 April the SDA leaders of Srebrenica yielded to the pressure of the SDS to divide up the town of Srebrenica, which was decided in an extraordinary town council meeting a few days later. Subsequently, the following day, 11 April, the police station in Skelani, a border spot on the Drina that

was part of the municipality of Srebrenica, was forcibly placed under Serbian control. Next, on 17 April, Bratunac was overrun by units of the Yugoslav Federal Army and paramilitary groups from Serbia. The meeting between SDA and SDS leaders on that day which had been convoked in Srebrenica was held upon request of the Serbs 'for reasons of security' in Bratunac, where the mayor of Srebrenica, Besim Ibisevic, and a few other Muslims were given an ultimatum by the SDS. They had to turn over the power in Srebrenica the following day to the SDS and see to it that all armed militias were disarmed. The authorities in Bratunac were presented with the same ultimatum.

When the Muslim delegation in Srebrenica returned and made clear to the population that Bratunac was now in the hands of the JNA and Serbian paramilitary groups, the population began to flee. Almost all of the Muslim elite of the town of Srebrenica, including the mayor, packed their bags and left in the direction of Tuzla. The following day in the afternoon, units of the Novi Sad corps of the JNA and paramilitary units took control of the town which had been abandoned and had offered no resistance whatsoever. Paramilitary units began to plunder the town. It was only in the town of Potocari and in Stari Grad (the higher, older section of the town of Srebrenica close to the Turkish citadel) that they did not dare to penetrate because of the Muslim militias hiding there.

Part of the population of Srebrenica took flight to the woods and hills in the surrounding area. In a number of villages around Srebrenica, the Muslim population began to organize local resistance groups. The first major act of resistance took place on 20 April in Potocari when Naser Oric ambushed a number of vehicles of the 'Arkan Tigers' and the local Serbian police. At least four Serbs were killed in this ambush. Right after, the JNA started artillery assaults on the Muslim stronghold Potocari and surrounding villages.

The Serbian conquest of Bratunac and Srebrenica signalled the beginning of large-scale ethnic cleansing. These acts of cleansing took place first of all in the surrounding villages and ultimately in the town of Bratunac itself where a great many Muslims were still in their houses. First, the head of the local SDS crisis committee of Bratunac, Miroslav Deronjic, sent ultimatums to the most important Muslim strongholds in this municipality, Voljavica, Glogova and Konjevic Polje (see map section 1) to disarm the population and to surrender all of the weapons. They were given until 1 May to meet this demand, and when they refused, the Serbs began that day with a large number of attacks on Muslim villages. The attacks were carried out and coordinated from two places, Bratunac and Milici. Instead of sending SDS delegations, paramilitary units and local SDS militias were sent to the villages; they chased the Muslim population out of their villages, killed them, plundered their houses and set them in flames. In Bratunac, the Bosnian-Serbian authorities began to pick up Muslims, political leaders and intellectuals primarily, also from Srebrenica, a large number of whom were killed. Some Muslim leaders from Srebrenica were followed as far as Montenegro. A number of them disappeared there, probably abducted and killed.

On 6 May, Muslims carried out their first counterattack on a Serb village, Gniona, to the north of the town of Srebrenica. It was the first Serb village to be attacked and captured by Oric in this way. It was of strategic importance because it offered access to another centre of Muslim resistance, Sucevka, where Zulfo Tursunovic held sway. On 7 May, a number of Serbs were killed in Srebrenica where the militias of Hakija Meholic and Akif Ustic were fighting around Stari Grad. On the same day armed Muslims laid ambush near Osmace on the way to Skelani, an extremely important communication route for the Serbs. After first cutting off the road between Srebrenica and Bratunac in Potocari, the Muslims now closed off this important exit route connecting Srebrenica to the outside world. This marked the beginning of a long series of attacks on Muslim villages in the new Serbian municipality Skelani, led by the local SDS president Dane Katanic. The attacks began on 8 May 1992 and within a few days more than twenty Muslim villages were completely emptied. Hundreds of houses were set on fire, more than 1,300 Muslims were transported to Macedonia and another 900 were chased away to other Muslim villages in the direction of Srebrenica.

Despite these actions, the morale among the Muslim fighters was given a considerable boost when it became known that the SDS president of Srebrenica, Goran Zekic was killed in the afternoon of 8 May on his way from Srebrenica to Bratunac (on the mountain road by way of Sase). According to

reports he was shot by Muslim fighters, although other sources suggest that the moderate Zekic was perhaps done in by SDS extremists. Although the responsibility for Zekic's death was not established with certainty, it was enough to inspire the Serbs to a new wave of violence against the Muslims, this time in the small town of Bratunac and surrounding villages.

On 9 May, sixty Muslims from the village of Glogova were driven into a field near the local mosque and executed. On 10 May, the Serbs forced thousands of Muslims from the town of Bratunac into the local sport stadium, separated the men from the women and children, and placed about seven hundred men in the gymnasium of a school, where one of the bloodiest and cruellest episodes of the war took place. Hundreds of men were tortured and killed, primarily by members of paramilitary forces who did not come from Bratunac. About half of the men did not survive the torture and executions, and the rest were transported a few days later out of the area and handed over.

The slaying of Zekic did have as a result that Srebrenica's last connection with the outside world was now considered by the Serbs to be unsafe. Shocked by the killing of Zekic, the Serb population fled the town in panic that very evening and night. On 9 May the Muslim militia of Akif Ustic were the first to enter the town. In the following days, the Muslims who had been hiding in the woods for weeks on end emerged and gradually returned to their houses. The Muslims held the town for about three years after this, while almost all of the Serb inhabitants fled to Bratunac or elsewhere. Although the Serbs had to abandon Srebrenica, they continued their attacks on the Muslim villages to the west, north and southeast of Bratunac. The Muslim population was herded together at various assembly points and the women and children were deported from there to Central Bosnia. The men were either killed, placed in the prison camp Susica near Vlasenica or were held at other spots. The Muslim villages along the Drina, to the southeast of Bratunac, were in a certain sense an exception to this pattern. Large numbers of the population withdrew into the mountains, in the direction of Srebrenica, to Muslim villages that had not yet been attacked by the Serbs. They were the first large group of Displaced Persons to enter the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica. They were housed in homes and apartments in the town that had been abandoned by the former inhabitants. Many Displaced Persons would follow.

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4. The Muslims fight back

These new Serb actions were answered by the Muslims starting on 15 May with a series of coordinated attacks on Serb villages. The first targets were villages located close to Srebrenica: Viogor, Orahovica and Osredak (see map in section 1). The objective of these attacks was to establish a compact, connected area which would link the variously located Muslim resistance centres. This intent succeeded, and on 20 May it was agreed in the village of Bajramovici to put all of the resistance groups under the joint command of Naser Oric. A number of weeks later (1 July), a civil governing body was also installed, the War Presidium of the municipality of Srebrenica which was housed in the post office building. The first president of this wartime Government, called the War President of the Opstina (municipality) of Srebrenica, was Hajrudin Avdic; Hamdija Fejzic was the chairman of the Executive Board. Nonetheless, Naser Oric as commanding officer of the army and local hero was the most important power factor in the enclave.

Starting at the end of May, Displaced Persons who had been driven out of their homes and villages and who had hidden in the woods and hills, began to stream into the enclave from all directions. Other Muslim enclaves located nearby such as Zepa, Konjevic Polje and Cerska received large numbers of refugees as well. In the town of Srebrenica only about three to four hundred of the original inhabitants were left; the rest were Displaced Persons from nearby or more far-off places. From a Serbian point of view, the objective of purging Eastern Bosnia of Muslims was not at all a success. Even though the largest share of Muslims had been driven away from hearth and home, there was now a number of Muslim enclaves that represented a serious threat to the Serbs. The enclaves grew and also became more and more closely joined. The Serbs worked out their frustration over the unexpected Muslim successes through acts of revenge that were often exceptionally violent.

It became clear that the Serbs would suffer even greater losses because more and more Serb villages and hamlets were being attacked by the Muslims. Various Serbian commanding officers were killed or were seriously wounded in fighting, for example at Kravica and Konjevic Polje. Given the fact that villages in this region were for the most part ethnically homogenous and small in size, it was easy for large groups of Muslim attackers to distinguish Serb from Muslim villages. If it was a Serb settlement, it was directly and without regard to persons plundered and burned down. In the summer and autumn of 1992, the sallies into the Serbian area became increasingly frequent and violent. Moreover, Muslims who had been driven out of their villages went back to pick up the food and possessions they had had to leave. The food situation in the enclave of Srebrenica became more and more acute, which was a strong incentive for carrying out raids. The Muslim forces were constantly looking for ways to strengthen their strategic positions. Finally, revenge also played a role. The regular troops were often unable to restrain the large groups of civilians who took part in the sallies, although the fear that these caused the Serbs was convenient to them.

After more than half a year of sallies, thirty Serb villages and seventy hamlets had fallen into Muslim hands and there were only a few places left that were Serb, among them Bratunac. Kravica was one of the last to fall into Muslim hands, on Orthodox Christmas (7 January 1993). There were at least a thousand Serb civilian casualties in all. Consequently, it is understandable that the Serbs saw the

situation around Srebrenica as a war of aggression by the Muslims. They felt more and more threatened; many people had lost family or friends; and the humiliation and bitterness experienced as a result of the Muslim attacks was great. Most Serbs sought revenge if the opportunity presented itself.

The area under Muslim control continued to grow and the various Muslim resistance centres were connected and forged into a whole. The military leaders in the enclave kept working on the integration of the armed forces and the strengthening of defence. The whole area under Muslim control (including the enclaves that initially stood alone: Srebrenica, Konjevic Polje and Cerksa) were brought together in November 1992 under one military commando led by Naser Oric, whose seat was Srebrenica. The integration of the Muslim forces did not always proceed smoothly, however. There was friction between some of the commanding officers, for example between Naser Oric and Hakija Meholic, who did not unquestioningly accept Naser Oric as his superior. Aside from these frictions, there was also political opposition to Oric in the enclave, which was led by his former protector, the SDA leader Ibran Mustafic.

Since Mustafic had been present at the outbreak of war in Sarajevo, he did not go back to Srebrenica until December 1992 when he succeeded in returning to the enclave. The SDA wanted him to return because it wished to try to regain its influence in the enclave after almost all of the local SDA leaders had left and Oric had disbanded the SDA. This situation was not in any way unique. In other parts of Bosnia that had also suffered from acts of war, the SDA was marginalized as well. Local military bosses had seized power and taken on the organization of defence, which the SDA had neglected before the war. Upon his return, Mustafic found that guns ruled the enclave. He accused Oric of having gained power by means of a coup and having installed a military junta.

The following winter of 1992-1993 was the hardest one the Muslim inhabitants of the enclave of Srebrenica would experience during the war. There was little or no humanitarian help; that only got going after the institution of the Safe Area in April 1993. People died from starvation and exhaustion that winter. On 28 November, after seven months of war, the first UNHCR food convoy arrived to the jubilation of the desperate population. The food and medical situation in the enclave was wretched then already, as the journalists who travelled along with the convoy observed. Nonetheless, as the Muslims had greater numbers and were driven by hunger, they succeeded in driving the Serbs farther back. The area that the Muslims controlled at the end of December 1992 / beginning of January 1993 reached almost to the edge of the town of Bratunac. It was surrounded on three sides and found itself in an utmost precarious situation. Given that many on the Serb side feared that Bratunac was on the verge of falling into Muslim hands, military reinforcements were rushed in from Krajina in Northwestern Bosnia. The state of the local Serb defence was abominable and morale had sunk to a low due to the fact that many local Serbs had fled to Serbia for various reasons.

Although the population that had stayed behind saw these Serbs as deserters, the authorities called on them to join in the defence of the town. The authorities promised that any recruits would be taken into the regular army units and would not be led anymore by non-professional people as had been the case in the past. They were referring here to the local SDS leaders who had commanded the Territorial Defence units at the beginning of the war. Initially they were able to hide their lack of competence through the large-scale support they had received from the JNA and the paramilitary units from Serbia. But as soon as the support left, it became clear that they were not skilled enough to defend Bratunac.

The Serb population was very frustrated about the situation in Bratunac, and some of them held the local SDS directly responsible for this. There was also dissatisfaction about the role of the paramilitary forces. Most were only present at the beginning of the war, when there was something to gain, but as soon as they had taken the booty they left. They had saddled the Serb population with an 'unsolvable' situation: the Muslims had not left and were living only a few kilometres away in an ever expanding enclave. Large groups of Serbs were now themselves living as Displaced Persons in Bratunac under the most miserable conditions and with little humanitarian help.

In the beginning of January 1993, the fall of the Serb stronghold Kravica, which in the past had always been an important symbol of Serb resolve, created a shock wave in Eastern Bosnia. The

population of Bratunac panicked and the authorities had to close the bridges over the Drina to prevent people from crossing the river en masse. For the Muslims, however, the victory over Kravica was a considerable boost. This conquest allowed Oric to connect with the resistance forces in Konjevic Polje and Cerska, yielding one large Muslim terrain from Zepa and Srebrenica almost to Zvornik. However, the Serb call for vengeance was great. As a local Serb chronicler wrote, the Serbs were looking forward to the day they would finally be able to take revenge. After Kravica the Muslim attacks continued. Instead of opening a large offensive on Bratunac, Oric decided to strike Skelani first. The objective was to chase the Serb units out of this area and to destroy the bridge over the Drina to prevent the Serbs from gaining reinforcements from Serbia. The attack on Skelani took place on 16 January 1993, and at least 48 Serbs died in this battle. The attack failed and this marked the beginning of the end of Oric's successes. Public opinion in Serbia was alarmed by the fact that points inside Serbian terrain were targeted, and the VRS and the Yugoslavian army prepared a large joint counteroffensive, led by Ratko Mladic.

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5. Consequences of the Serb counteroffensive for Srebrenica in the beginning of 1993

The advance of Naser Oric in the second half of 1992 prompted the VRS to improve its organization on the local level. As we have said, the local defence in Bratunac and elsewhere in the Bosnian-Serbian area originally relied too much on the units of the Territorial Defence that were subordinate to the local SDS party branches. The Muslim attacks in the autumn and winter of 1992-1993 made it clear that the Territorial Defence under the direction of the SDS in Bratunac was not equal to its task. A drastic change of tack was called for: the responsibility now came to rest primarily with the new local units of the regular army that were to be set up. This was a development that could be observed in all of the fighting parties: the army and command structures became better organized and centralized, and the paramilitary units and local militias were integrated into the newly established armies and stopped operating independently.[1]

At first there were quite a few problems to overcome, primarily in the area of recruiting. The biggest problem for the VRS was the lack of manpower and, according to numerous articles in the local paper Nasa Rijec, there was a lot of bitterness about the fact that many Serbs from Bratunac and Srebrenica had fled to Serbia. They were called upon to return to help defend Bratunac; if not, they would lose their homes and possessions and their civil rights. A related problem was the low morale in the units: many Serbs who had been mobilized came from elsewhere and were demoralized because they were displaced and were not deployed in their own areas to defend or win back their homes. There was a large group of Displaced Persons from Zenica in Central Bosnia for example, who found themselves in Bratunac. Since many local Serbs had fled, the morale of those who were fighting, and especially of those who came from elsewhere, was seriously undermined. A related problem was that the status of VRS soldiers was unclear: the Republika Srpska had not officially declared war, which meant that combat active soldiers were not recognized as such and could not count on compensations or pensions for themselves or their families. In case of death or disability they or their family had nothing to fall back upon. It bothered many that war profiteers earned millions and could enrich themselves tremendously, whereas normal soldiers received an extremely low salary.[2]

None the less, the VRS succeeded in gaining a grasp of the situation on the local level in Bratunac. Particularly after the town was closed in on almost all sides, improvements were implemented in the organization and coordination of defence. The first impulses for this came in November and December of 1992 with the formation of the Bratunac Brigade.[3] Reinforcements arrived from other parts of the Republika Srpska, from Krajina for example. The Yugoslavian army also became involved in the fights. The Muslim attack on Skelani and the shootings on the bridge over the Drina were seized by the JNA as a reason to take part actively in the actions against Naser Oric, which resulted in a complete turnaround in power. As of the middle of January 1993, the Serb troops succeeded in steadily pushing back the borders of the Muslim-controlled area. As we know, this led to their almost taking the enclave of Srebrenica in April 1993.

The large-scale counteroffensive that started on 20 January 1993 was carried out by regular troops of the VRS and the Yugoslavian army. According to Muslim sources, various corps of the

Yugoslavian army (the Novi Sad, Uzice and Valjevo corps) were part of the actions which were led by Ratko Mladic and the commanding officer of the Drina corps, Milenko Zivanovic.[4] Various paramilitary groups were also set in. In particular the Panthers, a paramilitary unit from Bijeljina led by Ljubisa Savic - nicknamed 'Mauser' - played an important role in pushing back the Muslims between December 1993 and April 1994.[5] According to reports, Russian mercenaries also took part in these actions; these were Afghanistan veterans who deserted the Russian army after the takeover of Boris Yeltsin. They had their own headquarters on the mountain of Majejica and were primarily active in Eastern Bosnia, including the Bijeljina region.[6]

Belgrade first strengthened its artillery positions on the Serbian side of the Drina; they posted artillery units in Bratunac on Bosnian terrain and brought special army and police units to Bajina Basta. These last units were mostly former paramilitary units that had been integrated into the army or police. Preparations were made for air support from the air force base in Uzice. A psychological war was also implemented: a propaganda campaign was started in the media to destabilize the military leaders in the enclave and to undermine morale. Pamphlets were strewn over the enclave to influence the Muslims to surrender, and loudspeakers mounted on army vehicles played a propaganda message on the front lines in the direction of the Muslims. Played to the music of the well known 'March to the Drina', the most famous World War I Serbian military march, the message called for the Muslims to stop the battle.[7]

The attacks on the enclave came from four main directions: Skelani, Bratunac, Zvornik and Milici. Artillery attacks were carried out from Serbia on the Muslim-controlled villages along the Drina. On 30 January Jezero, a strategically important village, returned to Serb hands.[8] In February, the press service of the Uzice corps of the Yugoslavian army announced that the right bank of the Drina (the Serbian side) was again completely safe. There was some incidental shooting at the hydro-electric plant in Perucac, but that was not seen as a real threat. The Uzice corps denied involvement in the fighting on the Bosnian side of the river.[9]

Out of Bratunac, the Serbs recovered first Voljavica and Zalazje from the Muslims in the beginning of February 1993, and in the middle of February many other villages along the Drina and in the hinterland. In March, the VRS advanced in a southerly direction along the Drina, slowly surrounding the eastern side of the enclave and making it possible for attacks in the direction of Srebrenica.[10] Moving from Zvornik, Kamenica was the first to fall in the hands of the VRS, followed in March by Cerska and Konjevic Polje. Since the advance did not go as quickly as expected, the Serbs tried to break the Muslim resistance at the end of January by offering the civilians trapped in Cerska, Kamenica and Konjevic Polje free crossing through a corridor to Tuzla. On the first night, many civilians did succeed in getting away, but on the second day the Serbs attacked the column and began to fire, killing many Muslims. Others were captured and have been missing since. The rest had to turn around and go back to Cerska.[11]

The humanitarian situation in Kamenica, Cerska, Konjevic Polje and Srebrenica became more acute every day, although it was not completely clear how grave the situation was. The Bosnian Government placed considerable pressure on the UN Displaced Persons organization UNHCR to bring aid to the Muslim enclaves. The Bosnian Government also pointed out that if Kamenica, Cerska and Konjevic Polje would fall completely into Serb hands, large numbers of Displaced Persons would try to go to Srebrenica, where the humanitarian situation would become even worse.

