

## An UNhappy Birthday in former Yugoslavia: A Croatian Border War

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### Introduction

The 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations has, according to many observers, brought the UN “*more condolences than congratulations*”.<sup>1</sup> For instance, speaking on 26 June in the auditorium of the San Francisco opera house where (on 26 January 1945) 51 countries signed the UN Charter, US president Bill Clinton castigated the UN for having “*grown too bloated*” and went on to urge “*major structural changes*” in the organisation.<sup>2</sup>

Among the most salient problems facing the UN and the issue over which the organisation has undoubtedly attracted the most bitter criticism is that of peacekeeping. In the post ‘Cold War’ era the demands placed on the UN to assist in conflict resolution or prevention through the deployment of peacekeepers have increased dramatically. The oft repeated statistic is that in the 42 years between the UN’s inception to 1987 a total of 13 UN peacekeeping operations were initiated, compared to the 21 missions sanctioned between 1987 and 1993. As a consequence of these increased burdens the annual cost of UN peacekeeping has escalated to approximately US\$3.5 billion. Although this amounts to a fraction of Western powers defence spending,<sup>3</sup> the UN has been criticised for the ‘high’ cost of its peacekeeping operations. Apparent shortcomings in the field have also been increasingly highlighted.

UN peacekeeping ‘failures’ in recent years have included the missions in Somalia, Rwanda and most clearly and currently the performance of the UN’s largest peacekeeping operation in former Yugoslavia. Indeed, the UN’s former commander in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lt-General Sir Michael Rose has stated that:

*“...the perceived failures and costs of the UN mission to former Yugoslavia...have led to widespread disillusionment.”<sup>4</sup>*

Yet even President Clinton, in the course of the address referred to above, acknowledged the

complex and inherently problematic nature of UN peacekeeping:

*“We must not ask the blue helmets to undertake missions they cannot be expected to handle. Peacekeeping can only succeed where the parties to the conflict understand that they cannot profit from war. We have too often asked our peacekeepers to work miracles while denying them the military and political support required.”*

The President’s statement seems to aptly sum up the UN’s predicament in former Yugoslavia and Bosnia in particular.

Are the dire criticisms of the UN’s performance in former Yugoslavia justified? The aim of this article is to trace events in Croatia’s borderlands where the potential for renewed conflict is highest and where the UN’s peacekeeping role is so clearly needed. In addition to looking at the problems and prospects faced by the United Nations mission in Croatia it is hoped that this paper will provide a useful overview of the political and military developments which provide the background for the UN deployment. It is also intended that a subsequent article will deal with the thorny issue of the UN’s involvement in Bosnia Herzegovina to which events in Croatia are inextricably linked.

### The Nature of UN Peacekeeping

Criticism of the UN should realistically be set against the context of the nature and limitations of UN peacekeeping. As Mr Akashi has ably argued in the previous article, UN peacekeeping is based on the consent of the parties to a given conflict. The UN mission is therefore an impartial and neutral presence whose broad objectives in former Yugoslavia as a whole can be summarised as follows:

- to deliver humanitarian aid.
- to attempt to bring about conditions whereby the parties to the conflict can together reach a negotiated settlement.

- to deter attack on UN declared 'Safe Havens' in Bosnia Hercegovina.
- to prevent the escalation and spread of the conflict(s).

Mr Akashi argues persuasively that expectations have outrun the UN's capabilities and that ultimately, "*The UN cannot impose peace.*"<sup>5</sup>

The UN's activities and performance in former Yugoslavia must be judged against this background. In Bosnia in particular the UN peacekeepers have been tasked with a predominantly humanitarian role and have simply lacked the resources and authority to execute the sort of 'peace-enforcement' operation which many would like to see. In light of this the UN force's former commander in Bosnia firmly argues that "*...when measured against its mandate, the achievements have been heroic and significant.*"<sup>6</sup>

### The Croatian Countdown

In several ways 1995 began in a positive manner in former Yugoslavia. The four month Cessation of Hostilities in Bosnia, brokered by former US president Jimmy Carter, came into force on 1 January. Violations of this accord were relatively scarce although this situation was to a considerable extent a function of the stalemate on the ground brought on by harsh winter weather, which in itself was a key reason for the acceptance of the ceasefire in the first place. In addition the UN was relatively successful in its attempts to deliver humanitarian aid, particularly to central Bosnia, where the Croat-Bosnian federation<sup>7</sup> was at least holding (if not deepening significantly). These factors combined to provide considerably better conditions for the Contact Group to pursue a negotiated settlement.

