

NATO to Republika Srpska, 09-02-1994

NATO to Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 09-02-1994

In the wake of the break up of Yugoslavia, a violent struggle ensued between various national and ethnic groups to capture as much territory of Bosnia Herzegovina. The government of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, dominated by Bosniaks, quarreled with Bosnian Serbs and with Bosnian Croats over the territorial division of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Bosnian Serbs had founded the Republika Sprska in August 1992 following the establishment of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina a few months earlier. They received support from the government of Serbia. None of the factions was deterred by the presence of Western peacekeeping forces, which was partially due to the prevailing divisions in the international community about how to respond to the violence the various groups employed in pursuit of their strategic objectives. Direct command over Western peacekeeping forces was exercised in a complex system of multiple layers of overlapping authority resting with the UN, NATO and individual states.¹ By early 1994, the Bosnian Serbs were in control of over 70% of Bosnia-Herzegovina.² Negotiations in meeting rooms about the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina into three republics alternated with heavy fighting and bombardments. Sarajevo was one of the focal points of the fighting. In early February, following weeks of intense shelling, a market in central Sarajevo was hit. The bomb claimed 68 civilian fatalities and over 200 casualties.³ Despite the fact that the initial investigations identified multiple potential culprits, Western countries practically immediately pointed fingers at the Bosnian Serbs.⁴ On 6 February UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, on the basis of UNSC Resolution 836 of June the previous year, requested confirmation from NATO that it would promptly comply with future requests for aerial strikes 'against artillery positions in or around Sarajevo which... [were] responsible for attacks on civilian targets,' asserting that the Bosnian Serbs were behind 'at least one' attack.⁵ European leaders called the bomb a 'turning point' declaring the aim 'to bring about the immediate lifting of the siege of Sarajevo by all means necessary, including air power'.⁶ The government of the United States requested heavy weaponry to be moved away from Sarajevo. On 9 February NATO's North Atlantic Council issued an ultimatum demanding that the Bosnian Serbs as well as the Bosniaks either withdraw or handover control to the UN all heavy weaponry from an exclusion zone stretching out twenty km around Sarajevo.⁷ Any remaining heavy weapons were to be attacked from the air. The deadline was set on midnight of 20-21 February. More specifically, the ultimatum called for

the withdrawal, or regrouping and placing under UNPROFOR control, within ten days, of heavy weapons (including tanks, artillery pieces, mortars, multiple rocket launchers, missiles and anti-aircraft weapons) of the Bosnian Serb forces located in an area within 20 kilometres of the centre of Sarajevo, and excluding an area within two kilometres of the centre of Pale; [...]

¹ See for instance, Sonia Lucarelli, *Europe and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: A Political Failure in Search of a Scholarly Explanation* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2000), 56.

² Lucarelli, 54.

³ Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 145. BBC, '1994: Market Massacre in Sarajevo', *BBC*, 5 February 1994, sec. 5, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/5/newsid_2535000/2535435.stm.

⁴ Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 166–67.

⁵ Keesing's, *Keesing's Record of World Events, February, Yugoslavia, March 1998*, 6th ed., vol. 44 ((formerly Keesing's Contemporary Archives), Keesing's Worldwide, LLC - All Rights Reserved, 1931-2013, 1998).

⁶ Keesing's.

⁷ Keesing's. Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 145.

the Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, within the same period, to place the heavy weapons in its possession within the Sarajevo exclusion zone described above under UNPROFOR control, and to refrain from attacks launched from within the current confrontation lines in the city.⁸

It went on to declare that:

ten days from 2400 GMT 10th February 1994, heavy weapons of any of the parties found within the Sarajevo exclusion zone, unless controlled by UNPROFOR, will, along with their direct and essential military support facilities, be subject to NATO air strikes which will be conducted in close coordination with the UN Secretary General and will be consistent with the North Atlantic Council's decisions of 2nd and 9th August 1993.⁹

Russia then stepped in and behind closed doors put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to comply with the ultimatum. Even though the Bosnian Serbs agreed to submit their weapons to UN control, there was initially some confusion due to different interpretations of what constituted actual control.¹⁰ Only about one fifth of the Bosnian Serb weaponry was transferred to UN control by 17 February.¹¹ The Bosnia-Herzegovina government had complied with the ultimatum. Then on 17 February, to the surprise of many including the US government, the Russian Envoy Hurkin together with Bosnian-Serb President Karadzic (of the Republika Srpska) announced that Bosnian Serbs had consented to a withdrawal and a cease fire that Russian forces would monitor.¹² The first 400 Russian forces entered the area on 20 February. Although the Bosnian Serbs had not withdrawn all weaponry by the expiration of the deadline, UN special envoy Yasushi Akashi announced 'no need for airstrikes' on 20 February noting that there had been considerable progress.¹³ On 21 February Bosnia-Herzegovinian president Izetbegovic declared that his fellow countrymen could 'celebrate this victory and [not] be afraid any more'.¹⁴ US president Clinton publicly announced that even if the handover of some of the weaponry was still ongoing, 'the parties are in effective compliance with the ultimatum. [...] As a result, air strikes have not yet been necessary.'¹⁵ Anthony Lake, national security adviser to US President Clinton, later observed that 'the Sarajevo ultimatum succeeded because the threat of NATO air power was judged real'.¹⁶ The conflict nonetheless continued and it was not before long or NATO would issue another ultimatum.

⁸ The North Atlantic Council, 'Decisions Taken at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Permanent Session 1 -- 09 Feb. 1994', NATO, 1994, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24465.htm.

⁹ 'Decisions Taken at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Permanent Session 1', NATO, accessed 12 June 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24465.htm.

¹⁰ Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 288.

¹¹ Keesing's, *Keesing's Record of World Events, February, Yugoslavia, March 1998*.

¹² Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 288.

¹³ Keesing's, *Keesing's Record of World Events, February, Yugoslavia, March 1998*.

¹⁴ Keesing's.

¹⁵ Government Printing Office, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, William J. Clinton, 1994, Bk. 1, January 1 to July 31, 1994* (Government Printing Office, 1994), 287.

¹⁶ Anthony Lake, 'Dialogue: The Reach of Democracy; Tying Power To Diplomacy - New York Times', New York Times, 23 September 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/23/opinion/dialogue-the-reach-of-democracy-tying-power-to-diplomacy.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.