UNHCR worker Larry Hollingworth has described how he attempted to lead a convoy to Cerska in February 1993, the intention being to also offer assistance to Kamenica and if possible to survey the situation in Srebrenica. The convoy was initially held up in Zvornik because the Serbs were involved in conquering Kamenica at that moment. Large groups of Muslims were already fleeing through the snow in the direction of Konjevic Polje. In Kamenica the Serbs found a mass grave which they showed to the international press.[12]

Since the UNHCR convoys to the Eastern Bosnian enclaves were constantly held up, the situation of the Displaced Persons degenerated rapidly. After a delegation from Srebrenica arrived in Sarajevo to sound the alarm, they started a hunger strike and said they would refuse all international

aid if nothing was done about the situation in Srebrenica and the other eastern enclaves.[13] It was decided to organize airdrops to ease the painful situation. American planes dropped large amounts of food over Sarajevo and the eastern enclaves. Serbian sources maintain that the Muslims in Srebrenica also were given military equipment, weapons and ammunition.[14] The first airdrops to Cerska took place in the night of 28 February 1993, but since the Serbs had this area under their control by that time, a significant share of the goods came into their hands.

The first airdrops to Konjevic Polje took place on 2 and then 4 March.[15] Later there were many complaints that the drops actually hurt rather than helped the enclaves. They created chaos because the population went out en masse to find the dropped aid packages. Moreover, the aid only helped the strongest who were able to reach the spots the fastest and once there, fight off the others. In general, the principle of the 'survival of the fittest' applied. The Muslims maintain that this was one of the reasons that Cerska was taken by the Serbs directly the following day on 1 March 1993.[16] Fearing a humanitarian catastrophe, General Philippe Morillon, the Commander of the UN units in Bosnia, wanted to take a personal look at the situation. Morillon invited Larry Hollingworth of UNHCR to come along to Zvornik to try to push through to the area where the fighting was going on. Morillon asked Hollingworth to take along a doctor from the World Health Organization (WHO). That was Simon Mardel from the UK. With a number of others, they left for Zvornik where they requested permission to continue in the direction of the fighting. After receiving permission, the convoy went on and arrived in Konjevic Polje where Morillon spoke with Oric and the local authorities.[17] There were many Displaced Persons from Cerska which had just fallen. Mardel indicated that he would like to continue to Srebrenica, and Morillon gave the green light.

A skilled climber, Mardel walked through the snow to Srebrenica that night with a small group of Muslims. The journey lasted six and a half hours. When Mardel arrived in Srebrenica he was taken immediately to the hospital where he was introduced to Dr. Nedred Mujkanovic, a young doctor and army captain who had been sent to Srebrenica by the ABiH; he arrived in the beginning of August 1992. He had carried out more than 1,300 operations, frequently without anaesthesia or medicine. Mujkanovic gave Mardel a tour through the hospital where the situation was worse than expected: there was no food, no medicine, and about twenty deaths a day. Mardel wanted to leave the enclave quickly, but the authorities would not let him go and refused to escort him back to Konjevic Polje. Mardel's presence in Srebrenica quickly became world news. After a few days he walked back on his own, and shortly before Konjevic Polje fell into Serb hands (15 March 1993), Mardel was evacuated. Konjevic Polje was still full of Displaced Persons at the time and was constantly under Serbian fire. Dozens of people died as a result.[18]

Shortly before the fall of Konjevic Polje, thousands of Muslims left in the direction of Srebrenica, now overrun by a new stream of Displaced Persons. The Muslim forces then left their positions and joined the Displaced Persons, and the Serbs retook control of Konjevic Polje, Kravica and Glogova.[19] Some Displaced Persons were taken in by families or friends, whereas the rest were housed in schools and factories, often under inhuman conditions. The last Displaced Persons to arrive in Srebrenica were forced to bivouac in the streets in the bitter spring cold.[20] On 11 March, Morillon succeeded in taking a medical convoy, escorted by Canadian soldiers and accompanied by members of the UNHCR (among them Larry Hollingworth and Laurens Jolles), a UNMO team and three people from *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) along the mountain road from Bratunac via Zalazje to Srebrenica.[21]

While Morillon was talking to Oric and the civil authorities of Srebrenica in the post office building, Hollingworth and his fellow UNHCR worker took a walk through the town. It was very cold (22 degrees below zero) and they saw Displaced Persons everywhere in the streets, sitting in circles around a fire; most of them had arrived within the last twenty-four hours from Konjevic Polje. Generally, they carried their possessions with them in a bag or a bundle, and there were only a very few with coats. Some did not even have shoes. Most of the Displaced Persons had not eaten in days; they were hungry, tired, confused and distraught. Some had been drifting since April and came from Zvornik, travelling through Kamenica, Cerska and Konjevic Polje before ending up in Srebrenica. People walked up and down the street with madness in their eyes, as Hollingworth writes.[22]

Members of *Médecins Sans Frontières* inspected the situation in the hospital which they found indescribable. Operations were being done without anaesthesia or the most essential equipment. The operating theatre used during the war was improvised (the hospital had not carried out any operations before the war); worn-out equipment was boiled in a pan to sterilize it. Threadbare, spotted bandages hung to dry above a stove. Two bulbs mounted on a riding frame and attached by a thin wire to a car battery formed the lights.[23] Nedred Mujkanovic, who had had hardly any surgical experience before the war, had become an experienced war surgeon. *Médecins Sans Frontières* reported that there was no water or electricity in the enclave, that many thousands of people had to go without health care and were threatened by starvation; the Displaced Persons were not prepared for the cold and lacked clothing and shoes, and warmed themselves by burning rubbish. Dozens of people died of starvation every day. There was a tremendous lack of everything: food, housing, medical care and sanitary facilities.[24] An annex to the hospital building, not far from the town hall, had been transformed into a ward where men with amputated limbs lay to recuperate. They made clear that they wanted to leave Srebrenica.[25]

Hollingworth also witnessed the airdrops made in the vicinity of the town. The first took place on 6 March; they would continue for the whole month, mostly in the woods near the town and the village of Bajramovici. The precise locations were never known ahead of time. Every evening, the inhabitants of the town (including women and children) went into the hills to watch for American planes in the hope of obtaining some of the aid. Fires were built to draw attention. As soon as the packages were dropped, it was the law of the jungle. It was a chaotic situation; it was usually dark and everyone did all he could to gain some of the booty. 'It is survival of the fittest that prevails' according to the report of *Médecins Sans Frontière*. People fought for food, using knives even, and there was regular loss of life.[26] In the beginning whole pallets weighing several hundred kilos were dropped, sometimes crushing the awaiting people. A total of 35 to 40 people were killed by such incidents during the airdrops. Later, small packages were made with food and medicine and thrown out of the aeroplanes. People kept the food for themselves and brought the medicine to the hospital. Sometimes the Serbs fired upon the airdrop locations.[27]

In his eyewitness report, Hollingworth describes the course of events at such an airdrop. He knew that it was every man for himself and that the authorities of the town complained about having no control over the distribution of the aid. Still, it was worse than he thought; Hollingworth drove to the spot where the drops took place and saw hundreds of men, women and older children run through the woods and fight over the aid. The largest and strongest grabbed the most and everyone screamed at one another. Within a few minutes everything was gone and there was nothing left for the local authorities to pick up. During the airdrop witnessed by Hollingworth four people died; three were crushed by pallets and one man was stabbed to death in a fight over the goods.[28]

When Morillon wanted to leave the enclave on 12 March, the population refused to let him go. Morillon's vehicle was blocked by a large group of women. The authorities, who at first stood to wave goodbye to him, suddenly disappeared or said they could do nothing against the crowd. The following night, Morillon attempted to escape from the enclave but did not succeed. On 14 March, Morillon made the speech from the balcony of the hospital that was soon to become world news; he declared that from that point on the population was under the protection of the UN. Hollingworth stuck a UN flag out of the window and the crowd cheered and applauded. Instead of being a hostage, Morillon was suddenly a hero. He settled in the post office building and was given two rooms with a stove by the authorities.[29] Not much later the authorities let Morillon leave. When he departed he left behind eight Canadian soldiers, nine United Nations Military Observers (UNMOs) and two UNHCR people.

On 18 March Mladic agreed to a temporary ceasefire. The following day in the afternoon, a large UNHCR convoy arrived made up of nineteen lorries bearing two hundred tons of goods. People were waiting in the streets and cheered when the lorries arrived. Morillon led the convoy which was taken to a warehouse and unloaded there. The acute food shortage was solved in one fell swoop in this way.[30] However, when the convoy wanted to return to Tuzla the next morning, chaos erupted when hordes of people tried to climb on the lorries and even children were crushed. The police shot into the air but ultimately almost seven hundred people went along to Tuzla.[31]

At the end of March a following transport reached the enclave. When this convoy wanted to return to Tuzla, the same scene took place as two weeks previously. At least two children were crushed to death.^[32] Up until the beginning of April a total of at least 5,560 people and a few hundred wounded were evacuated.^[33] On 24 March, an airbridge was opened which was intended to evacuate critically wounded by helicopter, but this was stopped a few days later because the Serbs shot at the aircraft, resulting in a number of casualties and wounded.

Bosnian Government circles were not at all happy with the evacuations, and even the local government in Srebrenica wanted to call a halt to them. As of that moment, no one else was allowed to leave, not even those older than sixty. The convoys that went to the enclave on 6 and 7 April returned empty.^[34]

In the meantime, the Serbian advance continued. At the end of March various villages to the east of Srebrenica fell into Serb hands. The Serbs tightened the ring around Srebrenica slowly but surely and the town came under constant artillery fire and bombardment. Serbian artillery was set up around Srebrenica and in Serbia itself, and fighter bombers and helicopters carried out daily bombings.^[35]

On 12 April Zalazje and Zeleni Jadar (see map in section 1) fell into Serb hands. On 13 April the situation became more serious when, during firing on the enclave, at least fifty-six people were killed, among them fifteen children who were playing football on the schoolgrounds, and seventy-three seriously wounded. UNHCR official Louis Gentile was there when this happened and described the atrocity he had seen: the ground was bathed in blood, there were human parts against the fence, and one child had been beheaded.^[36] Larry Hollingworth voiced the hope that the VRS commanding officer responsible for this would 'burn in the hottest part of hell'.^[37] By around the middle of April the Serbs had advanced to 1,800 metres from the town centre of Srebrenica. From their positions on the hills Kvarac and Pribicevac they had a good command of Srebrenica.^[38] Srebrenica was now on the verge of falling into Serb hands. Some people feared that this would be a bloodbath given the Serb desire for revenge after the events of the first year of war.

According to an official foreign document Milosevic too was exasperated and was extremely concerned that if the Bosnian Serb Armies entered Srebrenica there would be a massacre because of the tremendous bad blood that existed surrounding the Muslim leader that the Bosnian Serbs blamed for the Bratunac incident. Milosevic believed it would be a great mistake to take Srebrenica and personally instructed Karadzic not to do so.^[39]

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Part II

Dutchbat in the enclave

Chapter 3

Srebrenica under UN protection: demilitarized and Safe Area (March - June 1993)

3. Implementation of the demilitarization agreement of 18 April 1993

After the agreement on the demilitarization of Srebrenica was signed on 18 April, the company of Major Poirier of CanBat I received orders to move from Tuzla to Srebrenica. The company was made up of three infantry platoons, an engineering section and two groups with TOW anti-tank artillery, 150 men altogether. They left in 20 M-113 armoured personnel vehicles and arrived at 12:00 pm in the town, an hour later than instructed.

The Canadians were welcomed as saviours. Later in the day the CanBat commanding officer arrived in Kisovo, Lieutenant Colonel Geburt to lead the difficult assignment.[1] CanBat was the UNPROFOR name for a reinforced battalion of the 2nd Royal Canadian Regiment that had arrived in Bosnia in November 1992. Since deployment in the Bosnian-Serb area was problematic, the battalion had been stationed in Kisovo and used for all kinds of emergency assignments. According to UNPROFOR Commander in Chief Wahlgren this company was made up of 'well trained peacekeepers with heavy arms (...) the best that there was'.[2]

By chance, a few men from CanBat had gone with Morillon to Srebrenica at the beginning of March. They were part of the military engineering detachment and just happened to be in Zvornik when Morillon needed a YPR to go to Srebrenica and borrowed one from CanBat. This small group, led by Sergeant Morrison stayed in Srebrenica until 18 April. During an evacuation of wounded on 25 March, two soldiers of the group were injured by VRS firing.[3]

Without any specific preparation and almost totally unfamiliar with the area, the ceasefire line and the local conditions, the company of Major Poirier had the difficult task of demilitarizing Srebrenica. The assignment of Poirier's company was set out in an operations order from Bosnia-Herzegovina Command. Their first assignment was clearing and securing a landing zone for helicopters for the evacuation of wounded, as well as the coordination and support of this. The company was also charged with supervising adherence to the ceasefire in the town, and outside with the charting and observation of VRS positions, the establishment of contact with local civil authorities and the military commanders of the opposing parties. Finally, CanBat was to start the demilitarization in the town and then in the surrounding area by collecting and guarding all weapons, ammunition, mines and explosives. Instructions about the destruction of these materials would follow. Given the volatile situation, CanBat was instructed to report every hour to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Kiseljak.[4]

The evacuation of wounded from the enclave was slow in getting started. On 18 April British and French helicopters transported 133 wounded via Zvornik to Tuzla. On 19 April at the end of the day, 484 wounded had been evacuated by air. The week after that another 150 followed.[5] In actual fact, this was the only part of the agreement that was carried out to the letter. Naser Oric did not seem inclined to a smooth implementation of the agreement. He received no instructions from his superiors in Sarajevo to surrender or to carry out the demilitarization agreement. During the first meeting with Geburt, Naser Oric agreed to cooperate with UNPROFOR but he undercut that promise immediately by announcing that there was no question of evacuation of civilians.

Oric would allow no one to leave the enclave, including UN personnel. For the time being he did not make good his threats, however, and that evening the helicopters were able to leave for Tuzla without any problem.[6] Oric's announcement deterred the UNHCR from its plan to begin the next day, 19 April, with the evacuation of 25,000 refugees in two weeks. The civil authorities said that they were not interested in taking the refugees first to Tuzla if they were going to be able to go back to their villages within a few weeks - seemingly they expected that the Bosnian Serbs would accept the Vance-Owen plan as well. In their opinion, it would be better to bring back the 7,000 refugees who had gone to Tuzla since 19 March. They called for food and for building materials to repair the damage. A large-scale evacuation was no longer on the agenda.[7]

The biggest problems had to do with the implementation of the military parts of the agreement. The first days, the VRS and ABiH observed the ceasefire, but towards the end of April both parties started up fighting again on the ceasefire line. Demilitarization progressed with difficulty. No arrangements had been made in Sarajevo about implementation and CanBat had not received detailed instructions. The unit was too small to take charge itself of systematic collection of weapons and ammunition. UNPROFOR was dependent upon the cooperation of the ABiH for this crucial component of the plan. ABiH commanding officer Naser Oric wanted to put off the demilitarization of Srebrenica. To his mind, the CanBat contingent was not capable of defending the enclave against a VRS attack once the weapons would be handed over. Oric suspended cooperation until there would be reinforcements of CanBat. That was out of the question for the moment because the VRS refused to allow two extra Canadian platoons in Srebrenica.

To keep from affecting its own defence capacity in the enclave and still go along with the demilitarization, the ABiH decided to give its own interpretation. It used the discrepancies in terminology in the agreement. The agreement of 18 April did not include a precise description of the demilitarized zone around Srebrenica. It spoke of the 'demilitarization of Srebrenica' and of the ceasefire in 'the Srebrenica area'. The ABiH concluded from this that only the town had to be demilitarized and not the whole area in the 'achieved lines of confrontation'. In concrete terms, this meant that the ABiH took all modern and usable weapons and ammunition out of the town into the surrounding areas and turned over to CanBat only old and unusable weapons for which there was little or no ammunition. The result of the voluntary surrender by ABiH was extremely limited in other words. This put UNPROFOR in a precarious position.

To save the agreement, UNPROFOR was prepared to do everything possible to see to it that all weapons were handed over within 72 hours and that both parties would establish at 12:00 noon on 21 April that demilitarization was complete. It seemed unlikely that the VRS would agree. The previous evening Mladic said to Wahlgren that he estimated that the ABiH had 14,000 men in the enclave and that consequently CanBat had to take possession of at least 10,000 weapons. If that did not happen, he would take measures and would in such a case also demand the departure of UNPROFOR within 12 hours. That would mean the end of the demilitarization agreement. Wahlgren maintained that the demilitarization of Srebrenica was proceeding in accordance with the agreement. He suspected that in his anger about the chain of events, Mladic wanted to take the initiative again. Mladic said he wanted to conclude 'an honour deal' with ABiH Commander in Chief Halilovic, which Wahlgren suspected had to do with 'a surrender and free departure of Muslim troops'. Wahlgren assumed that it was too late for such a measure because he believed - incorrectly - that most of the ABiH soldiers had already escaped from the enclave.[8]

Thus, the danger existed that demilitarization would fail due to lack of clarity in the agreement and differences of opinion about the size of the demilitarized zone and the number of weapons to be handed over. In the talks of the Mixed Military Working Group in Sarajevo on 19 April 1993 a great deal of time was spent without result on the definition of 'the Srebrenica area'. The ABiH maintained that it was not responsible for demilitarization of the town - Wahlgren would later say to NIOD that this was a 'typical Muslim way of acting'.[9] Wahlgren's report to New York indicates that the VRS and UNPROFOR - contrary to what is found in the report of the Secretary-General of the UN of November 1999[10] - maintained that it meant that the whole area was inside the ceasefire line. This difference in opinion concerning the exact position of the border of the Safe Area would continue for a long time.

A compromise temporarily put off an impasse. Since both parties agreed that the town of Srebrenica and its immediate environs 'from which direct fire weapons can shoot into the city' were in the 'demilitarized zone', that is where a beginning would be made with the surrendering of weapons and ammunition. CanBat was given instructions to start.