The focus of international attention was, however, abruptly switched from Bosnia to Croatia on 12 January when Croatian president Franjo Tudjman announced that UNPROFOR's (United Nations Protection Force) mandate in Croatia would not be renewed after its next expiry date on 31 March and that the UN force would therefore have to leave Croatia by the end of June.

### The 'Cypriotisation' of Croatia

This bold Croatian move was brought about by what Croats perceived as major failings on the part of the

UN force. UNPROFOR in Croatia was officially established on 21 February 1992 by Security Council Resolution 743 in the wake of the Serbo-Croat war of 1991. By the time of the UN-brokered ceasefire agreement in January 1992 Serb forces had occupied approximately one-third of Croatian territory, principally in the Krajina and Slavonia regions (see insert map).

Under the Vance Plan brokered by UN special envoy Cyrus Vance the then 14,389 strong<sup>8</sup> UN force in Croatia was defined as "*...an interim arrangement to create the conditions of peace and security required for the negotiation of an overall settlement of the Yugoslav crisis.*" UNPROFOR therefore had four key tasks:

- to demilitarise the Serb-occupied UN designated protected areas (UNPAs).<sup>9</sup>
- to mediate the withdrawal of the Yugoslav People's Army from Croatian territory.
- to provide humanitarian assistance facilitating the return of all displaced persons to the UNPAs.
- in the event of serious tensions developing within a UNPA to "*...interpose itself between the two sides in order to prevent hostilities.*"

Although UNPROFOR's achievements in Croatia should not go unsung - the UN oversaw the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army (if by no means all their equipment) from Croatia, has maintained a crucial 'traditional' peacekeeping role fulfilling a 'disengagement' mission by patrolling lines of confrontation and preventing incidents between opposing forces which might otherwise have led to escalation and a fresh outbreak of hostilities, and has sought to promote negotiations between the parties, with some success - the force has failed to fulfil the terms of its mandate and the stalemate between the opposing parties remains. The UNPAs were by no means demilitarised and no discernible progress was made on the return of refugees to the Serb-occupied areas and reintegration of the UNPAs into Croatia proper.

The ambiguous nature of the Vance Plan concerning the role of the UN peacekeepers and future of the UNPAs was at least partially responsible for this failure. UNPROFOR was caught between the Croatian interpretation of the plan - that the UN's role should be to assist the Croatian authorities to reassert their control over the Serb-occupied areas, to disarm the Serbs and assist in the return of Croatian refugees to the UNPAs - and the Serb view, that the UN force was there to protect the

Serb-held areas and ensure their autonomy. UNPROFOR therefore suffered from the unenviable position of attempting to supervise an agreement which it "had neither the mandate or the resources to enforce",<sup>10</sup> and ultimately was even unable to extend its own authority throughout the UNPAs which remained under the control of the local Serb authorities. As Mr Akashi has emphasised, "...expectations of what the UN can do have been exaggerated...Peacekeeping missions can...do only as much as their resources and mandates allow."<sup>11</sup>

### The decision to eject UNPROFOR

As a result UNPROFOR in Croatia has been regarded, with some justification, as merely helping to preserve an unsatisfactory *de facto* situation analogous to the UN operation in divided Cyprus. The Croatian fear of this process, inelegantly referred to as 'Cypriotisation', resulting in a permanent institutionalised partition of Croatia was the main factor prompting President Tudjman's ultimatum to the UN and reflects widespread frustration in Croatia at the UN force's lack of progress on the issue of reintegration or on Croatian Serb calls for full independence and union with the self-styled Bosnian Serb Republic and Serbia proper. Indeed, in his letter to the UN secretary general relating to Croatia's decision not to renew UNPROFOR's mandate President Tudjman specifically cited the lack of progress over resolution of the Krajina issue stating that:

*"...although UNPROFOR has played an important role in stopping violence and major conflicts in Croatia, it is an indisputable fact that the present character of the UNPROFOR mission does not provide conditions necessary for establishing lasting peace and order in the Republic of Croatia."*

Although the Croatian President went on to attempt to reassure the international community that Croatia would not seek to reintegrate the Serb-held areas by force and would pursue "a constructive peace policy", he also stated that Croatia would "defend its national and state interests with determination". In a statement issued on the same day the UN secretary general stressed that while he was "...painfully aware of the frustration of the Croatian people that a final political settlement has eluded us", he was also "gravely concerned about the risk of renewed hostilities should UN peacekeepers be

*withdrawn from Croatia."* The Secretary General's statement was backed up on 17 January by the UN Security Council which expressed the hope that the Croatian government would reconsider its decision.

