

United Nations to Republika Srpska, 24-05-1995

United Nations to Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 24-05-1995

Bosnian Serb forces had resumed shelling Sarajevo after an extended lull following NATO's previous ultimatum (see case NATO to Republika Srpska, 09-02-1994). After another destructive attack in early May 1995, the US government called for air bombardments, in line with the threat contained in last year's ultimatum.¹ On 22 and 23 May, Bosnian Serb forces had recovered heavy weaponry from storage sites protected by UN personnel which they subsequently used to strike at targets Sarajevo.² On 24 May, United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) Sarajevo commander general Rupert Smith issued a public ultimatum. Smith demanded that the Bosnian Serbs once again withdrew their weaponry from the exclusion zone surrounding Sarajevo and return the weapons they had captured.³ Smith publicly demanded that:

In view of these grave circumstances and with intent of stabilising the situation all heavy weapons, as previously defined, are to cease firing and, the four heavy weapons removed from the Osijek and Poljinjia weapons collection points are to be returned by 1200 hours local Thursday 25th of May 1995. All remaining weapons are to be cleared from the heavy weapons exclusion zone or in collection points by 1200 hours local time on Friday 26th of May 1995. Failure to comply with either deadline will result in the offending party or parties being attacked from the air.⁴

The ultimatum was also delivered to Bosnian Serb Military Commander Ratko Mladic and to Bosnia-Herzegovinian Vice-President Ejup Ganic.⁵ UN Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi backed the ultimatum stating that the incidents of recent weeks amounted to 'a series of extremely dangerous and volatile escalations that cannot be tolerated.'⁶ Against this background, the UN mission was under pressure of falling apart with both France and Great Britain threatening to withdraw their forces.⁷ The Bosnian Serb forces met the deadline for the cease fire as did the Bosnian government but the Bosnian Serb forces did not return the heavy weaponry they had captured. Smith then ordered a limited number of air strikes executed by NATO forces on ammunition depots in a military complex outside Pale, the Bosnian Serb capital.⁸ Bosnian Serb forces in response bombarded Tuzla as well as other safe areas. 71 people died in the attack on Tuzla and 22 UN personnel were taken hostage.⁹ Smith ordered fighter jets to bomb additional depots in Tuzla. The Bosnian Serbs took more UN troops prisoner – whose total number by now exceeded 300 – which they used as human shields at

¹ Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 329.

² Mark Danner, *Stripping Bare the Body: Politics, Violence, War* (Nation Books, 2009), 220.

³ Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 329.

⁴ The Associated Press, 'Bosnia: Sarajevo: Commander Of UN Forces Threatens Air Strikes', 24 May 1995, <http://goo.gl/fSJsto>.

⁵ Joel Br, 'NATO Strikes Threatened in Sarajevo', *The Washington Post*, 25 May 1995,

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/05/25/nato-strikes-threatened-in-sarajevo/408276bb-ba18-43de-a903-7026335ca916/>.

⁶ Br.

⁷ Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 329.

⁸ Micah Zenko, *Between Threats and War: U.S. Discrete Military Operations in the Post-Cold War World* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 136.

⁹ Danner, *Stripping Bare the Body*, 221. Richard Ware, Fiona M. Watson, and Tom Dodd, 'Bosnia: Update and Supplementary Information' (London: International Affairs and Defence Section House of Commons Library, 30 May 1995), 17, www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP95-69.pdf;

twelve locations around Sarajevo.¹⁰ This effectively tied the hands of the UN commander and the NATO member states. The Russian government criticised the bombing as ‘misconceived and one-sided’ on 25 May. Three days later, with the forces taken prisoner, the French government, withdrew its earlier support calling the air strikes ‘not well prepared and [as having] exposed the peacekeepers to thoughtless risks’.¹¹ Overall UNPROFOR Commander French General Janvier, who was in New York presenting the situation to the UNSC, sent word to Smith on 29 May (in directive 2/95) ‘we must definitely avoid any action which may degenerate into confrontation, further escalation of tension and the potential use of air power.’¹² Upon Javier’s return, negotiations ensued between Mladic and UNPROFOR Commander French General Janvier. The hostages were released on 10 June after the UN had announced that from then on it would ‘abide strictly by peacekeeping principles until further notice.’¹³

¹⁰ Ware, Watson, and Dodd, ‘Bosnia: Update and Supplementary Information’, 17. Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 329.

¹¹ *Keesing’s Record of World Events, Yugoslavia, May 1995*, vol. 41, Issue No.5 (Keesing’s Record of World Events, (Formerly Keesing’s Contemporary Archives 1931-1988), 1995), 40563, <http://www.keesings.com/article/22972>.

¹² Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, *Srebrenica, a Safe Area: Reconstruction, Background, Consequences and Analyses of the Fall of a Safe Area* (Netherlands: The Institute, 2002), 139. ‘Letter from Gen Janvier to Gen Smith on B-H Strategy’, 2 June 1995, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB519-Srebrenica-conference-documents-detail-path-to-genocide-from-1993-to-1995/Documents/DOCUMENT%2013%20-%2019950602%20janvier.pdf>.

¹³ Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 329. See also Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, *Srebrenica, a Safe Area*, pt. III, 139–141.