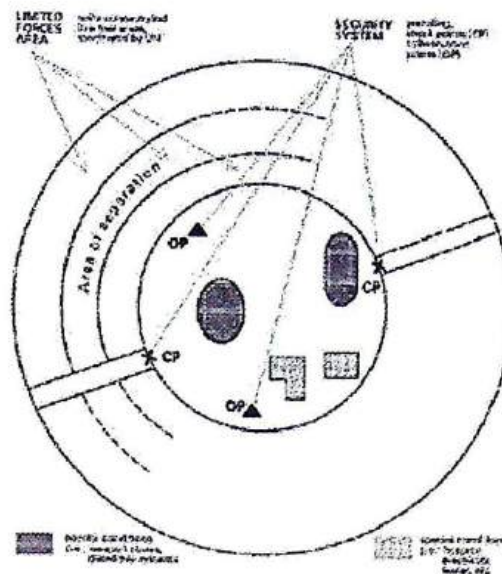
Wahlgren and his Chief of Staff, Hayes, wanted to try to achieve a more comprehensive compromise, but tensions were growing in Srebrenica itself. In the opinion of CanBat the VRS was cooperating with the implementation of the agreement. ABiH, on the other hand, threatened to end the agreement. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command feared that if ABiH continued to work against the agreement, the VRS would recommence hostilities. Consequently, Hayes flew on the following day, 21 April to Srebrenica and after consulting with the CanBat commanding officer Geburt established the border of the demilitarized zone around the town on his own; this was an area of approximately six km². ABiH and VRS officials made an inspection the same day and determined that there were no military units or troops in this zone and that demilitarization in the area had been completed. The map on which the zone was drawn was added to the formal declaration on demilitarization and handed over to both delegations. The surrendered weapons and ammunition were stored and kept by UNPROFOR.

Neither of the belligerents was content with this result however. Hayes reported from Srebrenica that ABiH and VRS saw the declaration on demilitarization of the town as 'a first symbolic step', a remark that he borrowed from the official VRS commentary. The parties added their vision to the state of affairs in the commentary to their declaration. According to the VRS delegation, the real problem continued because ABiH units inside the ceasefire line had not been disarmed; that held primarily for the two brigades from Cerska and the one from Kula. According to VRS information, the ABiH had more than 16,000 weapons in the area inside the ceasefire line. Finally, the VRS delegation established that with its current strength, CanBat was not capable of monitoring the transport of weapons in the area inside the Srebrenica enclave ceasefire line.

The ABiH delegation stated in its comments that in exchange for the disarmament required by the VRS, VRS units should leave the Opstina of Srebrenica. That meant a withdrawal far behind the ceasefire line. The ABiH delegation also demanded an investigation into the possible presence of VJ units in the area, into violations of the ceasefire and into changes in the ceasefire line by the VRS.[11] In so doing, the ABiH brought the ceasefire line into discussion and implicitly claimed a larger area for the enclave.

Despite the reciprocal distrust evident in the comments of both parties in the establishment of the demilitarization of the town of Srebrenica, the Chief of Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, Hayes, was of the opinion that the basis for an improved situation had been laid. He wished to encourage that by taking a number of measures. First of all, he wanted reinforcements for CanBat. Secondly, he wanted to consolidate the demilitarization of the town and the ceasefire line, that is to say, he wanted to chart the border of the enclave. The CanBat reinforcements arrived on 27 April when the two platoons that had been detained were admitted. Hayes wanted to call in more reinforcements at the beginning of May with the rotation of Poirier's company. In addition, a regulation was needed about supplying CanBat's weekly provisions over the road, as well as an air bridge for daily liaison, evacuation in case of emergency, and emergency supplies. Hayes wanted to facilitate demilitarization by turning the unofficial declarations of 21 April into official documents. It was also necessary to mark the demilitarized area in conformance with the Geneva Convention. Lastly, he wanted to have UNMOs inspect the ceasefire line on the VRS side and ask for VRS cooperation in inspecting their artillery positions.[12]

Hayes was overly optimistic however. The VRS had made it clear on 22 April already that they wanted to stand by their interpretation - endorsed by UNPROFOR - of the agreement on disarmament of 18 April which included the surrender of all weapons within the ceasefire line around Srebrenica. The results up until then had been 'just a farce' according to VRS Chief of Staff Major General Milovanovic. He insisted to Wahlgren and Morillon that UNPROFOR fulfil its obligations and see to a real disarmament of the 15,000 ABiH troops.[13]



The VRS did not continue to make an issue of the matter; however, nor did it cooperate with reinforcements for CanBat. That was a condition made by ABiH for demilitarization outside of the town. Consequently, the demilitarization process was deadlocked. By taking on a central role in demilitarization, UNPROFOR had put itself in a difficult position, for which there appeared no solution at the moment. There were no plans then for high level talks. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command was of the opinion that the presence of CanBat in Srebrenica would contribute to the stabilization of the situation and gradual improvement of relations in Srebrenica and thus would bring a solution closer at hand. Chief of Staff Hayes flew to Srebrenica a few times for this purpose. That did indeed contribute to a reasonable observance of the ceasefire and the supply of humanitarian aid, but had no effect on demilitarization.

Having discussed the first phase of the realization of demilitarization, we will now take a look at the contacts between UNPROFOR and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. It is striking that as of 18 April UNPROFOR showed a greater degree of independence. That is evident from the complaints of Under Secretary-General Kofi Annan about insufficient information on the development of negotiations: Wahlgren had only sent the text of the agreement of 18 April. Information to New York concerning verification of the demilitarization agreement was therefore incomplete.

On other fronts as well communication did not seem to be clear. Wahlgren for his part did not appreciate having New York interfere with operational matters. A French offer to station 70 UNPROFOR soldiers in Srebrenica - made after the Canadian government expressed its concern about the situation of CanBat and had pressed for making the UN presence in the enclave more multi-national - was rejected straightaway by Wahlgren. After the Canadian company had been reinforced with two platoons and an engineering section on 27 April, Wahlgren made it known that the commanding officer of CanBat was against a 'mixed command' and that the present forces were sufficient.^[14]

It is also important to note that the opinion existed in New York that Wahlgren had followed his own course in concluding the 18 April agreement. There was no reference in the agreement to Resolution 819 of the Security Council. That aroused some distrust in the Secretariat or the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In their eyes Wahlgren had missed the opportunity to use the resolution to put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. It called upon the belligerents to treat Srebrenica as a Safe Area, and that offered more possibilities to put pressure on the VRS than the agreement of 18 April. Annan explained his interpretation of the situation to Wahlgren, seemingly with the intention of informing him of the nuance of the vision in New York. Demilitarization was 'a step agreed by the parties, not one proposed by the UN'.

In Annan's words, UNPROFOR had offered its good services to save lives, 'to help both parties

fulfil the commitment they have made to each other. This includes receiving weapons from defenders of Srebrenica for the purpose of demonstrating to the attackers that they have no reason to attack. In doing so, however, UNPROFOR takes on a moral responsibility for the safety of the disarmed that it clearly does not have the military resources to honour beyond a point.' According to Annan, this implied that CanBat would defend itself against small-scale attacks on the enclave. The underlying principle had to be, however, that UNPROFOR was deployed in Srebrenica 'in the context of an agreement, and that the onus remains on the *parties* to treat Srebrenica as a "Safe Area", as Resolution 819 demands'.

Annan continued by expressing the idea that the fact-finding mission of the Security Council, as determined in Resolution 819, undoubtedly would make the Force Commander aware of the 'strong feeling amongst several Member States' that UNPROFOR should not take an active part in 'disarming the victims'. Annan repeated his instruction that in the next meeting of the Mixed Military Working Group, UNPROFOR should give high priority to the withdrawal of the VRS out of the area around Srebrenica.[15]

While Annan was looking for ways to show the Security Council that Wahlgren also had used Resolution 819 as the underlying principle for his actions in Srebrenica, Wahlgren believed that the Department of Peacekeeping and Operations shared his preference for a demilitarized zone as the first step to a Safe Area.[16] The visit of the Security Council mission led by the Venezuelan Ambassador to the United Nations, D. Arria, did not bring the two points of view closer together. The mission was ill-informed about the situation in Srebrenica and seemed to be looking for confirmation of preconceptions about military intervention in favour of the Bosnian Muslims. Arria showed no actual interest in the situation in Srebrenica. To their displeasure, Arria was more interested in the media aspects of the visit and dismissed all UNPROFOR advice in that area. Some of Arria's statements were according to Hayes 'a little inflammatory and emotive', others 'open to misinterpretation'. The mission was primarily looking for 'Serbian intransigence'. [17] Arria, for his part, found that Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, and in particular Hayes did everything they could to obstruct the mission and to thwart a visit to Srebrenica. UNPROFOR was much too submissive to the VRS and according to Arria not prepared to implement Resolution 819.[18]

All in all, the Arria mission did nothing to improve mutual understanding between the Security Council and the UNPROFOR commanders in Bosnia. Wahlgren and those around him were convinced that the UN peacekeeping force should not manifest itself as the ally of ABiH and the 'enemy' of the VRS in the implementation of Resolution 819, as Arria attempted. The Force Commander maintained demilitarization on the basis of the principle of neutrality as the starting point for the establishment of the Safe Area of Srebrenica. After the visit of the Arria mission, he saw no reason to set a different course. Kofi Annan supported his policy despite criticism of some of the non-permanent members of the Security Council.

After the Arria visit, Wahlgren tried to give his policy a legal basis as well. His legal advisor shared his opinion that article 60 of the first additional protocol of the Geneva Convention of 1949 was the best basis for the establishment of a Safe Area around Srebrenica.[19] When, on advice of the Arria mission, the Security Council wanted to declare other places in Bosnia as Safe Areas as well, Wahlgren stood by his opinion that demilitarization was the best method for doing so. He understood the intention of the Security Council in indicating five other Safe Areas in Resolution 824 as a political signal against further VRS aggression.

However, Wahlgren foresaw problems if the Safe Areas would allow the presence of army units and military activities of one of the belligerents - contrary to the purpose of a demilitarized zone. If a Safe Area was not demilitarized, according to his line of thinking, the peacekeeping force would be limited to monitoring and reporting on the developments in the area, but would certainly not be able to take responsibility for the safety of the area. Even that minimum task in the Safe Area would be dangerous because of the risk of being taken hostage by one of the parties. In Wahlgren's opinion, UNPROFOR units should only be stationed in a Safe Area after agreement of both of the belligerents. [20] General Hayes's concerns about concept Resolution 824 of the Security Council were more

political in nature. He found the timing of the new resolution unfortunate because, in his opinion, the Bosnian Serb parliament would approve the Vance-Owen peace plan in a few days, whereupon after implementation of proposals of Vice President Koljevic of the *Republika Srpska*, the demilitarization of certain areas could be started. The government in Pale would consider a new resolution as additional proof of the UNPROFOR's partiality, whereas after the peace plan for all of Bosnia was approved, an atmosphere could be created in which the VRS would cooperate in the inspection of the ceasefire lines.[21]

The discussion between New York and the UNPROFOR headquarters about the basic principles of establishing the Safe Areas continued for a time even after the endorsement of Resolution 824 on 6 May 1994. Although Wahlgren and his staff said that they followed the clear indications of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations...

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[1] Taylor & Nolan, *Tested Mettle. Canada's Peacekeepers at War*, pp. 101-102. UNGE UNPROFOR Box 195 file 2.5.2. HQ BH Comd (Main) Kiseljak daily sitrep 18/04/93. Stankovic, *Trusted Mole*, 148-150. (Stankovic made a dating error. He dates the arrival of CanBat in Srebrenica as Sunday 17 april instead of 18 april.) 'Canadian troops Sent to Besieged City' *The Toronto Star*, 17/04/93. Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p.106 say that 'a silent crowd had witnessed the entry of the Canadians'.

[2] Interview L-E. Wahlgren, 03/06/99.

[3] Taylor and Nolan, *Tested Mettle*, pp. 100-101. DFAIT, file 21-14-6-UNPROFOR vol 26: memorandum DNHQ, Sitrep re:Morillon, 17/03/93. NIOD, Zylab 21536, declassified DND, Srebrenica rotation, 02/04/93.

[4] UNNY UNPROFOR, file87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2 MAR 93: fax COS BH Comd Kiseljak to HQ UNPROFOR Zagreb, 18/4/93 appendix: CG/6054/93 Demilitarization of Srebrenica.

[5] UNNY, DPKO coded cables UNPROFOR: Wahlgren to Annan, Z-517, 21/04/93. Interview Nedred Mujkanovic, 20/04/99. Confidential information (129).

[6] Stankovic, *Trustful Mole*, p. 147 en 152.

[7] Confidential information (106).

[8] UNNY, DPKO coded cables UNPROFOR: Wahlgren to Annan, Z-516, 21/04/93. UNGE UNPROFOR Box file 2.5.2. Fax HQ BH Command Kiseljak to HQ UNPROFOR Zagreb, 20/04/93 re: report demilitarization of Srebrenica, appendix: Material delivered to UNPROFOR during demilitarization. UNNY, UNPROFOR, file 87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2 Mar 93: fax HQ BH Command Kiseljak to CO CanBat 2, 20/04/93 re: direction for CanBat force in Srebrenica. Ibid: fax 191518B, CPI BH Command to CPI Zagreb, 19/04/93 re: situation in BH. Ibid: fax 191645B, CPI BH Command to CPI Zagreb, 19/04/93 re: situation in BH. Interviews Smail Mandzic, 18/05/99 and Hakija Meholic, 02/02/98.

[9] Interview R-E. Wahlgren, 03/06/99.

[10] *Report on Srebrenica*, § 60.

[11] UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: Wahlgren to Annan, Z-517, 21/04/93. UNNY, UNPROFOR, file 87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2, Mar 93: fax 201800B, CPI BH Command to CPI Zagreb, 20/04/93. Ibid: fax 200119B, BH Command Hayes to Canbat 2, 20/04/93. Ibidem: fax CAC Andreev to DCM Zagreb Thornberry, 21/04/93. Ibid: fax 21 2059, HQ BH Command to HQ UNPROFOR Zagreb, 21/04/93 re: Report on demilitarization of Srebrenica. UNGE, UNPROFOR Box 53, file 1.2.6. HQ BH Command daily infsum 20/04/93.

[12] UNNY, UNPROFOR, file 87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2, Mar 93: fax 21 2059, HQ BH Command to HQ UNPROFOR Zagreb, 21/04/93 re: Report on demilitarization of Srebrenica.

[13] UNNY, UNPROFOR, file87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2, Mar 93: fax 23.21.24 LO BH Command to HQ UNPROFOR Zagreb, 23/04/93 appendix: letter 17/230-49, 22/04/93 Milovanovic to Wahlgren and Morillon.

[14] UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: Z-553, 28/04/93, Wahlgren to Annan. Ibid: MSC-666, 22/04/93 Annan to Wahlgren. Confidential information (66); UNNY, UNPROFOR, file 87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2 Mar 93: Ibid: fax ZAY 180, 24/04/93, Wahlgren to Annan appendix: fax BH Command (Hayes to HQ Zagreb, 24/04/93 re; reinforcement Srebrenica.

[15] Confidential information (102).

[16] Interview L-E. Wahlgren, 03/06/93.

[17] *Report on Srebrenica*, 21 (para 63). Confidential information (141).

[18] Interview D. Arria, 10/05/00.

[19] Interview L-E. Wahlgren, 03/06/99.

[20] UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: MSC-735, 04/05/93, Annan to Wahlgren. Ibidem: Z-588, 05/05/93, Wahlgren to Annan.

[21] UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: Z-588, 05/05/93 Wahlgren to Annan, appendix 2: fax 05 1629 May 93, Hayes to FC Zagreb.

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Part II

Dutchbat in the enclave

Chapter 3

Srebrenica under UN protection: demilitarized and Safe Area (March - June 1993)

4. The second demilitarization agreement of 8 May 1993

The exchange of ideas between UNPROFOR and New York about Safe Areas and UNPROFOR's role in maintaining them was directly related to the developments in Bosnia itself. After the Vance-Owen plan was rejected by the Bosnian Serb parliament on 6 May 1993, the commanders of ABiH and VRS signed three agreements on 8 May 1993 in Sarajevo during a meeting chaired by Bosnia-Herzegovina Commander Morillon. The first concerned a total ceasefire for all of Bosnia, the second the demilitarization of Srebrenica and Zepa, and the third was a general declaration on the ceasefire as a first step to enduring peace. The second document with its preamble and division into sections had all of the characteristics of a formal agreement. The preamble made reference to Resolution 824 of the Security Council and its demand that both places be treated as Safe Areas. The preamble also established that the Geneva Conventions and Protocols of 12 August 1949 concerning the protection of victims of international armed conflicts were applicable to the conflict in Bosnia. Agreements were set forth in the various articles of the document of 8 May more precisely than in the one of 18 April. The demilitarized zone would include the whole area within the ceasefire line and UNPROFOR would mark it with signs on which the following message would be given in English and Serbian: 'Demilitarized zone. Any military operation is strictly forbidden (article 66 Protocol 1 additional to the Geneva Convention)'.

The agreement provided for demilitarization by the withdrawal of military units from the enclave and the handing over of weapons and ammunition to UNPROFOR. On 10 May at 17:00 pm representatives of both parties in Srebrenica would establish whether the process had been completed and set that forth in a joint statement. UNPROFOR would supervise the demilitarized zone with at least one company and supporting units. The peace force would be given freedom of movement inside and outside the enclave. Non-belligerent parties were not allowed to bring weapons or ammunition into the demilitarized zone or to loiter inside the area. The agreement also determined that all stipulations of the additional protocol concerning the protection of civilians were applicable. It also covered the participation of UnCivPol, medical evacuation and access for humanitarian aid. Finally, it included agreements about the charting of mine fields, prisoners of war, graves for the dead, and the withdrawal of heavy artillery in concentration areas and of infantry units to one and a half kilometres from the ceasefire line after demilitarization had been completed.[1]

Bosnia-Herzegovina Command had devoted a great deal of energy to the preparation of this agreement; that held in particular for the Bosnia-Herzegovina commander Morillon and his Chief of Staff Hayes. The history leading up to the agreement of 8 May was important for its implementation. This is true for both the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command of UNPROFOR and the belligerents; consequently, it is necessary here to take a step backwards in time to examine the situation. At the end of April Hayes had launched his proposal for a complete demilitarization of the Srebrenica Safe Area in his consideration of the concept of Resolution 824 for the designation of new Safe Areas. Hayes's proposal was made primarily out of concern about a resumption of fighting around Srebrenica, as there was 'very intense activity' on the ceasefire line. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command considered the situation 'a little difficult and delicate'. Headquarters could not determine with certainty the cause of this tension,

but had the strong suspicion that increasing tension was a result of ABiH activities.[2] CanBat had tried since 18 April to stabilize the explosive situation in the enclave. Many patrols marched through the town to demonstrate UNPROFOR presence; vehicle patrols were made outside the town up to the confrontation line/ceasefire line.