In response, the Croatian government emphasised that its decision on UNPROFOR was non-negotiable but that it would consider "other international mechanisms for controlling the implementation of the agreements and installing confidence building instruments" thus holding the door open for negotiations on the issue.

Although sources in Belgrade appeared confident that the Krajina Serbs could withstand any Croatian attack one source said, "We take [Croatian President] Tudjman's threats seriously and if the Krajina Serbs are really threatened, of course we will intervene to help them."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, on 25 January, the UN Secretary General warned that Croatia's decision threatened the UN operation in Bosnia: "There is a concern that it would be very difficult to maintain the forces in Bosnia in the event of a withdrawal from Croatia...The withdrawal from Croatia would be a disaster...". His warning was echoed by Serbian president Milosevic who said such a pull-out would "re-open the possibility of a new conflagration" between Serbia and Croatia; and by a UN military observer who expressed the fear that if the UN were to withdraw the two sides would rush to fill the vacuum, leading to dozens of skirmishes that in the absence of the UN's mediating role would be "bound to escalate". As one Canadian UN officer stated: "No one can argue otherwise; if we pull out of here, war will resume."<sup>13</sup>

Another, perhaps more oblique, explanation for the Croatian government's announcement was a desire to boost to President Tudjman's flagging popularity domestically.

### Progress in negotiations

Paradoxically the Croatian move came against the background of progress in negotiations between Zagreb and the Serb leadership in Knin. The two sides signed a four-point economic agreement on 2 December 1994 aimed at achieving a restoration of water supplies, the opening of the 27km stretch of the Zagreb-Lipovac motorway passing through Western Slavonia (UNPA Sector West) and ending in Eastern Slavonia (UNPA Sector East), the return of generator poles for the power plant at Obrovac in

Krajina (UNPA Sector South) by the Croatian government and the opening of the southern part of the Adriatic pipeline from Krk on the Adriatic via Krajina (UNPA Sector North) to Sisak. The economic agreement was seen as the second stage of a three stage process which started with the March 1994 ceasefire agreement and was due to culminate with political negotiations on the final status of the Serbian population in Croatia. Little progress was evident on the final phase of the negotiations process. The majority of the economic agreement provisions had, however, been fulfilled by the time of the Croatian President's declaration on the ejection of UNPROFOR on 12 January.

### The Z-4 Plan

Croatia's ultimatum to the UN also served as a spur to diplomatic developments. On 30 January the so-called Zagreb-4 Ambassadors group, consisting of the US and Russian ambassadors in Croatia plus representatives from the EU and UN, presented a long-awaited draft peace plan for a political settlement for Croatia (the 'Z-4 Plan'). The plan proposed considerable autonomy for Serb-dominated areas (then known as UNPA sectors North and South), transitional international control for Sector East, and immediate reestablishment of Croatian control in Sector West.

Croatia expressed reservations over the plan, with certain elements of the government alleging that it was utterly unacceptable as it amounted to the creation of a bi-national federation in the country,<sup>14</sup> but agreed to further talks using the Z-4 Plan as a basis. The Serbian authorities in Knin refused even to consider the plan because it appeared to be forcing them to recognise Croatian sovereignty. The Croatian Serbs have subsequently clearly demonstrated their desire for full independence from Croatia with an ultimate goal of union with the Bosnian Serb state and Serbia proper. The Z-4 group also wanted to go to Belgrade to try to get President Milosevic's support for the plan, but the Serbian leader declined to see them.

### Pressure to renew the mandate

Croatia's action shocked the international community and the UN, raising as it did the grim prospect of a serious escalation of the conflict in former Yugoslavia. Should the UN be forced to leave, a renewed Serbo-Croatian war appeared

inevitable with Croatian forces attempting the reintegration of the UNPAs by force with Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs intervening on behalf of the Croatian Serbs. Frantic Western diplomatic efforts to avoid a UN withdrawal, which the US assistant secretary of state, Richard Holbrooke said "*could trigger the most dangerous situation Europe has seen since 1945*", culminated in a joint announcement by President Tudjman and US vice-president Al Gore on 12 March at the World Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen that a general agreement had been reached whereby the UN peacekeepers would remain in Croatia but with significantly fewer troops and a radically altered mandate.