CanBat had set up observation posts on the border of the demilitarized zone around the town of Srebrenica to prevent weapons from being taken into the city. CanBat commander Lieutenant Colonel Geburt and Major Poirier tried to create a basis of mutual trust through regular contacts with the ABiH and VRS. Geburt went to Bratunac regularly to meet with the commanding officer of the Skelani brigade, Colonel Vukovic, who was also the VRS liaison officer for UNPROFOR. At these meetings they provided information about their activities, asked about certain events and stimulated adherence to the agreement. Geburt - and in his absence Poirier - met every evening in the town of Srebrenica with the mayor, UNMOs, UNHCR and NGO representatives. Set items for discussion were the events of the day and the patrol plan for the following day. Possible improvements to the living conditions in the enclave were also considered. The result of CanBat's active approach and its intensive contact with the various parties was a more stable situation in and around the demilitarized zone.[3]

CanBat's action had almost no effect on the situation at the ceasefire line however. There continued to be an exchange of fire. As remarked above, considerable activity between the VRS and ABiH occurred on the ceasefire line at the end of April according to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command. Bosnia-Herzegovina Command Chief of Staff Hayes wanted to curb the situation through a drastic measure, namely the extension of the militarized zone to the ceasefire line. According to Hayes's reasoning, demilitarization of the Safe Area meant that the party in the enclave, the ABiH, would no longer have any weapons. This would end the many violations of the ceasefire, since Bosnia-Herzegovina Command had come to see ABiH as the primary source of the violations. Hayes set up an operation plan that would be carried out after the arrival of a second Canadian company in Srebrenica to relieve Major Poirier's company. The UNPROFOR contingent would then temporarily be double in strength which Hayes wanted to implement his plan without consulting the two parties.

That was going too far for Morillon, however, which is why he brought up the plan during a meeting with Vice President Koljevic of the *Republika Srpska* on 4 May. The following day in a meeting with Morillon in Srebrenica, Oric agreed to go along with the complete demilitarization of the Safe Area. On 7 May - one day after the decision of the Bosnian Serb parliament to put approval of the Vance-Owen plan to the people in a referendum - Mladic agreed in a meeting with Morillon on the implementation of Resolution 824 to allow the second Canadian company to go to Srebrenica. He gave UNPROFOR until 14 May to complete the demilitarization of Srebrenica. That was sufficient basis for Morillon to set forth the agreement in a new, improved document. The following day after a discussion chaired by Morillon, Commanders Mladic and Halilovic signed the agreement on the demilitarization of Srebrenica and Zepa.[4]

In actual fact, the agreement of 8 May set out the same method for realizing demilitarization as that of 18 April. The main difference was that the preamble now explicitly coupled the status of Srebrenica and Zepa to Resolution 824, and the demilitarization to the provisions of article 60 of the Additional Protocol of the Geneva Convention. However, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York was less enthusiastic about the new clarity of the agreement reached under Morillon's leadership. In the opinion of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Security Council would find the agreement unacceptable, despite a reference to Resolution 824, because it did not in any way address the central point of the resolution, namely a first step to ending the VRS threat to the Safe Area through the withdrawal of its troops.[5] Core elements of the agreement remained the surrender of all weapons or the withdrawal of military units from the enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa, verification of the demilitarization by both belligerent parties and then withdrawal of VRS units from the ceasefire line as border to the demilitarized area.

After the experience with the agreement of 18 April, the intention of the 8 May accord was to eliminate misunderstandings about the area of the demilitarized zone. On the other hand, only three days were set aside for the demilitarization of this large, virtually inaccessible area. It is not clear why

this was. One possibility is that Mladic ultimately went back on his offer to Morillon concerning completion of demilitarization on 14 May. What is clear is that Bosnia-Herzegovina Command and Morillon saw the agreement as a means of stabilizing the situation in Srebrenica and Zepa. Morillon operated from an assessment of the local situation and tried to establish in an agreement between the two parties whatever was possible. He seized the chance to make use of a plan of his Chief of Staff - which originally would have been carried out without the knowledge of the ABiH and VRS - now with the endorsement of both parties. Morillon seemingly trusted that the assent of the ABiH commander of Srebrenica was sufficient basis for implementation of the agreement. The VRS could continue to follow the same course under the agreement: first the ABiH had to surrender its weapons and only then was it the VRS that had to make a move. Up until then the VRS could continue its military threat by keeping Srebrenica surrounded and had as ultimate means the renewal of attacks. Enlarging the demilitarized zone to the total area of the enclave might end up giving the ABiH less space for actions against the VRS on the ceasefire line, but it did not place it in a position in which it could not move. The ABiH could be confident about Resolution 824: the resolution did not forbid the presence of Muslim troops in the Safe Area and focused first of all on Bosnian-Serb aggression.[6]

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[1] *Agreement on the Demilitarization of Srebrenica en Zepa concluded between Lt Gen Ratko Mladic and Gen Sefer Halilovic on 8 May in the Presence of Lt. Gen. Philippe Morillon*. Text given in Karremans, *Srebrenica*, pp. 269-272. Confidential information (130).

[2] NIOD, Coll. Wahlgren. Fax 30 2050 (R 4685), Morillon to UN New York (for Lord Owen), 30/04/93. UNNY, UNPROFOR, file 87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2 Mar 93: fax 30 1115 (R4612), BH Command to HQ UNPROFOR, 30/04/93. Confidential information (131).

[3] Interview Th.K.D. Geburt, 18/11/99.

[4] UNNY, UNPROFOR, file 87305 DFC 3300 Srebrenica vol 2 Mar 93: fax (R 4549), BH Command to Canbat2 and Britbat, 03/05/93 re: Operation order for expansion of Srebrenica DMZ. UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: Z-588, 05/05/93, Wahlgren to Annan appendix 2: fax05 1629, 05/05/93, Hayes to Wahlgren. Ibid: Z-611, 09/05/93, Wahlgren to Annan appendix: BH Command to HQ Zagreb, 07/05/93. Confidential information (132).

[5] *Srebrenica Report*, § 69. UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: MSC-760, 08/05/93, Annan to Wahlgren.

[6] *Srebrenica Report*, § 67.

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Part II

Dutchbat in the enclave

Chapter 3

Srebrenica under UN protection: demilitarized and Safe Area (March - June 1993)

5. Failure of the second demilitarization of Srebrenica

An extra company of the second battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment was made available for the demilitarization operation. Upon arrival, its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Desjardins, was given responsibility for the northern part of the enclave and immediately demonstrated his presence in the operation area, but the results of the demilitarization were not encouraging. The whole process of collecting arms lasted much longer than had been anticipated and was far from completed on 10 May, as is indicated in the available sources. In the existing demilitarized zone around the town of Srebrenica, a superficial demilitarization was carried out again by means of a house-to-house check by UN CivPol and the local police. Outside of the town, demilitarization began in three of the four sectors. Once again, the ABiH surrendered to the Weapons Collection Point old weapons or ones that did not function due to a lack of ammunition. Two T-55 tanks, which were out of petrol and ammunition, were turned over. Later, 4 anti-aircraft systems were added.

On 19 May, CanBat destroyed a portion of the surrendered ammunition. Usable guns, mostly hand guns were not surrendered on order of ABiH general Halilovic, rather carefully hidden in the enclave. The ABiH used the same argument for the surrender of only unusable weapons as during the first phase: the strength and armament of CanBat was insufficient to hold off a VRS attack. None the less, CanBat believed that it could round off this first phase on 24 May. The VRS delegation for verification of demilitarization, however, refused to testify to the complete surrender of weapons.[1]

CanBat sets to work to meet the terms of the agreement

After extending the demilitarization to the whole area of the enclave on 10 May 1993, CanBat also made serious work of seeing to its monitoring. So as to work as efficiently as possible, CanBat divided the enclave into two parts, with two sectors each. A company of 5 officers and 111 soldiers were responsible for each part. CanBat established its headquarters in the post office building where Morillon had also been located in March. It hoped to reduce the level of violence between the belligerents inside the enclave by means of a 'demonstrable presence'. That was done primarily by being 'tough on the Muslims' and by taking seriously the complaints of the VRS.[2] Still, this did not mean that CanBat took a one-sided position against the ABiH. In the first weeks after the expansion of the demilitarized zone there were regular problems between CanBat and the VRS as well. On 12 May CanBat set its checkpoint post at Zeleni Jadar and demanded the withdrawal of the VRS infantry to 1.5 km behind the ceasefire line. At the same time thirteen permanent observation posts (OPs) were established on the former confrontation line. During the summer these were rebuilt and turned into permanent reinforced posts.

In principle, CanBat placed these posts on the ceasefire line and only did not when another position offered a better view of the terrain and the two parties. This was the case with the observation post on the road between Srebrenica and Zeleni Jadar (OP-Echo or OP-E). Unlike what was said later by the Muslims, the post was set on VRS territory because the view of the terrain was better. Despite many allegations from the ABiH and Muslim side,[3] there is no hard evidence that CanBat moved its

observation posts between April 1993 and March 1994 on the insistence of the VRS. UNPROFOR's discussion about the borders of the Safe Area and moving them was fed by the fact that there had never been an official marking of the area since there had never been official agreement about completing demilitarization. CanBat did draw up a map on which the border of the Safe Area was drawn in red, the red UNPROFOR ceasefire line. This ceasefire line had no official status.

Discussions in the Mixed Military Working Group in Srebrenica bogged down because the VRS was not willing to make any agreements until demilitarization was complete. In determining the border line, it was also significant that CanBat had to work from inside the enclave because the VRS did not allow any UNMOs or CanBat officers on their side of the confrontation line. Furthermore, CanBat assumed that the VRS infantry would pull back 1.5 km and its artillery 10 km from the border. That did not happen however: only in a few places did the VRS pull back its heavy arms.[4]

Aside from observation of the ceasefire line, important tasks that CanBat fulfilled were compliance with the ceasefire and demilitarization. In the beginning, movement was not possible in all parts of the Safe Area because of mine fields, in particular in the north-eastern part of the enclave. The UNMOs took over some of the patrols. While CanBat tried to gain a grasp of the military situation in and around the enclave through manning of the observation posts and intensive patrolling, tensions between the Canadians and the VRS increased. On 12 May a CanBat soldier at the observation post at Zeleni Jadar was wounded by gunshot fire. CanBat responded with directed fire and killed probably two VRS soldiers. Afterwards as well patrols were regularly fired upon by snipers. In such incidents CanBat always returned directed fire. In fact such confrontations were nothing new; since their arrival in March, the UNMOs had also experienced that whoever came too close to the VRS lines or positions would be shot at.

A tense atmosphere came into being which was also expressed in threats and insults during discussions of the CanBat commander Desjardins with VRS Col. Vukovic in Bratunac. The ABiH contributed to the tensions by making use of CanBat's presence to set up positions inside and outside of the ceasefire line. According to the ABiH, the VRS regularly pushed into the enclave and was able to gain territory at critical moments. The Canadian commander checked on such reports personally; he would walk in the direction of the Bosnian-Serb army and summon the unit to withdraw. CanBat reported many violations of the ceasefire as of the end of May, without having any insight into the exact circumstances. Requests for intelligence from the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo went unanswered.[5]

Matters stabilized somewhat in June 1993 in that both parties seemed to be resigned to the situation. The VRS replaced its regular troops with local units. After the acceptance of Resolution 836, with its definition of the Safe Area and the establishment of the UNPROFOR mandate for those areas (for the circumstances leading up to this resolution, see Chapter 11 of Part I), the ABiH did not have to worry about any large-scale UNPROFOR attempt to force demilitarization. As Wahlgren had predicted, the ABiH used the Safe Areas as exercise and rest areas for its units and as a base for raids into the Bosnian-Serb area. Srebrenica was used as an exercise area for its units there and as a base for raids. In as far as could be determined, the VRS undertook little military activity and tried to keep the ABiH and the Muslims inside the enclave.

There were changes in CanBat as well. CanBat II, the first company of which arrived in Srebrenica at the beginning of May, was known as the *Vandoos*, a unit of swaggering French-speaking Canadians from Quebec, most of them under twenty, who attracted attention with their RayBan sunglasses and non-regulation clothing. CanBat II had a different way of doing things: patrols on foot were done away with and contact with the local population avoided. As a result of the decreased Canadian contingent in Bosnia, the two companies of CanBat II were replaced with one company. Consequently, the activities of CanBat had to be reduced as well. Five of the thirteen observation posts (OPs) were no longer permanently manned, which caused a great deal of disquiet among the ABiH.[6] Although the Bosnia-Herzegovina Command reported the military situation almost every day as: 'Srebrenica: situation relatively calm and stable' that does not mean that it really was all that calm. There were many incidents between the belligerents along the ceasefire line.

CanBat reported violations of the ceasefire every day. In the period of 17 to 30 June 1993, CanBat reported 1,200 violations with small calibre weapons, mortars, tanks and artillery. In the period of 7 to 16 November the amount was 4,000, 1,836 on 13 November alone. Observation posts were shot at regularly and patrols came under fire. In addition there was directed fire on CanBat, an action that was consistently answered, in keeping with the *Rules of Engagement*, with .50 or other calibre weapons. This had little to do with peacekeeping. It was more survival under war circumstances because the demilitarization agreement of 8 May 1993 was never really implemented.[7] In that sense the situation could be called 'stable'. This was the situation that DutchBat I would land in upon its arrival in the enclave in February/March 1994.

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[1] Confidential information (133). Interviews Nedred Mujkanovic, 10/03/99; Hakija Meholic, 02/02/99; Th.K.D. Geburt, 18/11/99 and P. Desjardins, 12/11/99.

[2] Interviews P. Desjardins, 12/11/99 and Momir Nikolic, 20/10/00.

[3] Interviews Nedred Mujkanovic, 10/03/99; Fahrudin Salihovic, 04/02/98 and Hazrudin Kistic, 17-18/05/99.

[4] Interview Nedred Mujkanovic, 10/03/99. Interview Fahrudin Salihovic, 04/02/98. Interview Desjardins, 12/11/99. Interview D. MacIssac (57th Engineer squadron), 16/11/99. Interview Hazrudin Kistic, 17-18/05/1999. Interview (VRS) Momir Nikolic, 20/10/00. Interview J. Zoutendijk, 06/04/01.

[5] UNNY, DPKO, coded cables UNPROFOR: Z-626, 14/05/93 Wahlgren to Annan. Confidential information (134). Interview P. Desjardins, 12/11/99. Interview Nedred Mujkanovic, 10/03/99. Interview Th.K.D. Geburt, 18/11/99. Interview J. Zoutendijk, 06/04/2001. Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 16/04/1998.

[6] Taylor and Nolan, *Tested Mettle*, pp.104-105. Interview J. Champagne, 12/11/99; Sie LL. De strijd om Srebrenica, p. 64. Briquemont, *Do something General*, p. 224.

[7] DefatOttawa. Red Folder Secret, UNPROFOR Zagreb to NDHQ Ottawa: sitreps 17/06/93 – 30/06/93 and 07/11/93 – 16/11/93.

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Part II

Dutchbat in the enclave

Chapter 8

Peacekeeping and humanitarian action

10. Problems between Dutchbat and the warring factions

The military aspects of the duties involved supervising compliance with ceasefires between the Bosnian Government army, the ABiH, and the forces of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS. When they arrived in the enclave, Dutchbat soon observed that there was no peace at all, but only a disputed ceasefire, which was constantly violated by both parties. There was a great lack of clarity about how to interpret the task in practice. The Commander of Dutchbat II, for example, wanted to know whether digging trenches was or was not permissible in a 'demilitarized' area. He requested clarification from headquarters in Sarajevo on three separate occasions, without receiving an answer. Finally only a half-hearted answer came from Tuzla, that put the problem back on the Commander's plate.[1]

The problems surrounding the demilitarization, the establishment of the enclave borders and the determination of the ceasefire line appeared to be insoluble in the short term, and they repeatedly reopened negotiations with both parties. The Dutch battalions adapted, as mentioned in the previous chapters, their policy to this situation. They preferred to remain in discussion and to preserve the mutual contact between the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Serbs. Identical borders accepted by all parties existed at best on paper, but in practice there were three borders: those of the ABiH, of the VRS and of UNPROFOR. Because the demilitarization also came to a standstill, the leaders of the successive Dutch battalions found themselves increasingly falling between two stools. On the one hand, the VRS repeatedly complained about the inadequate disarming of the Muslims, and from that side they argued that Dutchbat was not carrying out its duties properly. On the other hand, the ABiH constantly insisted that Dutchbat did not react alertly to Serbian movements and border corrections, and was actually too conscientious in gathering weapons from the Bosnian Government army.

In the Dutch battalions themselves, this stagnation led to many frustrations. Dutchbat I ran into this problem immediately. According to Commander Vermeulen:

'if you saw a man with a weapon, you could shout *'stani pucam'* ['stand or I will shoot!'], but you were not permitted to shoot, because the Rules of Engagement did not allow it. If that man ran home fast enough and threw the weapon inside, you could put up a cordon around the house. You then had to call the local police, and they would say: 'I would have to be crazy, because then we would all be punished by Naser Oric.' You would then ask the UN police, who then said that they had had no mandate for it. It was a warped regulation.'^[2]

The regulations did indeed require Dutchbat members to make a report if they found armed men in the enclave. Under no circumstances should they go off in pursuit. If the opportunity to make an arrest presented itself, they should do so, and subsequently indeed call in the UnCivPol. Frisking was forbidden, as was the searching of houses. They were allowed to 'secure' a house, which meant that they could set up a cordon around the house to await the arrival of UnCivPol. If such a situation should become 'threatening', then Dutchbat was to withdraw.^[3]

Dutchbat was therefore not authorized to enter houses, and so the men who carried weapons, as Vermeulen described, could escape being disarmed by fleeing into a house. Sometimes, the blue

helmets saw women leaving with shopping bags, in which they were probably taking the dismantled weapons to safety. UN CivPol and local police were allowed to enter the houses, but according to a number of Dutchbat members it was sometimes took hours for them to arrive.[4] Furthermore, the probability was indeed extraordinarily small that the local police would find much, because of the reprisals to be expected from ABiH soldiers. Many ABiH soldiers had more respect for their own commanders than for the agreements that had been made with the UN and had to be executed by Dutchbat. They feared reprisals if they were to surrender their weapon, which was sometimes so abundantly clear that the Dutch offered to mediate: if 'Dutchbat could just have those weapons, then the liaison officer would talk with the Muslim commander, to avoid punishment'.[5]

The effectiveness of the Dutchbat action in this sort of matter was also seriously impeded by another cause. It quickly became apparent that as soon as a patrol left the compound, a sort of alarm system went into effect (via children and adults), which usually attained a higher speed than that of the patrols: 'They just knew: time to hide the weapons! Now the patrol is back inside. Get the weapons back out again.'[6] According to patrol coordinator Captain Rutten, he did decide to pursue armed Muslims in a few situations. But:

'you can go after them on the risk that they know the terrain much better than you and, of course, disarming was not of much use. This gradually became clear to everyone. You took a weapon and you drew a certain risk to yourself. Because if you were to go into the same area later with a patrol, you ran the risk of being fired on by Muslims. I tried not to sidestep that, but in the orders I said: 'If you come across them [weapons], collect them. If you don't come across them, don't go looking for them! Is not worthwhile.'[7]

The regulations were so unclear that neither did the battalion leaders know whether the ban on searching houses was an unwritten rule or a UN rule. To prevent escalation of the confrontation between the ABiH and Dutchbat, Lieutenant Colonel Karremans decided, towards the end of the deployment, to leave large groups, who were walking around openly with weapons, undisturbed.

In brief, it is not surprising that Karremans remarked to the NIOD that in his opinion nothing ever came of demilitarization.[8] During Dutchbat III especially, the execution of demilitarization measures formed an acute security problem, because the Dutch had little or nothing else to offer the population. Because the Bosnian Serbs would not allow through any more fuel, fresh food, or medical stocks, Dutchbat could hardly do anything more for the population. The situation was utterly hopeless, as the humanist counsellor Hetebrij said: 'You had to beat with a stick with one hand and give with the other hand, but we had nothing to offer'.[9]

For the Dutch battalions, there was no doubt that the ABiH had weapons at their disposal in the enclave. There was regular shooting in and around the Safe Area. Especially in the evening and at night it was unclear where the firing was coming from. Unknown marksmen also fired over and at the compound in Potocari, and sometimes shots landed only a couple of metres away from the Dutch soldiers. This was nothing special for those who had regularly been on the shooting range, but it made others fairly nervous. On the compound, they assumed that ABiH marksmen were involved and they became increasingly amazed about what they had to put up with from the Muslims, who they were supposed to protect. The practice of 'drawing fire' by ABiH soldiers around the OPs was a permanent source of concern. Because the ABiH fired on Bosnian-Serb positions in the vicinity of Dutch OPs, there was a fairly large probability that the observation post would come under fire if the Serbs returned fire. This also did happen regularly. The Dutch assumed that the ABiH played this risky game to involve Dutchbat in the conflict.

In this way, the relationship between Dutchbat and the ABiH deteriorated in the course of time. This is also apparent from the manner of the response to the figure of Naser Oric. The first battalion still had mixed feelings about Oric, but the second and third battalions no longer had a good word for him. Oric also showed himself far less in the last period, and he was generally viewed as a criminal. On the other hand, a number of soldiers did have respect for him, and they were also not unmoved by

his aura of invincibility and heroism. A Dutchbat III soldier relates his first acquaintance with Oric:

'I first met him on a patrol. We arrived at a stream; I no longer know what it was called. There was some kind of small water mill there. He was sitting there resting with a group of men. Because they were armed, I said to the sergeant: 'Shouldn't we take those weapons?' His answer was: 'If you really want, off you go! But that is Naser Oric.' He explained a little about who he was and what he had done before the enclave was established. That he had practically liberated the entire enclave from the Serbs with a small group of men. I then started to take a different view of the matter.'^[10]

For the third battalion, the taking hostage of a large group of Dutchbat members in the Bandera Triangle, which was discussed in Chapter 6, was one of the first and immediately also one of the most perturbing experiences with the ABiH. This confrontation took only a few days, but did set the tone. From 28 January 1995, 100 men were detained at three locations in the western part of the enclave. Negotiations took place regarding a solution, and permission was even obtained for a supply trip to the detained unit. The local civilian population provided the men with fresh bread and snacks.^[11] Nevertheless, for the Dutchbat III personnel who had just arrived in the enclave, it remained totally incomprehensible that they should be taken hostage by the same Muslims who they had come to protect. This is how the view could become established that relations with the Muslims were more problematic than those with the Bosnian Serbs.

While the Dutchbat members were being held hostage, the village carpenter arrived in the compound to sell woodcarvings to their colleagues, at West European prices. This was the height of absurdity for the soldiers in the compound. Some wondered whether the money paid to the carpenter was used to buy the weapons that made life miserable for Dutchbat.^[12] The experience of powerlessness, which is so disturbing for soldiers, was described by Captain E.G.B. Wieffer as follows:

'You just sat in the underdog position. That was the point. You were the underdog because you were in a remote location. You were the underdog because there was no possible way out. This was also well known. The battalion occasionally shouted: 'How can we do the job if matters really get out of hand?' You were also the underdog simply because you were bullied by both the ABiH - and I am not referring to the Muslims, but to the ABiH - and the VRS anytime they felt like it. And therefore you had no mandate, nor any position of power, and therefore no leg to stand on to participate there as UN. You were just a small boy there.'^[13]

Dutchbat patrols were regularly apprehended by the ABiH and sent back. For example, a patrol from OP-A at the end of April 1995 was told by the local leader Imzah Begovic 'that they were no longer allowed to pass through the village of Sastafci'.^[14] Practices of this kind made the execution of the original task as good as impossible.

The assumption of the deployment - that Dutchbat was present 'with the assent of both parties' - seemed in practice to be becoming increasingly problematic. The fact that agreements had been signed did not necessarily mean that they were also carried out. In spite of agreements, it was not made very difficult for the warring factions to quietly continue going their own way. The procedure that prescribed how patrols were to respond if they came under fire, virtually invited misuse. In the event of shooting, the patrol actually had to lie on the ground, and after ten minutes someone was supposed to review the situation. If the situation was safe, the patrol could cautiously resume. However, if the shooting started again, the patrol had to turn back. This procedure certainly helped limit the escalation of violence, but at the same time it made it very simple for the ABiH to get rid of a patrol: just fire twice over their heads.^[15]

Dutchbat III increasingly often observed large armed groups of ABiH, which it could not act against. At the end of January 1995, approximately 400 Muslims armed with rifles and bazookas even gathered in front of the gate of the compound in Srebrenica. An hour later they departed again to the south. It was a mystery to Dutchbat members what this action was supposed to mean, although most tended to interpret the incident as a show of strength.[16]

There was also great irritation about the maintenance of the weapons that the ABiH had actually handed in; it had been agreed that the ABiH was permitted to maintain these weapons. They were stored in the Weapon Collection Point, which was controlled by B Company. According to the ABiH, Dutchbat members refused to supply them with the necessary maintenance equipment, such as polishing cloths and oil, which were not part of the agreement. Several incidents took place during the maintenance sessions. For instance, on 21 March 1995 an ABiH soldier attempted to take away a dismantled Kalashnikov after a maintenance session in the Weapon Collection Point. This attempt was discovered, after which B Company removed all ABiH personnel from the compound.[17]

Apart from that, the ABiH also had numerous complaints about the military task performance by the Dutch battalions. Ramiz Becirovic, Deputy Commander of the ABiH in Srebrenica, blamed the Dutch soldiers for never being willing to believe what they had not seen with their own eyes. Becirovic once took a Dutchbat patrol to the Muslim village of Jasenova. He wanted to make the Dutch aware of infiltration by Bosnian Serbs in the village. While Becirovic was lying flat on his stomach in hiding, the Dutch stood surveying the situation. They could make no other observation than: 'We see that they are there, but we can't do anything about it.'[18] - this was a frustrating experience for Becirovic.

Under the circumstances in the enclave it was not simple for the Dutch battalions to observe the necessary neutrality or impartiality. This was even exacerbated by the material aid to the destitute population. The parties involved, in the midst of a conflict where the distinction between civilians and soldiers was often unclear, rapidly interpreted such aid as partiality. Humanitarian aid to civilians could in practice lead to indirect aid to the soldiers. The UN order stated clearly that the Dutch battalions must act in a 'neutral' and 'impartial' way. The views on the practical meaning of these concepts diverged somewhat, however, because they were not translated into clear rules. The consequence was that each (company) commander interpreted 'neutrality' and 'impartiality' in their own way.

In the period of Dutchbat I, Commander Vermeulen and Liaison Officer Derksen shared the view that neutrality meant that Dutchbat must not take sides and should try to get on well with all parties. This came down to 'never appearing vulnerable and not been swayed by either of the parties'. They were aware of the nature of the problems and they tried to familiarize themselves with them without taking sides.[19] The way in which Vermeulen defined the term neutrality did not mean that his people were allowed no contact with the population nor dealings with anyone. Yet he was well aware of how difficult it was to keep a grip on neutrality and impartiality. After all, 'as soon you go in and sit down, you are with the Muslims and you are one with the Muslims, and you are the opposing party for the other party. You will never again be neutral.'[20] According to Derksen, you have to preserve your impartiality, but this did not mean that you could not deal with people in a friendly way.[21]

The Commanders of Dutchbat II and III felt obliged to define the position differently. They opted to keep more distance and limited themselves as much as possible to functional contacts. They were also more apprehensive of too intimate contacts between battalion members and the population, because this could endanger the neutrality. Partly on the basis of their experiences in Lebanon, Everts and Karremans practically forbade contact between Dutchbat and the local population. They themselves also hardly had contact with anyone, because in their eyes this was a prerequisite for 'neutral' action.[22] It had been driven home in the preparation that Dutchbat must act in a neutral way, and that keeping a distance appeared to be the simplest way to give substance to the concept of impartiality. However, Dutchbat members were occasionally allowed to play football with the population and to provide organized humanitarian aid.

The most far-reaching consequences of the order to be neutral and impartial were taken by the Commander of Dutchbat III B Company, Captain Groen. Groen wanted to distinguish two tasks within

the framework of his main task. In the first place, according to him, came the care for his own personnel, and in the second place the safety of the Muslims. To perform the latter task as well as possible with the limited resources that he had available, it appeared to him to be advisable to remain as 'neutral' as possible. Based on what he had heard of the experiences of his predecessors, he thought that a 'neutral' attitude could also mean that, if necessary, he would have to protect his own people against the Muslims. Groen understood from the accounts that Dutchbat I arrived in the enclave very pro-Muslim, on the assumption that they were there 'to help the Muslims against those bastard Serbs'.

According to his own account, his view was different:

'I think that as part of the UN you have to be impartial. This was also officially the intention. To be a third party in the middle. But they clearly very openly took the side of the Muslim population, which is very understandable, because you have the idea that you are in the misery together. But you do send a signal to the Serbian side who are surrounding you. As Dutchbat I, I would also not have approached this as they did.'^[23]

It is striking that Groen apparently failed to notice that in addition to Dutchbat I's good contacts with the Muslims, they also maintained good contacts with the Serbs, and in this way therefore also acted in a 'neutral or impartial' way, except that it was not consistent with his own view. The commanders give their own interpretation of the principle of neutrality, but in the case of the last two commanders this entailed that they preferred to reduce contacts with the Muslims to a minimum. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the training paid no attention to how neutrality and impartiality were to be interpreted: this meant that it was unclear what was permissible and what not in the contacts with the warring factions. The matter was left to the capacities of the responsible officers, such as their insight into human nature, flexibility, creativity and social intelligence.

It appeared that Dutchbat II and III preferred to be safe than sorry, and avoided risks in this area as much as possible.^[24] This was otherwise a consequence not only of a personal interpretation of orders by the Dutchbat leaders, but also of the worsening relationship with the ABiH and, in general, the increasing tension in and around the enclave. What was problematic in this line of conduct was that Dutchbat actually assumed that it was there for the benefit of the population in the enclave. At the same time, the battalion leaders deemed contact with the population to be so risky for the mission, that the enclave residents were kept as much as possible at a safe distance. This ultimately led to a paradoxical situation, in which it was actually forbidden to make contact with the Muslims, while they were to be provided with humanitarian aid.

In order to assess Dutchbat's situation, it is also necessary in general terms to raise the question of to what extent striving for neutrality is compatible with a peace mission with a strongly humanitarian element. Simply by being present, peacekeepers influence the existing relationships and the way in which the hostilities develop. The task of providing humanitarian aid to a less than clearly separated conglomerate of civilians and soldiers made this even more difficult. The UN intervenes politically and militarily to achieve its objectives and is therefore a party in skirmishes, fighting and aid. Upholding the principle of neutrality in such a situation is more of a wish than a reality, and it is even questionable whether it can serve as an adequate guide for action in a UN context.^[25] The concepts are often interchanged, but it is possible to make a clear distinction .

Impartial or neutral?

According to specialists, the concept of 'impartiality' has appeared to be more workable for peace missions than 'neutrality', also for many NGOs.^[26] Impartiality allows for being 'judgmental', which, roughly speaking, means acting as a referee. Neutrality is a more detached attitude. The author J. Pictet describes the difference as follows: 'the neutral man refuses to make a judgement whereas the one who is impartial judges a situation in accordance with pre-established rules'.^[27] At the time of the deployment of Dutchbat, the problematic implications of the order to observe neutrality by the United

Nations were still little recognized, let alone that account was taken of them in formulating the order for Dutchbat. The consequence was that each commander provided his own interpretation of these concepts. Vermeulen of Dutchbat I viewed 'neutral' as remaining on friendly terms with everyone; Everts and Karremans of Dutchbat II and III viewed it more as keeping distance from the parties.

Security measures in the contacts with the population and the warring factions

Dutchbat II and III aimed to avoid contacts between Dutch soldiers and the local population, also for reasons of military security, as much as possible. There had been regular problems in previous years. For instance, men of the Dutch transport companies sometimes took civilians along in convoys over the confrontation line, which could have endangered the entire convoy. Contacts with civilians could also easily have led to identification and taking sides, which was in conflict with aiming for neutrality. In the case of Dutchbat I and II, for example, it appeared that battalion members sent numerous parcels to civilians in the enclave. Rave, who, apart from being a member of the liaison team, was also a military security officer of Dutchbat III, wanted to stop this practice because it carried security and operational risks.[28]

For that matter, not all members of Dutchbat III fell under the explicit ban on contact with the population. However, it was advised in connection with the security risks to limit contact to what was strictly necessary and functional. In problems of this kind too, it came down to working according to individual discretion. According to an involved party, Rave solved this problem on the Potocari compound by means of the following line of conduct: 'Contacts are fine, but I do want them to be reported to me'. In this way he was able to check what specific contacts involved, and whether anything strange was going on.

Rave impressed upon soldiers to remain anonymous and therefore not to disclose their names. He was concerned about possible activities of Intelligence Services and criminals. Therefore, for example, Rave instructed no envelopes to be thrown away, in case...

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[1] See Honig & Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 186.

[2] Interview C.H.P. Vermeulen 09/06/99.

[3] SMG/Debrief. Ccie (NL) UN INFBAT Standing Orders Part III.

[4] Interview R. Sensen 11/02/99.

[5] Interview A.J. Derksen 10/04/95.

[6] Interview E.G.B. Wieffer 18/6/99.

[7] Interview J.H.A. Rutten 01/12/99.

[8] Interview Th.J.P. Karremans 01/12/00.

[9] Interview with Bart Hetebrij in *Panorama*, autumn 1995, pp. 19-21.

[10] Interview A.E. Broeder, 03/5/00.

[11] MID/RNII. Dutchbat Milinfo Sie 2/3 30/01/95.

[12] NIOD, Coll. Koreman. Diary Koreman, 17th week 25.

[13] Interview E.G.B. Wieffer, 18/06/99.

[14] MID/RNII. Milinfo 30/04/95.

[15] 101MIPel. Military debriefing report DUTCHBAT II 09/02/95.

[16] Dutchbat Milinfo Sie 2/3, 29/01/95.

[17] Dutchbat Milinfo Sie 2/3, 22/03/95.

[18] Interview Ramiz Becirovic, 02/02 and 05/02/98.

[19] Interview A.J. Derksen, 10/04/01.

[20] Interview C.H.P. Vermeulen, 09/06/99.

[21] Tabak, *Tussen hamer en aambeeld*, pp. 49-50.

[22] Interview Th.J.P. Karremans, 26/06/98.

[23] Interview J.R. Groen, 14/01/00.

[24] The commanders of Dutchbat II and III have also repeatedly pointed out that through their experiences in Lebanon they had become extremely cautious and wished to act in a strictly neutral way.

[25] The author Hugo Slim explains the pitfalls of using concepts such as neutrality and impartiality extremely well in 'Positioning Humanitarianism in War: Principles of Neutrality, Impartiality and Solidarity in: *Aspects of Peacekeeping*'

D.S. Gordon and F.H. Toase (ed.) (London, 2001) pp. 125-140, The author Stuart Gordon does the same in 'A Recipe for Making the Safe Areas Unsafe' in: *Aspects of Peacekeeping*, D.S. Gordon and F.H. Toase (eds.) (London, 2001) pp. 213-230 The Sandhurst Conference Series.

[26] see explanation by Hugo Slim in the article 'Positioning Humanitarianism in War: Principles of Neutrality, Impartiality and Solidarity' in: *Aspects of Peacekeeping*, D.S. Gordon and F.H. Toase (eds.) (London, 2001) p. 134.

[27] J. Pictet *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: A Commentary*, Geneva, 1979, p. 26. An American Air Force manual for dealing with NGOs contains the following clear and concise description of the difference between neutrality and impartiality: '*Neutrality implies that all parties will be equally affected by an action. But no peace operation, not even unarmed monitoring, will be likely to affect all parties equally and therefore none is neutral. Impartiality implies that the United Nations, normally the Security Council, believes that all parties share responsibility and therefore refuses to identify aggressor or victim. Peace operations are or should be impartial*', in: 'Strengthening the Partnership' Improving Military Coordination with Relief Agencies and Allies in: *Humanitarian Operations*. Prepared by Rand for United States Air Force by Daniel Byma. (et al.), Santa Monica, 2000, p. 105.

[28] Confidential interview (85).

him and his men correctly and attempted to make their forced stay in Milici as pleasant as possible by offering soft drinks and cigarettes and providing the opportunity to phone the Netherlands. Otherwise, the Dutchbat members had no idea of the massacre at that time.

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[1] Stefano's hamburger bar was an 'approved' stopping place for the UN convoys on the way from and to the enclave. The Dutchbat security department sometimes had concerns about Stefano because he spoke and understood Dutch reasonably well, and they were afraid of spying.

[2] Interview psychologist P. Venhovens in: C. van der Laan, 'Dutchbat heeft niets van bevolking Srebrenica begrepen', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 26/07/95.

[3] Interview A. Ceelen 02/07/99.

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Part II

Dutchbat in the enclave

Chapter 8

Peacekeeping and humanitarian action

16. The attitude towards the Bosnian Serbs

In the discussion of the relationship between Dutchbat and the Bosnian Serbs, it is of great importance to recognize that the representatives of this group that the Dutch came into contact with usually came from a different social group. The question is whether the blue helmets recognized this sufficiently, and whether it influenced the picture that they had. On the way to Bosnia, the soldiers first passed through the apparently Western Zagreb, and subsequently they travelled through Bosnian-Serb terrain to the enclave. On the way there was 'the Serf Stefano', a hamburger bar that functioned as a stopping place for UN convoys. The owner attempted to pamper the men with hamburgers and drinks.[1] Moreover, Dutchbat dealt with well-dressed Bosnian Serb businessmen in Hotel Fontana in Bratunac, and with VRS soldiers. Dutchbat had no contact with the Bosnian-Serb population in the surroundings of the enclave, let alone with Bosnian-Serb Displaced Persons.