### UNCRO

On 1 April 1995 the Security Council finally voted through three resolutions by which UNPROFOR was divided into three different operations. The original name was kept only for the UN operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina (UNPROFOR). The operation in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia was renamed in UNPREDEP (UN Preventive Deployment Force), while the operation in Croatia was renamed UNCRO (UN Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia). The redefinition of the peacekeeping mandate came after prolonged and sometimes dramatic diplomatic negotiations. The biggest problem was with the UN operation in Croatia.

The Croatian government insisted on a new name for the operation and new tasks for peacekeepers. Croatia finally succeeded in getting the operation renamed; however Resolution 981 did not propose any essential changes in the mandate but defined UNCRO as an interim arrangement tasked with creating the conditions conducive to a negotiated settlement consistent with the territorial integrity of Croatia. The Croatian demand for effective control of its international boundaries was not built into the new mandate. Only "*help in controlling, by monitoring and reporting, the crossing of military personnel, equipment, supplies and weapons*" across Croatia's boundaries was mentioned. The UN secretary general subsequently (on 18 April) reported to the Security Council on the detailed arrangements for implementation of the new mandates and recommended a reduction in peacekeeping personnel in Croatia from around 15,000 to 8,750.

A statement by Croatian foreign minister Mate Granic summarises both Croatian expectations and the contents of the resolution:

*“UN Security Council Resolution 981 follows the spirit of the Copenhagen agreement, President Tudjman’s recent contacts in Washington and New York, as well as conclusions of Croatian Parliament. There is no more UNPROFOR. The UNPROFOR mandate in Croatia is over, there are no more UNPA’s, no more Yugoslavia in the resolution. This is a new peacekeeping mandate in the Republic of Croatia. This resolution strongly stresses territorial integrity and sovereignty of Croatia. It promotes mechanisms of control of Croatian boundaries. The Vance plan does not exist as a basis for resolution anymore. Only some of its parts are still active, such as the return of refugees and demilitarisation. This resolution also brings new elements: a cease-fire agreement and an economic agreement and leads towards peaceful reintegration. It calls on Belgrade to recognise Croatia within its internationally recognised boundaries and on the other hand it directs Knin to negotiate political issues and peaceful reintegration.”*

Observers were, however, critical of the new mandate, for example pointing out that *“The UN’s mandate in Croatia has always seemed a stretch, and the new mandate slashes its personnel while burdening it with increased responsibilities.”*<sup>15</sup>

The Croatian Serb refusal to accept any effective UN presence on Croatia’s international boundary was also highlighted as one of the *“...many reasons to assume that the renewed UN force mandate in Croatia is going to be every bit as unsuccessful as its predecessor.”*<sup>16</sup>

### **“Operation Flash”**

Seemingly fulfilling these negative predictions, in what was termed a ‘limited’ action<sup>17</sup> Croatian police backed by elements of the Croatian armed forces launched an offensive into the Serb-controlled portion of UNPA Sector West, Western Slavonia, on 1 May brushing aside the UN peacekeeping presence. The action, codenamed *“Operation Flash”*, coinciding with the formal end on 1 May of the tattered four month cessation of

hostilities in Bosnia, was triggered by the stabbing of a Croatian motorist by a Serb and an incident on 28 April when Serb forces fired on Croatian vehicles passing along the recently reopened Zagreb-Lipovac highway which runs through the region in question. By 3 May Croatian forces gained effective control over the entire formerly Serb-occupied area of Western Slavonia including the regional centre, Okucani, and the northern end of the bridge linking Western Slavonia to Serb-held regions of Bosnia. The Croatian Ministry of Defence stated that 33 soldiers and 9 police officers had been killed in the operation and that Serb losses were estimated at 450 dead and 1,200 wounded.

The Croatian Serbs based in Krajina retaliated on 2 and 3 May by launching attacks on Zagreb with rockets equipped with cluster anti-personnel munitions which left seven dead and nearly 200 wounded in the Croatian capital. The Croatian towns of Karlovac, Sisak and Novska were also shelled. On 3 May the UN special envoy, Yasushi Akashi, managed to broker a verbal ceasefire between Zagreb and Knin. Despite Croatian calls on the Serb inhabitants of Western Slavonia to stay in the region the vast majority opted to join those who fled the Croatian advance to the Bosnian Serb Republic over the Sava River to the south. Their departure was facilitated by UNCRO’s operation *“Safe Passage”* in cooperation with UNHCR and the Red Cross. By the end of June it was estimated that of the 12,000-15,000 Serbs who lived in the former Serb-held part of Western Slavonia only 2,000-2,500 remained.