On the other hand, the Muslims that Dutchbat had to deal with were the extreme poor, and the Displaced Persons especially were in extraordinarily wretched circumstances. This distorted the difference between 'the Bosnian Serbs' and 'the Muslims'. In view of the circumstances, it was not surprising that the average Dutchbat member was struck by the fact that the Muslims that they encountered in the enclave 'stank' and 'begged'. The Dutch themselves would soon enough have undeniable problems with hygiene. Other views that quickly became heard were such generalizations as: 'the Muslims' looked terrible because they had nothing, they stole, they were unreliable and they were never on time. This negative stereotype contrasted with the more positive picture of the Bosnian Serbs with whom Dutchbat came into contact. They looked respectable, were well-dressed, had food to eat and were punctual. The Bosnian Serbs belonged to the middle class or above, while most of the Muslims compared poorly with them.

In addition, Bosnian-Serb soldiers, at least around Srebrenica, were more readily identifiable as regular soldiers than the men of the ABiH. Locally, the latter sometimes resembled an irregular combat group, which was consistent with an assumed 'Balkan tradition'. In this respect, the relationships between the two parties around the enclave were different from elsewhere in Bosnia. The psychologist Venhovens often observed an attitude of Dutchbat towards the appearance and organization of the VRS that verged on awe. He remarked that soldiers can usually get on best with fellow soldiers. They understand each other's professionalism and codes of behaviour, they are usually subject to a comparable discipline and think in the same language of strategy and tactics. The ABiH soldiers, on the other hand, were seen by Dutchbat not as professional soldiers, but as an 'irregular rabble'[2]. At the start of the Dutchbat III deployment, the VRS regularly allowed supply convoys through, and at first sight, the daily problems with the population of the enclave were greater than with the Bosnian Serb army. This influenced the mood, although the increasingly inflexible attitude of the VRS towards the supplies would not remain without consequence.

Around the fall of the enclave, the contact with the Bosnian Serbs became more intensive as a consequence of the constraints imposed by the circumstances. VRS men stole from Dutch soldiers and took them hostage, but at the same time they gave them cigarettes and food. The treatment was apparently not as bad as might be expected, as is apparent from the statement of Sergeant Ceelen, who was taken hostage after the fall of OP-K, that he did not 'feel like a prisoner of war'.[3] The VRS treated

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Part III

The fall of Srebrenica

Chapter 1

The military and political situation in spring 1995

10. The air strikes on Pale

The month of May saw a considerable escalation of the fighting between VRS and ABiH.[1] UNPROFOR got involved in the fighting, which resulted on 25 and 26 May in the much-discussed air strikes on ammunition depots in Pale, the 'capital' of the Republika Srpska. However, it would be incorrect to consider these bombings by NATO as the single cause of the escalation; before 25 May the conflict had already been escalating.

For instance on 7 May ten French UN soldiers and civilians were killed and 30 got wounded in a mortar attack near Sarajevo, on which operation also the carefulness of the UN headquarters in Zagreb was underlined once more: Akashi's refusal to use Close Air Support was criticized by a number of UN member states.

A next step on the escalation ladder was the removal of heavy weapons by Bosnian Serbs from a Weapon Collection Point, on 24 May even followed by firing heavy weapons by Bosnian Serbs from Weapon Collection Points, and taking away still more weapons. That included tanks and rocket launchers in what was called the Heavy Weapons Exclusion Zone around Sarajevo.

This removal of heavy weapons by Bosnian Serbs did not remain without consequences. On 24 May the Bosnian Serbs received an ultimatum through a press conference by general Smith in Sarajevo: if the next day heavy weapons would not have been removed or delivered at a Weapon Collection Point, the VRS would be attacked from the air. If the heavy weapons would not remain silent within 24 hours after that, another air strike would follow. That same ultimatum also applied to the ABiH.

The VRS did not respect this deadline. That made 25 May 1995 a day to remember in the Bosnian conflict. In the Chapter 'Air power: Close Air Support and air strikes' below, these air strikes will be discussed in more detail. Threatening with force, as Smith did on this occasion, sometimes had a positive result. The fact that NATO was prepared to shoot down airplanes that violated the no-fly zone, had prevented the use of the airspace for offensive purposes. Threatening with force had already worked before to set up the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zone around Sarajevo. But the Bosnian Serbs had quickly understood that they could have the UN pay an unacceptable price for the use of air power. And that was exactly what happened after the second air strike.

After the Bosnian Serbs had failed to respect the deadline, NATO indeed carried out an air strike on 25 May. To prevent unintended damage (in military terms: collateral damage) and casualties, they selected as target two bunkers on an ammunition site near Pale, the capital of the Republika Srpska, proclaimed by the Bosnian Serbs.

The VRS did not take long to respond to this air strike. That same day the VRS besieged Weapon Collection Points and fired at all Safe Areas, with the exception of Zepa. Especially Tuzla was hit very hard: as retaliation for the air strikes on 25 May (Tito's day of birth, and the day of unity and fraternity[2]) they fired at Tuzla from a distance of 20 kilometres, and one single shell (a 130 mm artillery shell) caused 195 casualties, of which 72 were killed.[3] Because the Bosnian Serbs did not observe the ultimatum, on 26 May NATO carried out a second air strike on the other bunkers at the same ammunition site near Pale.

Three examples show how UN personnel got involved in the VRS actions against their will. The first and most important one showed UNPROFOR's vulnerability: on 26 May the VRS took 145 UN observers and UN soldiers hostage. During the following days the number of hostages increased. Now famous TV images showed UN personnel chained to strategic objects, in many cases tied to bridges and lampposts. The VRS said to have locked up 168 peacekeepers at possible targets for an air strike to make sure the next air strike would not be aimed at those. General Mladic informed general Smith that their lives would be at risk if the air strikes were to continue. A second example of the direct involvement of UNPROFOR personnel happened at Sarajevo: there the French retook the Vrbanja bridge (see below) on French initiative, that had earlier been taken by the VRS. A third example is that on 28 May the VRS in Gorazde fired at the British compound and took 33 men prisoner of the personnel of the observation posts (OPs). The following section describes the direct consequences of these actions for UNPROFOR.

The VRS didn't stop at that: also on 28 May the Bosnian Serbs cut off the gas, water and electricity supply to Sarajevo. From the Weapon Collection Points they had surrounded the VRS took back two hundred mortars and artillery pieces.

After the VRS had taken UN personnel hostage, it was relatively quiet in Sarajevo, but that had been achieved at a high price and it had left UNPROFOR in complete isolation. The situation increased the problems with sending supplies to the eastern enclaves, because now the Bosnian Serbs didn't feel at all like letting convoys pass that were heading for the UN personnel in those eastern enclaves. The capacity of the UN to act effectively in Bosnia had badly been affected. The same applied for the intended impartiality of the UN and the necessary consent from the warring factions for the UN presence: the warring factions considered UNPROFOR party to the conflict.

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[1] For the description of the events in May in this section in a general sense use has been made of the list of events as stated in the report by Boutros-Ghali. The conclusions in his report will be discussed in section 11.

[2] CRST. Remark by General Sead Delic, see Minutes of Meeting with Brig Delic/Comd 2 Corps on 07/0695. Compiled by MA/Comd Sec NE Maj Valved.

[3] NIOD, Coll Brantz. Commander Sector North East (Brigadier General Hagrup Haukland) to Major General Rupert Smith, 28/05/95. UNMOs later expressed their suspicion that the shellings then and in later weeks on the western part of city were not random, but that these were aimed at the TTU factory of which it was suspected that it was an ammunition factory. Remarkably, the shell was Soviet-made and it was equipped with an American percussion fuse. (CRST.UNMO HQ Sector NE to UNMO BHC, 111000B Jun 95).

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Part III

The fall of Srebrenica

Chapter 1

The military and political situation in spring 1995

11. Direct consequences of the air strikes for UNPROFOR

The air strikes on 25 and 26 May in Pale were not isolated events. Earlier in spring it had already become clear what the pattern was at the use of air power (air strikes or Close Air Support): Force Commander Janvier wanted to observe extreme restraint because of the safety of the troops on the ground. That attitude in itself was not strange, because each time air power was used against the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS quickly responded with major consequences for UNPROFOR: hostages were taken, the supply route to the Safe Areas was closed, airplanes supplying relief-aid to Sarajevo were fired at, UNMOs and VN personnel at isolated observation posts were taken hostage and UNPROFOR was ignored. The general UNPROFOR policy as regards the use of air power, and the decision-making process that led to the air strikes at Pale, will be discussed in the next Chapter, 'Air Power: Close Air Support and air strikes'. Here the account continues with consequences the air strikes on 25 and 26 May had for UNPROFOR of which the most important one was, as stated earlier, that the Bosnian Serbs were taking hostages because UNPROFOR would have chosen sides.[1] In addition, isolated UN units were surrounded by the VRS, and UNPROFOR had been robbed of their freedom of movement in Bosnian-Serb territory.[2]

On 29 May general Smith also concluded that the objective of the air strikes had not been achieved. This objective had been to revitalize the regime of the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones and Weapon Collection Points that had gradually been broken down. On the contrary, the VRS had taken possession of large numbers of arms and equipment from the Weapon Collection Points. The Bosnian government did cooperate as long as it was to their advantage, but could also be forced to give up the regime of the Heavy Weapon Exclusion Zones or Weapon Collection Points.

The VRS had a hold on UNPROFOR, Smith concluded: still (on 29 May) 347 UN soldiers were being held hostage, isolated UN units were surrounded by the VRS, and the VRS had robbed UNPROFOR of their freedom of movement. The UN personnel in the enclaves was vulnerable and, as Smith put it, 'more part of the problem than the solution'. UNPROFOR had lost the consent of the Bosnian Serbs for their presence and were no longer seen as peacekeeper, certainly not since UNPROFOR was holding four VRS soldiers prisoners of war. UNPROFOR could hardly be called impartial anymore and they were not far from the point that in fact they were allies of the Bosnian Muslims. [3]

After the air strikes on Pale on 25 and 26 May 1995 a completely new situation developed. As general Smith put it in a discussion with the Bosnian vice-president E. Ganic on the evening of 24 May: the air strikes would change the situation to such an extent that 'much of the debate currently going on in New York would become academic'. [4] New York did not know that the air strikes were coming: On 24 May Janvier held his speeches before the Security Council and the troop contributing nations, and he said he was aware of the importance of air strikes, but he gave no indication whatsoever that he was actually going to use them.[5] Directly after the first air strike the UN were in an uproar.

Bosnia-Hercegovina Command in Sarajevo had estimated that the air strike would cause escalation. The intelligence staff (in military terms: the G-2) in Sarajevo expected that an air strike would mainly evoke a strong response because the Bosnian Serbs had been hit so close to home.

Karadzic might see it as proof that he was right to continue to fight; he would resist Milosevic's pressure to start negotiations. UN personnel could be taken hostage, as Karadzic had threatened to do. The VRS might even take up arms against UNPROFOR. In particular it was predictable that as countermeasure for the enclaves the VRS would attack there, hold UN personnel and stop further convoys. The ABiH would wait and see which way the wind was blowing and wait for the response from the Bosnian Serbs, while at the same time they would try to increase the tension and destabilize the situation by provoking the Bosnian Serbs. Sarajevo and also Gorazde were obvious targets for such actions. They were playing high-stakes poker and it wasn't clear what card the Bosnian Serbs would be playing. 'They are very good poker players and never show their cards until they have to'. [6]

The first reactions by the Bosnian Serbs to the air strikes came in words and didn't promise much good. Mladic accused Smith of 'crazy and unreasonable' use of the instrument of air strikes. He wondered whether Smith was trying to frighten him. Mladic expected Smith to act as a reasonably thinking human being: he, Mladic, had never provoked or attacked the UN, but now it had been Smith who had attacked him. Smith should have thought of his soldiers and the consequences of 'such unreasonable and unthinking decisions'. Mladic expected apologies rather than threats. [7] Other reactions from the Bosnian Serbs were just as furious. The advisor and spokesman of Karadzic, Jovan Zametica, reeled off a litany of protests against the UN. He said that from now on the UN could only be considered an enemy, because the UN had chosen the side of his enemies. The international community tried to use force to induce the Serbs to make concessions, but that wouldn't work. Already that community didn't understand much of the Serb cause and the Serb rights. The Bosnian Serbs were prepared to negotiate about peace tomorrow, but only when the Bosnian-Serb interests were taken into account and the Bosnian Serbs were not seen as just an autonomous minority in Bosnia. [8] Karadzic himself declared that because of the air strikes, the Republika Srpska considered the UN an enemy and he revoked all arrangements made earlier with the UN. UN resolutions would no longer be respected. Momcilo Krajisnik, Parliament Chairman of the Republika Srpska, also said that the UN had given up their neutral position and should from now be considered the enemy. After what the UN had failed to do, they did not have the right to attack the Bosnian Serbs. That is because Krajisnik stated that the Safe Areas were not at all safe, but that they were used as base of operations for attacks by the Bosnian Muslims. There were armed troops instead of civilians under protection. The ABiH had carried out attacks from Srebrenica, Zepa as well as Gorazde. [9]

After these threatening words against the UN, the Bosnian Serbs suited their actions to the word: large numbers of UN personnel were taken hostage. That plunged the UN into a crisis. The special representative of the UN secretary-general, Akashi, appealed to Karadzic to release the hostages. The way in which they were exhibited in images that went all over the world, with UN personnel chained to objects, had not done much good to Karadzic's reputation. Harming the hostages would only cause pressure from the international community for further military action, air strikes included, 'that will be impossible to resist'. [10]

However, Akashi was bluffing for in reality the actions against the Bosnian Serbs didn't become stricter after 25 and 26 May. It looked more like the reverse; the careful powers were gaining influence again. Akashi was only too aware of the limitations the hostages would cause for the political and military activities of UNPROFOR. [11] 'The need not to worsen the security situation in UNPROFOR is paramount.' Akashi reported to New York that he had instructed general Smith that implementation of the mandate was second to the safety of the UN personnel. Smith had to take measures to prevent the VRS from taking even more personnel hostage. That could mean a reduction of UNPROFOR's presence and activities. [12] That had proved Smith right that the discussion so far in New York suddenly seemed very academic, now that Akashi had also worded his vision of the mandate.

More in general most people within UNPROFOR thought that the air strikes had fallen short of expectations. That was for instance concluded by Akashi's substitute in Sarajevo, Deyan Mihov. The objective had been to make the VRS comply with the agreement of February 1994 on heavy weapons, and to achieve stabilization of the situation around Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia. Because that objective had not been achieved, and to get the hostages released, Mihov wanted to stop the air strikes. In his opinion it looked like the Bosnian Serbs were following a preconceived plan. Their objective

seemed to cause disputes between UN and NATO, as well as within the Security Council, in the Contact Group and among the troop contributing nations.[13] Whether or not that was the objective of the Bosnian Serbs, they succeeded rather nicely: the consequence of the air strikes of 25 and 26 May was that for the time being UNPROFOR gave up further air strikes.

New visions of the national governments

The development of the hostage situation had really shaken the troop contributing nations, in particular the United Kingdom and France. For instance, on 2 June the French observers were transported to safer areas as a matter of precaution. The situation in Bosnia was getting highly gruesome for the intervening soldiers too.

The Americans had also had a fright, although they had no ground troops in Bosnia. They got more involved after an American F-16 was shot down near Banja Luka on 2 June.[14] There were American individuals in Bosnia, but only in the civil and military staffs. That also appeared on 29 May when messages came about hostage-takings of American observers of the ICFY mission who were monitoring the border between Yugoslavia and Bosnia. These observers were then hastily withdrawn.

At a high level in the United States now discussions started on how to continue. On 27 May safety advisor Lake and chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-staff, general Shalikashvili, had a discussion about the subject. Lake thought that UNPROFOR 'should stay on course and decide what to do next'. Shalikashvili was instructed by him: 'Be prepared to discuss redeployment and emergency extractions.' General Smith had already warned for the possibility that the troops would have to be withdrawn.

Military precautions were taken for an operation to withdraw UNPROFOR. The American so-called Rapid Response Option (the Marine Expeditionary Unit or MEU) in the Mediterranean was activated, as well as a third part of an American airborne division in Italy, the availability of which had been kept silent. That activation merely involved an increase of their readiness and did not yet mean deployment.

Washington also took political precautions: Lake talked to American Congress members about moving the Marine Expeditionary Unit from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic Sea. However, as yet their actual deployment was not discussed. The American Minister of Defence, Perry, had a meeting with the British and German Ministers of Defence, Rifkind and Rühle. Perry's message was: 'no air strikes, only Close Air Support'. This response mainly seemed inspired by the spur of the moment; there are no further indications that the policy of the United States did not remain that the Bosnian Serbs had to be closed down on through air strikes. The American army also got permission to make plans to rescue the hostages. The American government did not rule out commando actions to free hostages.

The hostage crisis made achieving international agreement even more difficult than it already was. For instance the Security Council could not reach agreement on a Presidential Statement to denunciate the violence, and the North Atlantic Council, called in emergency session, did not get beyond demanding that the shooting at the Safe Areas had to be stopped and that the hostages should unconditionally be released. Even the Russians spoke of barbarism.

Soon it also appeared that the hostage crisis got a place of its own in the discussions between the Americans and the troop contributing nations. For instance, Perry had spoken to the new French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hervé de Charette, and it had appeared to him that the hostage situation had been reason for the separate countries to have a much greater interest in Bosnia because of their hostages than before.

The same applied for the British: the British Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Peter Inge, had already said that so far the British had not had a 'vital interest' in Bosnia, but that now they did. British troops with heavy weapons (artillery) landed in Split.[15]

The French and American response to the hostage crisis

The hostage crisis had roused the emotions, not in the least in France: the strategic Vrbanja bridge near Sarajevo had been stormed and taken on 27 May by Bosnian Serbs, dressed as French UN soldiers. Two French soldiers were killed. That same morning this bridge was retaken; this recapture took place, without Smith knowing anything about it, on personal instructions of the French President, Chirac. He gave orders to the French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, and he transferred them to the also French general Gobilliard in Sarajevo, who set up the recapture operation. The argument for this French get-together was that the French government reserved the right to take Command and Control in case of an emergency and to issue direct instructions to French units under international command.[16]

Despite earlier tirades by telephone, the generals Smith and Mladic remained in touch with each other on subjects like this. On 28 May they discussed the situation that had developed. The recapture had killed three VRS soldiers and four were taken prisoner of war. It caused the bizarre situation that a peacekeeping force took prisoners of war, although they were not allowed to be called like that. Then VRS soldiers threatened to kill the French UN soldiers that had been taken hostage if these four Serbs were not released. Smith did not directly reply to that to Mladic; Mladic told Smith that he had information that these four Serbs had been handed over to the ABiH (which was not true). Mladic called the treatment of the French UN soldiers taken hostage humane and correct - apart from an isolated case -. He did admit that some French UN soldiers were at key locations that could be target of NATO actions, including Mladic' own headquarters. In addition Mladic told Smith that he hoped that Smith would act in accordance with the UN mandate and would not respond to the wishes of the Bosnian government. Smith should make it clear once more to the Bosnian Vice-President Ganic, according to Mladic.[17] The VRS soldiers were not released until after mid-June also the UNPROFOR hostages had been released.

The French directly took the position that the French and not the UN should liberate the French hostages. In addition to the solo action at the Vrbanja bridge, the French were considering to set up another national operation for that purpose; the French aircraft carrier Foch sailed with special units on board. The French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, told his American counterpart Shalikashvili that neither the UN nor UNPROFOR were the right intermediaries to do business with the Serbs now that there were hostages. The UN in Zagreb could not handle the crisis. Countries would want to solve the hostage problem each in their own way. The chairman of the Military Committee of NATO, Sir Richard Vincent, even received telephone calls from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hervé de Charette, who was unhappy because there was no multinational involvement.[18]

The new French president, Chirac, also responded to the hostage crisis. After the indignation on the hostage-takings, it was mainly France that tried to realize new initiatives. Chirac took the lead in new diplomatic offensives and the French chairmanship of the EU that ended by the end of June caused a diplomatic final sprint. An important French initiative was the proposal to set up a Rapid Reaction Force (for its formation see section 13). On top of that the French intended to follow up this military initiative with political action. France called for an international conference and asked the two joint chairmen of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia, Stoltenberg and Bildt, to leave for The Balkans as soon as possible for preparatory talks, so there could be results in time to discuss those at the European summit in Cannes on 26 and 27 June.[19]

The Americans on the other hand wanted to prevent each country from steering its own course, for that would result in chaos. That's why Perry thought it necessary to have NATO solve the hostage crisis, by a group of international planners. Otherwise the Americans seemed to have written off the UN: In Perry's opinion the entire peace operation had to be transferred to NATO. Finally he emphasized the vital interests of a new negotiator for the Contact Group; if no political agreement could be reached, everyone would be up a blind alley.

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Part III

The fall of Srebrenica

Chapter 1

The military and political situation in spring 1995

16. The strategy of the Bosnian Muslims in the fighting

So far in this Chapter a lot of attention has been paid to the role the Bosnian Serbs played in frustrating the UNPROFOR mandate. Clearly the army of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS, constituted a major problem for UNPROFOR, because this VRS gradually started to see and treat UNPROFOR as their opponent. The position of the army of the Bosnian Muslims, the ABiH, was materially different. The ABiH did not really see UNPROFOR as their enemy, but increasingly expected UNPROFOR to stand up for the Bosnian Muslims as the 'underdog' in the conflict. With that attitude the Bosnian Muslims – not only the ABiH soldiers but also the Bosnian government – considerably complicated the position of UNPROFOR. In the meantime the warring factions also had their own strategy in the struggle between them, in many cases over the heads of UNPROFOR. This section will discuss the strategy observed by the Bosnian Muslims.

In his memoirs, EU negotiator Lord Owen analyses the relation between the UN troops and the Bosnian Muslims. In his opinion that relation was characterized by the fact that the UN soldiers had trouble understanding that disorder and desalinization were an essential element of the strategy of the Bosnian Muslims. That was at odds with the military mind of the UN soldiers, used to working in a relatively well-ordered military organization, who had to find order in the midst of the Bosnian chaos. That impression must have been even stronger because in the conflict the Bosnian Serbs were the ones who had an interest in maintaining the status quo, while the Bosnian Muslims were the ones who refused to except the truce lines and tried to change them by violating agreements and provoking incidents. Consequently, the Bosnian Muslims were responsible for most of the truce violations and, in the opinion of Owen, they were the main threat to the Safe Areas: from there they could execute their operations, and even under protection of the UN. The Bosnian Muslims did take care not to provoke so far that they endangered the efforts of UNHCR.[1]

The UN headquarters in Zagreb had also concluded that the Bosnian Muslims continually misused the Safe Areas to maintain their Armed forces, while in some cases it looked as if they intended to provoke shelling by the Bosnian Serbs. Zagreb referred to the example of Tuzla, where the ABiH regularly fired artillery deployed in the city, which in turn in provoked retaliation by the VRS, in many cases targeted at the headquarters of the 2nd ABiH Corps, located in the centre of the city. As far as the eastern enclaves were concerned, expectations of the UN headquarters were that the ABiH would continue their outbreak from the Safe Areas but that it was unlikely that this would happen at a large scale.[2]

The Bosnian government did not make it easier for UNPROFOR to get a good idea about the intentions of the Bosnian Muslims. Their political and military strategy were not always easy to follow, and sometimes of a varying nature. The Bosnian president, Izetbegovic, kept aloof in the negotiations; the discussions were between the other members of the Bosnian government. In addition to the impenetrability of the position of the Bosnian government, there also was the problem that people not always spoke with one mouth. For instance the Bosnian vice-president, Ganic, had wanted to use the month of April 1995 to come to a political arrangement of the conflict rather than just trying to achieve a continuation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. He thought that the international community had wasted the period of the Cessation of Hostilities, and had only resumed matters when it ended.[3]

However, other members of the Bosnian government pointed out that a quick solution of the conflict was exactly what the Bosnian Serbs wanted. Indeed the Bosnian Serbs had repeatedly expressed the wish to put a direct and final end to the war, followed by negotiations. The *communis opinio* in the Bosnian government was that it was a 'public relations trap', worded as follows by the Bosnian Prime Minister Siladjic: 'soon we will be called aggressors in our own country.' [4]

This Siladjic, the Bosnian Prime Minister, wanted to find a way out of the deadlock in quite a different way than Vice-President Ganic. He interpreted the position of the Bosnian Muslims towards the Bosnian Serbs as follows: 'we are not strong enough to win and they are not strong enough to defeat us'. His strategy was aimed at forcing the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan. Siladjic had asked the Contact Group to propose to Milosevic to acknowledge Bosnia with a view of Milosevic acknowledging the Republika Srpska as a part of Bosnia; while on the contrary the ideal of the Bosnian Serbs was to affiliate with Serbia. In this way Siladjic tried to force a wedge between Milosevic and Karadzic. The next step would be that the Contact Group plan would have to be formally accepted by the Security Council. Accordingly, at the same time Siladjic wanted that the international community would give the Bosnian Muslims guarantees towards the Bosnian Serbs. [5] If the Bosnian Serbs refused to accept the Contact Group plan, as they had done earlier, the Bosnian Muslims could blame the Bosnian Serbs for obstructing the peace process.

The position of the Bosnian government was even more complicated because they were not only speaking with several voices, but on top of that those voices expressed changing ideas. A clear example of that occurred late April as regards Siladjic, the Bosnian Prime Minister. He repeated what he said earlier, that the ABiH would not take the initiative for offensive military operations. However, at odds with that was that he added that a continuation of the cease-fire was not in the interest of the Bosnian government and, consequently, not in the interest of the Bosnian Muslims. Siladjic accused the Bosnian Serbs of wanting to maintain the status quo through a 'creeping legalization of what they took by genocide'. If the Bosnian Serbs wanted peace, they had to pay attention to the worries of the Bosnian government about the shellings by the VRS of the Safe Areas, Siladjic said. According to him the Bosnian Serbs were planning an intensification of the shellings of the Safe Areas. Another sign that the Bosnian Muslims wanted to take up arms again, was that Siladjic was breathing new life into the call to lift the arms embargo, suspended by the Bosnian President Izetbegovic in November 1994.

A major theme in the strategy of the Bosnian government, no matter with which voice they were speaking, was that pressure was exerted on UNPROFOR to resume the humanitarian relief to the enclaves. Prime Minister Siladjic and the minister without portfolio charged with UN matters, Muratovic, were trying to get an unambiguous statement by Akashi and Smith that UNPROFOR was prepared to adopt a forceful interpretation of the mandate, in particular with regard to humanitarian relief. For quite some time Akashi had already been under pressure from the these two Bosnians to adopt a more forceful attitude, or to clearly say that UNPROFOR was not prepared to do so. Akashi did not do either, because he wanted to keep operating carefully as well as to avoid underlining the failure of UNPROFOR. According to the Bosnian Muslims the mandate offered scope for more forceful action against the Bosnian Serbs for frustrating the convoys, and UNPROFOR could do more. Siladjic also tried to put pressure on general Smith to make him use force to ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief. However, Smith replied that he could not go beyond self-defence and did not willfully want to endanger convoys. [6] As stated earlier, Smith really was prepared to try the experiment to send out a convoy without permission from the Bosnian Serbs, but telling that to Siladjic might give the latter false hope.

Akashi tried to derive a view on the Bosnian strategy from conversations with the Bosnian Muslims. That was successful to the extent that it became clear that the Bosnian Muslims wanted to benefit by the factor time and also by exerting international pressure to exploit their 'underdog' position. If UNPROFOR were to remain neutral, according to the mandate, in Akashi's analysis that would probably lead to a Bosnian campaign aimed at the UN, the United States, some European countries, and some Islamic countries to exert pressure to pursue a policy of punishing the Bosnian Serbs. Akashi thought it likely that the Bosnian government would want to use the factor time by considerably stepping up hostilities during the months after the end of the Cessation of Hostilities

Agreement: the ABiH would violate truce lines and provoke incidents to keep the VRS busy. In those circumstances the UN would come under great pressure to ensure the humanitarian relief to the enclaves and to deter a VRS attack. In the meantime the Bosnian government would be worrying about the expected continued refusal by the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan; after all, Karadzic had stated that he considered the West the enemy of the Bosnian Serbs and that he did not want to have anything to do with the Contact Group. That would also lead to international pressure to relieve the Bosnian position. More in general the Bosnian government would remain trying to brand the Bosnian Serbs as the aggressors responsible for continuation of the war. The Bosnian government would also want to revitalize the battle against the arms embargo with help from the allies and the Republicans in the American Congress, still according to Akashi.[7]

The presence of UNPROFOR in the eastern enclaves also became subject of discussion within the Bosnian government. The Bosnian Permanent Representative at the UN, Sacirbey, said that his government set great store by continued presence of UN troops in the Safe Areas. The Bosnian government should want to agree to a demilitarization of Sarajevo – a crucial city to the VRS and to the ABiH -, provided that it would not only apply for the areas under Bosnian control, but also for the areas under Serb control, and that UNPROFOR would be defending the area. The Bosnian government did not want demilitarization for Safe Areas such as Tuzla and Gorazde, because important military installations were located there.[8] Shortly after that Sacirbey, by then Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that the Bosnian government could agree to withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves, provided that it would be compensated by a UN commitment to the effect that they would use air power to deter the Bosnian Serbs, would protect the population and, if necessary, arrange food airdrops. This was possible, according to Sacirbey, because gradually the ABiH were capable of defending the enclaves on the ground. UNPROFOR could then concentrate on traditional peacekeeping in Central Bosnia, and keeping open a secure corridor to Sarajevo - an old wish of the Bosnian Muslims.[9] However, there were also reports that Sacirbey as minister had violently criticized Boutros-Ghali who had proposed withdrawal by UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves. Sacirbey said he feared that the population would no longer be protected in that case. Vice-President Ganic also said that he would not allow UNPROFOR to leave the Safe Areas.[10] Minister Muratovic in his turn said that the Bosnian government supported changes in the mandate. He preferred a smaller UNPROFOR with a limited mandate, that would offer options for NATO actions. With that Muratovic also seemed to suggest that UNPROFOR could leave the eastern enclaves. Lifting the arms embargo, or a larger UNPROFOR that did have the capacity to enforce peace, were other options for Muratovic. [11]

Lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims, as discussed before, came on the agenda in June. That happened in connection with the loss of trust in UNPROFOR on the part of the Bosnian government. Then Minister Sacirbey of Foreign Affairs said that his government had to choose between fighting to lift the arms embargo or sticking to UNPROFOR, and Sacirbey now decided to choose the first option. He noted a continuous erosion in the implementation of the Security Council resolutions and he was harassing its chairman with letters expressing his worries. He wanted consultation to achieve implementation of relevant resolutions. In fact the only still had confidence in UNPROFOR if their mission was reinforced with heavy artillery through the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force to implement the Security Council resolutions, but Sacirbey was cynical about its arrival: 'the first time it uses force will be the last'. Only if the Rapid Reaction Force would succeed in gaining access to the enclaves and Sarajevo, its arrival was justified, said Sacirbey. Because the Bosnian government did not believe in it, according to Sacirbey they were close to the point when they would ask UNPROFOR to leave the country because it no longer could play a useful role.[12] Minister Muratovic spread the same message, but with a tougher and more disdainful tone. He said that the Bosnian government disapproved of all relations with the Bosnian Serbs, including people in contact with them, as was the case with UNPROFOR at all levels at that moment.[13] Muratovic also said that he no longer placed trust in Akashi en Janvier. Their decisions weakened the operations in Bosnia and raised the question what was the use of 20,000 troops in Bosnia. Only Smith still had his trust.[14]

Recommencement of the hostilities around Sarajevo

What UNPROFOR had been expecting for a long time, happened on 16 June: the battle of Sarajevo broke out again. That day the ABiH had started a major offensive from Sarajevo. The intention was to connect the city with the area of the Muslim-Croat Federation north and west of the city. From Central Bosnia the ABiH simultaneously attacked the VRS in the back. This outbreak attempt was in violation of the Security Council resolution 913 of 1994, that prohibited 'provocative action (...) in and around Safe Areas', but there was little UNPROFOR could do about it. Initially the offensive seemed to yield successes.[15] The ABiH managed to block two supply routes of the VRS, which caused counter-attacks from the VRS. [16]

Akashi's staff in Zagreb analysed what the various objectives of the ABiH with this attack were. According to Akashi this time the objective of the offensive was not specifically military, but mainly political and diplomatic: it put pressure on the VRS, that already was experiencing political and military problems: in a political sense because they got isolated from the international community, in a military sense because they had to save their strength as long as the problems with their own supplying continued. The offensive would also put pressure on the regime in Belgrade, to make it clear that this regime was making common cause with the Bosnian Serbs. In addition, the offensive would boost the morale of the Muslim population, and generate support for the SDA, the leading nationalist party of President Izetbegovic. That way the ABiH wanted to show that they were doing what the international community failed to do. Moreover, the objective of the offensive was to gain international sympathy for the cause of the Bosnian Muslims: with the Bosnian Muslims as underdog much attention of the international press, more than to the ABiH attack itself, would go to the responses by the Bosnian Serbs, such as the shelling of Sarajevo. That in turn could contribute to pressure on the international community and to lifting the arms embargo. President Izetbegovic had already said: 'In our situation we have no obligation to look at what the world is thinking, the world that has done nothing for Sarajevo.' Reacting against the indifference of the international community was possible without the Bosnian Muslims paying a political price. Finally the offensive could demonstrate that the military alliance between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats was fruitful. Indeed there seemed to be some coordination with the army of the Bosnian Croats in the form of artillery support around Kiseljak and in the Lasva valley. That forced the Bosnian Serbs to fight on several fronts at the same time, by which both the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Croats benefited: it could increase the Croatian pressure on the Serbs in the Knin. In the meantime the UN were fully powerless.[17]

That way UNPROFOR had to face increasing problems, Akashi said. The offensive started by the ABiH around Sarajevo was only one of those. That offensive had resulted in an increasing use of heavy weapons on both sides. The Rapid Reaction Force could not respond adequately, because it could not be operational until 15 July. The VRS were not only firing at military targets in their offensive, but also at civil targets to make the ABiH pay a price for the shellings from the Safe Area Sarajevo. That had to do with the highly cynical strategy of the ABiH: civil targets are we used a shield for military targets. The ABiH had deployed the weapons they used to fire at the VRS near civilian targets, including the Sarajevo hospital.[18] If the VRS in their counteroffensive should hit the hospital, the Bosnian Muslims could exploit that in the media and keep on exerting pressure internationally.

The main players in the battle of the ABiH: Delic & Delic

The main executors in the strategy of the ABiH were army Commander Rasim Delic and the Commander of the so-called 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla, Sead Delic (not related to each other). The area of responsibility area of this 2nd Corps comprised all of north-eastern Bosnia, including Srebrenica and Zepa. Because they were the most important soldiers of the ABiH in this connection, their backgrounds and activities in the battle deserve attention here.

First of all it should be noted that in the political-strategic game they did not seem to play a very important role. The name of Rasim Delic as ABiH Commander is found in UN documents not nearly as often as that of his Bosnian-Serb counterpart Mladic; the name of Sead Delic is hardly mentioned at all. That can partly be explained by the fact that Delic and Delic were staying closer to the line of their political party, the SDA, while Mladic determined his course much more

independently from Karadzic, thus offering him the opportunity to develop himself as leader of the Republika Srpska. However, this did not mean that Rasim and Sead Delic and Delic had no influence on the later events around Srebrenica: both had a role in giving orders for military outbreaks of the ABiH from the enclave, and as regards the position of Oric as military Commander in Srebrenica.

The few times that 2nd Corps Commander Sead Delic was mentioned in UN documents, it was not in a very positive sense: 'he was selected by the SDA for his dedication and loyalty to the party rather than for his tactical ability'.^[19] Sead Delic was also known as a person who took all decisions by himself and did not consult his staff. He had attended the Military Academy where he had been trained as a scout. At the beginning of the war he was Major and Commander of a reconnaissance unit and as Bosnian Muslim he then still fought with the Yugoslav army, the JNA, in Croatia. Consequently, the Croats would consider him a war criminal, but he escaped from Croatia and returned to Bosnian Tuzla by way of Hungary and Serbia.^[20]

Sead Delic came under attack due to a failed offensive carried out by the 2nd Corps in March 1995 against the Stolice communication tower in the Majeveca hills. The ABiH lost an estimated one thousand men, the hospital in Tuzla was temporarily closed to civilians. In front of Delic's headquarters demonstrations were held by soldiers who had returned from the battle.^[21] Despite the fact that Sead Delic was severely criticized for the large number of casualties in the attempts to conquer the Majeveca hills and the Ozren mountains, he was officially congratulated on his military successes. The latter was presented during a press conference that seemed to be intended to boost the image of his political party, the SDA.^[22]

In the Yugoslav army Rasim Delic had been a contemporary of Mladic. It was said that with regard to quality Mladic was at the top of his year and Delic at the bottom. Nevertheless Rasim Delic had been one of the few Bosnian Muslims who had risen to the higher ranks within the JNA. He took part in the fighting of the JNA against Croatian Vukovar in 1991, but he left the JNA before the war broke out in Bosnia in 1992. That year he joined the SDA, the party of Izetbegovic. His star rose during the fighting against the army of the Bosnian Croats in 1993-1994. After his appointment as army Commander of the ABiH, within the more hard-line nationalist branch of the SDA Rasim Delic closely worked together with Vice-Presidents Ganic and the deputy Minister of Defence Hasan Cengic, architect of substantial arms deliveries to the Bosnian Muslims by the Islamic countries. Rasim Delic had a major role in transforming the ABiH from undisciplined territorial units and volunteers into a regular army.^[23]

General Rose, Smith's predecessor, got the impression that ABiH Commander Rasim Delic did not like to negotiate personally with Mladic. He sometimes refused to do that and seemed to be physically afraid of Mladic. Rasim Delic knew that at a certain moment during a meeting he would have to give way to Mladic. Mladic managed to intimidate him. When Rasim Delic refused to meet Mladic in person, sometimes for Mladic that in turn was reason to refuse to talk with the ABiH, unless it was with Rasim Delic himself. In fact they would only have shaken hands once, after concluding the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in December 1994. According to Rose a difference between the highest army command of the ABiH and of the VRS that Delic would rarely stick to his words and that in that sense Mladic was the opposite of Rasim Delic. The latter opinion dates back to Rose's time as Commander of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, that ended early 1995.