Croatia attracted considerable criticism from the international community over her action in Western Slavonia, particularly when it was alleged by the UN in Zagreb that Croatian forces were guilty of firing on fleeing civilians - a charge hotly denied by the Croatian government.<sup>18</sup> The Krajina Serbs’ indiscriminate use of cluster munitions over the Croatian capital brought even stronger condemnation, however, and essentially destroyed the Serbs status as ‘victims’ of Croatian aggression. The US Ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, denounced the rocket attacks as *“...an outrageous and disproportionate response to the Croatian [military] action.”*<sup>19</sup> As the London-based *Guardian* newspaper put it:

*“The rocket attacks failed to stop the offensive and rebounded on the Serbs by handing the moral high ground to Zagreb,*

*despite reports of human rights abuses by its forces in Western Slavonia.*"<sup>20</sup>

President Tudjman's chief military advisor, General Anton Tus, subsequently called for a radical rewrite of the UN's mandate to allow the blue helmets to use force to help Croatia reimpose Zagreb's authority over the Serb-held areas of Croatia, saying that he thought peace had to be imposed. If no such alteration was forthcoming, General Tus made the ominous prediction that, "...we will have to carry out another operation on another area, with or without a mandate. That way we will get our country back piece by piece..."<sup>21</sup>

### A Zagreb-Belgrade deal?

In the aftermath of Croatia's successful offensive in Western Slavonia there was much speculation<sup>22</sup> over whether the fall of Western Slavonia had been the subject of a tacit deal between Serbian president Milosevic and Croatian president Tudjman with unchallenged, at least for the time being, Serbian control of Eastern Slavonia constituting the other side of the equation. This dubious conspiracy theory was reinforced by the Serbian president's reaction to the Croatian victory which was reported to be "*muted to the point of dismissal.*"<sup>23</sup>

Certainly, from the perspective of the Bosnian Serb state whose armed forces are suffering from severe manpower shortage and are dangerously overstretched, the influx of the majority of the Serb population of Western Slavonia is highly convenient, for all self-styled Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic's pledges to "*liberate every single square foot of Western Slavonia.*"

Similarly it is undeniable that President Tudjman benefited from a major political boost as a result of the successful Croatian attack. Soon after the "Operation Flash" the President stated that only 17% of Croatian territory remained under Serb control and that if water areas were counted then the Serb-held areas amounted to only about 11% of Croatia. President Tudjman thus gained a significant domestic political coup with a *Globus* magazine public-opinion poll showing a jump in popular support for the ruling Croatian Democratic Union from 32.2% to 48.1% following the action with President Tudjman's personal approval rating likewise climbing significantly from 36.5% to 59.5%. It is, however, difficult if not impossible to envisage Croatia giving up her hopes of recovering

all the Serb-held territories in Croatia, including Eastern Slavonia, no matter how long it takes. At present, however, these theories amount to no more than speculation.

### The aftermath of the fall of Western Slavonia

Later in May, following the Croatian Serb's debacle in Western Slavonia Belgrade despatched General Mile Mrksic, former deputy chief of staff of the Yugoslav army and former commander of the Yugoslav special forces, to take command of the rebel Serb army in Croatia. Media sources have since indicated that Mrksic has brought 50 Yugoslav officers with him and is in the process of building an 'elite' mobile force based in Slunj with an estimated 1,000 troops and 30 M-84 tanks.<sup>24</sup> It therefore appears that Belgrade has successfully exploited the Western Slavonia fiasco to reassert control over the Serb forces in the remainder of Serb-held Croatia. The Croatian foreign minister, Mate Granic wrote to the UN to protest this Serbian intervention including the alleged transfer of 26 tanks from Serbia to Krajina. According to UN sources it now appears that at least some of these vehicles were transferred from Serb-held areas of Bosnia rather than Serbia proper.