General Rose regarded Rasim Delic as 'not a bright officer'. According to Rose, to blame for that was the fact that Rasim Delic followed instructions from the politicians in Sarajevo, and they subsequently determined what happened to the ABiH. Rasim Delic himself was in favour of an all-out war; he considered this the only way to come to a just solution. In many cases he started an offensive that invariably seemed to end in defeat...

[1] Owen, *Odyssey*, p. 199-200.

[2] UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 81304, File 3300-6, Vol. 4, 1 Apr-12 Jul 95. Operations BH. Interoffice Memorandum Military Information Branch, G2 to COS, 18/03/95.

[3] UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 20/03/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-441.

[4] UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 21/04/95, No. UNPROFOR Z-637.

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Part III

The fall of Srebrenica

Chapter 1

The military and political situation in spring 1995

17. The strategy of the Bosnian Muslims in the fighting

Even before the air strikes at Pale on 25 and 26 May, the intelligence staff of UNPROFOR in Zagreb determined what the main objective of the VRS was: forcing the Bosnian Muslims to the negotiating table. The UN was the instrument to realize that. At the same time the Bosnian Serbs saw the UN as an obstacle to victory and they thought that the presence of the UN in Bosnia delayed its realization. Since the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had imposed the embargo against the Bosnian Serbs in August 1994, the factor time had become ever more important and pressing for the VRS. Yet the advantages of the UN presence seemed to compensate its drawbacks from the perspective of the Bosnian Serbs: as long as the UN remained present, the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims would also remain in force and it also restrained too open arms deliveries by Islamic countries. Moreover, in the political isolation of the Bosnian Serbs, the UN gradually was the only organization that confirmed the more or less independent status of the Republika Srpska.[1] Of course also the Bosnian-Serb forces, the VRS, had their strategy in the struggle against the Bosnian Muslims – again over the heads of UNPROFOR.

The fact that the Bosnian Serbs were dissatisfied about the way they were treated by the UN, has already been discussed in detail above. They kept complaining that their rights were not recognized and that UNPROFOR was damaging the Bosnian-Serb interests. Karadzic said to be under pressure from population and Parliament to end the not so profitable relation with UNPROFOR. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had been violated so often that in the end it no longer existed. Consequently, the Bosnian Serbs were not prepared to discuss a new cease-fire, but only a final end to the war. Karadzic pleaded for an immediate end to the war and a flexible attitude by parties to come to a territorial arrangement. It has already been discussed at the strategy of the Bosnian Muslims that this was exactly what the Bosnian Muslims did not want because the factor time was to their advantage. Akashi got the impression that in the end the Bosnian Serbs saw resumption of the fighting inevitable and resigned themselves to that.[2] The big question was what strategy the Bosnian Serbs were going to follow; UNPROFOR, the ABiH and Western intelligence departments were trying to find the answer. However, that did not mean there was much insight into their political and military intentions.

The Bosnian-Serb strategy according to UNPROFOR

Early July 1995 an analysis drawn up by the UN in Zagreb of the 'Serb Strategic Culture' was published. This analysis finished with the often-heard idea that the Bosnian Serbs possessed a unique culture, mainly based on historic experiences, which caused them to act irrationally and that their acts could best be understood through a psychological-cultural approach.

The analysis in Zagreb was that mainly political and military factors determined the behaviour of the Bosnian Serbs and their reactions on the battlefield. Moreover, the Bosnian-Serb strategic and political assessment of the situation was well-developed. The rational dimensions of the strategy should not be underestimated by paying too much attention to historic and cultural factors, even though it was clear that those were often referred to in a rhetorical sense. The Bosnian Serbs understood the Western mind better than the West understood the Bosnian-Serb mind. Since the outbreak of the war the West had consistently underestimated the military capabilities of the Bosnian Serbs. There were

good reasons to assume that the behaviour of the Bosnian Serbs was the result of calculation. Already at the start of the war Yugoslav military experts had come to the conclusion that the risk of a direct Western military intervention was negligible, because no Western interests were involved and it was not wise for the West to send troops at high costs and run political and military risks.

The Bosnian Serbs also had a keen eye for their own vital interests in the struggle against the Bosnian Muslims. Only twenty percent of the infrastructure and the main economic objects was in the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. Karadzic stated that, according to the Contact Group plan, the Muslim-Croat Federation would get 51% of the Bosnian territory, but that subsequently the Bosnian Croats and the Bosnian Muslims would have 76% of the power plants, 83% of the railroads, and 84% of the road network.

In Zagreb they also analysed that to a high degree both Karadzic and Mladic depended on local political and military leaders. The position of the Bosnian Serbs deteriorated and they saw themselves surrounded by enemies. The activities of the Hague Tribunal and the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force invoked a mixture of fear and aggression. In these circumstances it was to be expected that the leadership would become more adventurous and dangerous. That seemed to apply to Mladic to a greater extent than to Karadzic, because military aspects became increasingly important so the influence of Mladic gained weight, while also the international strategy to isolate Karadzic began to have effect.

According to this analysis in a military-strategic sense the VRS would remain utterly on the defensive and their possibilities to carry out large-scale offensive operations were limited. That was because the units were hardly mobile due to the fuel shortage so it was difficult to move them from one front to the next.

As a result the morale of the VRS troops was sinking. The announced complete mobilization, including calling back VRS reserves from Serbia, indicated that the Bosnian Serbs were preparing for the worst. The morale of the VRS caved in, discipline was bad and there was a shortage of officers. Already in mid-April Mladic would have made it clear during a meeting with the Parliament of the Republika Srpska that the Bosnian Serbs could no longer count on successes, or on keeping the territory they were holding, and that they were going to suffer losses. On the other hand, the leadership of the Republika Srpska needed military successes to survive. The VRS were aware that time was working to their disadvantage.

In Zagreb the analysis was also that in view of the increasing fighting power of the Bosnian Muslims, the Bosnian Serbs were left only three options: either wait for a decisive attack by the ABiH; or start a pre-emptive offensive to take a number of strategic objects such as airfields and roads; those were strategically important in the event the arms embargo would be lifted; or to choose a more an indirect approach by threatening to shell cities, to turn against UNPROFOR, and to take hostages again. What would happen in all events was that the warring factions would continue to provoke UNPROFOR, and the question was how the UN would respond to that.^[3]

Although much in this analysis sounds plausible, it still should be put into perspective: the actual contents of the strategy pursued by the Bosnian Serbs as regards Eastern Bosnia, was known by neither UNPROFOR, nor the Bosnian Muslims. UNPROFOR's perception of the strategy of the Bosnian Serbs has already been discussed in detail. In this connection the ABiH did not get beyond speculations on the intention of their enemy. Nevertheless it is important to a proper understanding to know what those speculations were.

The Bosnian-Serb strategy according to the ABiH

When considering the strategy of the Bosnian Serbs it was important according to ABiH intelligence officers to include the old plans of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) during the Cold War. Those plans assumed that Yugoslavia would be attacked from outside. In such an event the border between Croatia and Bosnia would form a defence line, and on the right bank of the Drina (in present Serbia) the JNA would redeploy and lead further resistance. However, that right bank of the Drina was not

militarily developed. For that reason it was important to the Serbs to control the area left of the Drina. Moreover, fighting in the Bosnian mountains was not easy; consequently, the best alternative was to fight along the Drina. Disturbing factors in this strategy were Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde.[4] Therefore, the strategic objective of the Serbs would be to take a strip of at least twenty kilometres along the Drina – a strip in which all three eastern enclaves were lying.[5]

The idea that the strategic objective of the Serbs was to take possession of the eastern enclaves, was not entirely speculative. A European intelligence service also held the opinion that pressure had been exerted from Belgrade on the Bosnian Serbs to attack the eastern enclaves, with the objective of obtaining an additional safety zone of some thirty kilometres along the Drina. That would improve the communications between Serbia and the Republika Srpska, and there were economic motives as well, such as securing the hydroelectric installations in the Drina. Cutting off the connection between the Muslim part of Bosnia and the Sandžak in Western Serbia, where many Muslims lived, can be important in this relation.[6]

From the start of the war a central objective of the Bosnian Serbs would have been to deport the Muslim population from Eastern Bosnia, later the eastern enclaves.[7] That was also important for a possible affiliation between the Republika Srpska and Serbia.[8] Conversely, the strategy of the Bosnian government, according to minister Muratovic, aimed at defending the eastern enclaves to preserve the border between Bosnia and Serbia along the Drina, the old historic border.[9] Said European intelligence service rather saw the eastern enclaves as political cards in the game of the Bosnian government, to get help, certainly from the Islamic countries. The eastern enclaves would not have had military-strategic importance for the Bosnian government in Sarajevo and for that reason an exchange of territories had been considered earlier.[10]

The Bosnian-Serb strategy according to a western intelligence service

This analysis by a Western intelligence service contained a rational analysis of the Bosnian-Serb strategy, but its high abstraction level gave it little predictive value. In this analysis the Republika Srpska had taken over much of the range of ideas of the old JNA, as a result of which there was no coordination in the strategy, with all its consequences. That was caused by the fact that in the former Yugoslavia the power of the state was founded on the People's Army, the territorial defence and the (secret) police as civil defence.[11] These three had never been under military pressure before. When it did happen it directly caused major problems. These three cornerstones had never matched properly and they had never exercised together. Neither had there ever been exercises with army mobility, or fighting with fire and troops movements in cooperation with territorial defence. For instance, territorial defence did not exchange information on minefields that had been laid and barricades, with the result that the own Yugoslav units ran into minefields.

In the old Yugoslavia the model of a people's defence would only have worked if a doctrine to that effect had existed and the army had been made mobile. The people's defence had never been exercised, but they did use it locally without control. That was because local party bosses had much influence, much more than people in the West were used to. Local uncontrolled use of the people's defence was also contributed to by the presence of the Ministry of Home Affairs with its own troops and paramilitary units. The reason that so many warlords appeared with all warring factions in the conflict in Bosnia, was that regular military defence did not perform properly and adequately.

In a military-tactical sense units in the former Yugoslavia differed from those in the West. In the West a military operation would develop according to a strategy in which the enemy was attacked at its weak spots, surrounded and then defeated. One of the main reasons this went differently in Bosnia, was that politicians – unlike in the West - had a considerable influence on the military strategy. This sometimes caused illogical military attacks and strategies. Sometimes also special regional solutions were thought out for military problems, for the sake of special economic or political interests. In practice the conflict in Bosnia was usually about dispelling the opponent as well as the population living in the area. The political leaders were less interested in the manner in which that was realized. In

short: the war was fought on the basis of a military philosophy that had never been exercised and was not practicable when Yugoslavia fell apart. Later they did develop military structures, but those were aimed at ethnic cleansing.

This Western intelligence service also noted that there was cooperation between the old Yugoslav army, the JNA (later VJ), and the army of the Bosnian Serbs, the VRS. That cooperation did decline over the course of time and got a more secretive character. Mladic had a special line with Milosevic through the General Staff in Belgrade; JNA chief of staff general Perisic was first of all a soldier, he obeyed orders and was a cooperative man. Unlike Mladic, he did not push himself on the forefront much. Perisic was mainly an executor of orders and completely subservient to Milosevic. Mladic was more of a political general.

After all, it was certain that in the battle the Bosnian Serbs used means coming from Serbia. These means, pursuant to an alliance between VRS and VJ, included that Serb staff officers were stationed in Pale, that VRS officers were trained in Serbia and that VRS officers were paid through Belgrade. There was an JNA liaison regiment in the Bosnian-Serb Han Pijesak. In addition, the VJ provided a lot of strategic support to the VRS: the VJ arranged repairs, spare parts and kept equipment up to date. The VJ also coordinated and arranged road transport of tanks and APCs in the Republika Srpska. Yet means of transport were in very short supply. Sometimes it took the VRS days to get troops somewhere due to lack of vehicles.^[12]

The Bosnian-Serb strategy: Karadzic' vision

For UNPROFOR it remained guessing in the conflict what the Bosnian-Serb strategy with regard to the eastern enclaves specifically meant. They did know that for a number of reasons the Bosnian Serbs would like to lay their hands on the eastern enclaves, but that was quite a different thing than fathoming their specific strategy.

At first sight it seemed that the Bosnian-Serb strategy with regard to the eastern enclaves was based on long-term considerations. According to the Chief General Staff of the VRS, later Minister of Defence of the Republika Srpska, general Manojlo Milovanovic, the idea among the VRS was that in all events the enclaves would remain isolated after the war and that the Muslim population would leave on their own accord, mainly because after war the international relief would slowly come to a stop. The Muslim population would gradually move to the territory of the Muslim-Croat Federation. They would have disappeared within ten to fifteen years.^[13] D.Ludlow, former Private Secretary of Lord Owen, also voiced this vision in retrospect, after the fall of Srebrenica: though the Bosnian Serbs had the ambition to gain control over the banks of the Drina, they would probably have accepted the isolated enclaves such as Srebrenica and Zepa, because the Bosnian Serbs believed that these areas would not appear viable in the long run and the population would leave on their own accord.^[14]

According to VRS general Milovanovic, from a military point of view it had already been possible to press on with the attack on Srebrenica in 1993. But because of the intervention by general Morillon, the fact that Srebrenica was declared a Safe Area, and the pressure from the international community, the leaders of the Republika Srpska in Pale had decided at the time not to press on with the attack on Srebrenica. After that the VRS initially had no other strategy then keeping the Bosnian Muslims inside, though that was difficult to check because they used all kinds of narrow tracks and tunnels. The main reason why the attack did not happen after 1993, according to Milovanovic, was that manpower, ammunition and weapons had been brought into the Safe Area by the Bosnian Muslims, and the weapons had been handed over to UNPROFOR. In the Bosnian-Serb vision that meant the ABiH had not carried out their share of the demilitarization agreement. It was clear that military personnel had stayed behind in the Srebrenica enclave, otherwise the ABiH would not have been able to form new brigades and divisions in the enclaves. All these units operated in the enclaves, and they were the ABiH and attacked the VRS from these Safe Areas. That way the creation of the Safe Areas contributed to a paralyzation of the VRS. The army, until it is clearly seen, had to be concentrated around the enclaves. Srebrenica required continuous deployment of three to four brigades of the VRS,

Sarajevo of twelve brigades and Bihac of an entire corps. That way the enclaves occupied a major part of the available VRS troops, which reduced the offensive force of the VRS.[15]

The military strategy of the Bosnian Serbs developed by anticipating on the ABiH strategy, which Karadzic did as follows from his perspective. His analysis, laid down in his directives of 8 March 1995, on which the following is based, can be considered rather adequate in a military sense, although in his analysis it seemed he rather overestimated the military capabilities of the ABiH at a number of points.

According to Karadzic, the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had treated the Muslims and the Croats particularly: in the meantime they had been able to improve their armament. After the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement the Bosnian Muslims had not only observed the provisions of the agreement and the ABiH had started a major reorganization to regain their strength: among other things, there had been large-scale exercises. Manpower, weapons and equipment had been brought to strength, through... preparing to start a new offensive already before the end of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, according to Karadzic. In his opinion, the military... actions were in favour of continuation of the war. The Bosnian Muslims were thought to hope that offensive action would bring more advantage than changes in the Cessation of Hostilities...

Karadzic concluded to his dissatisfaction that the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had also contributed to keeping alive the eastern enclaves and Sarajevo, because supplying of the enclaves had restarted to a certain extent in 1995. That was unfavourable because it increased pressure on the Bosnian Serbs and drained the VRS potential. Moreover, Karadzic feared, the Muslims and Croats... Mladic and him would get worse. The Bosnian Serbs would be forced to accept negotiations, but then... conditions that became more unfavourable with the lapse of time.[16]

Karadzic did not expect much support from the Russians. Because of their own political and... would not be able to stand up to the Americans. Karadzic even went as far as to think that there was a secret agreement between the Americans and the Russians. The... would be after a dominant position in the Balkans, and military presence in a large number of Balkan countries.

Karadzic thought that the West was backing the Bosnian Muslims. He also wondered whether the West-European countries realized that this would cause an islamization of Europe; in his analysis Western Europe did realize the risk of a spread of the Islam, but... could be controlled with non-military methods. The West assumed, Karadzic thought, that if the Bosnian Serbs should not... without deployment of NATO ground troops. In the long run the intention of the West would be that a steady balance of power... Federation and the Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia. Karadzic saw that as the way the West was trying to get the Bosnian Serbs under control.

Also in military-strategic sense the West chose the side of the Bosnian Muslims, according to Karadzic: the Bosnian Muslims were to expect little pressure from the West to accept a political arrangement, and they assumed that the results of a military offensive of the ABiH would get the... If the ABiH should not be successful, the Bosnian Muslims would use NATO to exert pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to stop a VRS... NATO ground troops highly unlikely.

Karadzic realized that the military means of the ABiH... strength of the ABiH was 270,000 men, divided over six army corps with 112 brigades and another 45 independent battalions. The ABiH should be in the possession of 1000... military guns, 70 multiple rocket launchers, 120 light rocket launchers, 1800 mortars, 450 PAT anti-aircraft guns, 700 PAM anti-aircraft guns, 200 Stinger or Strela anti-aircraft missiles, 370 POR anti-

tank missiles, 16 helicopters and 17 light and agricultural airplanes.

Karadzic' expectations on 8 March were, that an ABiH spring offensive - in Northern and Eastern Bosnia - would be aimed at the Posavina corridor at Brcko, the Majevisa hills, at Vlasenica and at Han Pijesak (see map Eastern Bosnia). In reality however, it would appear that the ABiH offensive was only aimed at one of these four areas: the Majevisa hills. According to Karadzic' ~~the~~ ~~offensive~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~area~~ ~~of~~ ~~Brcko~~ were likely targets o