The reinforcement of the Serbian-occupied Krajina coincided with piecemeal Croatian advances in Western Bosnia. Croatian forces in Bosnia, supported by regular Croatian troops have reportedly been pursuing a 'low-intensity' warfare policy aimed at winning territory step by step and have made significant advances in the Croatia - Bosnia-Herzegovina borderlands particularly on the Dinara massif, Livino karst *polje* and Mts. Golija, Staretina and Sator. The consequence of these moves is that Croatian forces in Bosnia are now capable of shelling not only Knin but the main road linking Knin to Banja Luka.

UNCRO meanwhile proved unsuccessful in attempts to promote the reintegration of Krajina and effectively monitor Croatia's international boundaries. This apparent failure together with Croatia's enhanced military capabilities (buoyed by the success in Western Slavonia) and advances by Bosnian Croat forces raised the strong possibility that Croatia might once again lose patience with the UN force's inability to overcome Croatian Serb intransigence and resort to military action in order to achieve forced reintegration of the Krajina. This view was reinforced by the outspoken Croatian

general Anton Tus, the chief military adviser to President Tudjman:

*"We would very much prefer to recover the occupied territory peacefully, but we are coming to the conclusion that the international community is not going to bring us a solution... We have to do it ourselves. If we do nothing, we are essentially giving away part of our country and permitting the establishment of a Serb-run state on our territory."*<sup>25</sup>

### The Battle for Bihac

Tension mounted considerably in July with a concerted Serbian offensive against the cruelly misnamed UN 'safe-haven' of Bihac, not only from Serbian-held parts of Bosnia but also from Serbian-held positions in Croatia.<sup>26</sup> The Serbian offensive into Bihac across the international border, backed by rocket and artillery bombardment from within Croatia was, by the end of July, resulting in serious losses of territory on the part of the Bosnian government forces defending the enclave as well as generating an estimated 3,000-plus fresh refugees. Bihac, with its 150,000-strong mainly Muslim population, has received no aid or medicine since May and the first deaths caused by starvation were reported in June. The enclave is therefore hard-pressed to withstand such an offensive on all fronts even with all men of fighting age drafted to the frontlines.

The elimination of the Bihac enclave and the Bosnian 5th Army Corps defending it would at a stroke lead to a major consolidation of the Bosnian and Croatian Serb territories as well as release substantial numbers of desperately needed troops for action elsewhere in Bosnia or to reinforce Krajina against Croatian attack. Such a scenario is viewed as a disaster in both Zagreb and Sarajevo leading to closer military cooperation between Croatian and Bosnian Army forces.

If the Serbs press ahead with their attack this would seemingly inevitably trigger a Croatian counter-attack on Serb-held Krajina aimed at taking pressure off the besieged Bosnian forces in Bihac and, emboldened by their success in Western Slavonia, at recovering more of the territory occupied by Serb forces since 1991. Indeed, this view is supported by the fact that when Bihac came under severe Serbian attack in late 1994 Croatia, on 18 November, came

close to military intervention and was only forestalled by diplomatic pressure from the US.<sup>27</sup> There have been many reports of a major Croatian mobilisation and troop build-up near Krajina's western borders in response to Serbian actions in Bihac. As one former Croatian general recently noted: *"Everything is ready for the final showdown."*<sup>28</sup>

### A Croatian Border War?

The situation outlined above once again raises the spectre of a wider war with Croatia intervening both against the Croatian Serbs in the Krajina and in Bosnia over Bihac and Serbia-proper potentially being dragged into the conflict. For the UN and the international community this represents a nightmare scenario. UNCRO in particular, already deprived of a role in Western Slavonia by Croatian military action, has been seen as being increasingly irrelevant as escalation in the conflict in the Croatian borderlands seems inevitable.

As this issue of the *Boundary and Security Bulletin* went to press it was reported that the struggle for Bihac was intensifying and that Bosnian Croat forces had renewed their offensive in western Bosnia towards Grahovo, just over the international boundary from the Croatian Serb capital Knin. In response the Croatian Serb leadership apparently ordered the mobilisation of all able-bodied men to halt the Croatian advance.

For its part the UN was reacting to the escalation in hostilities by attempting to bolster its presence on the Croatian-Bosnian international boundary, thus fulfilling UNCRO's mandate, in the hope that peacekeepers could interpose themselves between the opposing factions and thus avert further conflict. Furthermore, the UN's overall military commander in former Yugoslavia, General Bernard Janvier, was in the midst of discussions over the use of NATO airstrikes to forestall the fall of Bihac in the wake of the decision on 25 July to apply extensive airstrikes if Serb forces were to move against the last UN 'safe haven' in eastern Bosnia, Gorazde.

It remains to be seen whether the UN will succeed in its attempts to halt the vicious spiral of escalation and prevent an overspill of the chaos and bloodshed in Bosnia into Croatia and elsewhere in the Balkans or whether the latest UN efforts once again represent a case of too little, too late on the part of the international community.

- <sup>1</sup> *The Economist*, London, 24/6/95.
- <sup>2</sup> *The Guardian*, London, 27/6/95
- <sup>3</sup> Approximately one tenth of Britain's defence budget and one-hundredth of the USA's. *The Observer*, 2/7/95.
- <sup>4</sup> General Sir Michael Rose, in *The Guardian*, 2/5/95.
- <sup>5</sup> Akashi, Y. (1995) 'The Role of the United Nations in the Balkans', *Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 3: 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Rose, *op cit*.
- <sup>7</sup> Established by the Washington Agreement of 1 March 1994 with its territory defined as constituting the areas of pre-war Croat and Muslim majority - 58% of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Coincidentally a confederation between the Bosnian Federation and Croatia was also proposed.
- <sup>8</sup> UNPROFOR's original strength was 13,340 military, 530 police and 519 civilian personnel.
- <sup>9</sup> This function was later extended to include the so-called 'pink zones' which remained under Serb control after the cessation of hostilities but were beyond the limits of the UNPAs. The most extensive pink zones were located around Sector South. Under the terms of the Vance Plan Croatia might have insisted that these areas should be immediately and unconditionally returned to Croatian authority once the Yugoslav Army had withdrawn. In order to forestall the possibility of a fresh outbreak of hostilities however, Croatia agreed to accept UN assistance in reinstating Croatian sovereignty over the pink zones through UNPROFOR. The pink zones, however, effectively became integral parts of the UNPAs under Serb control - a major reason for Croatian disenchantment with the UN operation. The UN force was also tasked with ensuring that the UNPAs remained demilitarised. This was to be verified through a network of unarmed military observers. It was also intended that unarmed civilian police monitors be deployed throughout the UNPAs to closely monitor the work of local police forces.
- <sup>10</sup> Claesson, P. and Findlay, T. (1995) 'Case Studies on Peacekeeping: UNOSOM II, UNTAC and UNPROFOR', pp 62-80 in *SIPRI Yearbook 1994*, Oxford: OUP: 73.
- <sup>11</sup> Akashi, *op cit*.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Guardian*, 19/1/95.
- <sup>13</sup> Quoted in *The Guardian*, 4/3/95.
- <sup>14</sup> Culic, M. (1995) 'Croatia and the New UN Mandate: Securing Frontiers or Frontlines?', *Balkan War Report*, No. 32, March 1995.
- <sup>15</sup> Culic, *op cit*.
- <sup>16</sup> Gornisek, K. (1995) 'Military Mismatch', *Balkan War Report*, No. 32, March 1995.
- <sup>17</sup> The operation involved an estimated 7,200 personnel.
- <sup>18</sup> In fact subsequent reports indicated that it was far from clear how the civilians concerned had died. The Croatian government maintained that they had been killed in crossfire between Croat and Serb forces and by no means deliberately targeted by the Croatian army or police. The UN later retreated from its claim with Mr Akashi stating that: "There were some alarming reports, but we may have sent signals perhaps louder than the situation justified itself."
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in *The Guardian*, 3/5/95.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Guardian*, 15/5/95.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Guardian*, 8/5/95.
- <sup>22</sup> For example Vasic, M. (1995) 'The Decline and Fall of Western Slavonia', *Balkan War Report*, No. 33, May 1995.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Economist*, 6/5/95.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Guardian*, 6/7/95. The figure for Mrksic's 'elite' mobile unit was later put at "up to 5,000 men". *The Guardian*, 20/7/95. The M-84 tank is an improved Yugoslav version of the Soviet T-72 design.
- <sup>25</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 17/7/95.
- <sup>26</sup> Serbian forces are aided by a rebel Muslim militia commanded by renegade Bosnian Muslim leader Fikret Abdic.
- <sup>27</sup> IISS, *Strategic Comments*, No.1, 17/1/95.
- <sup>28</sup> Gorinsek, K. (1995) 'Readying for the Showdown', *Balkan War Report*, No.34, June 1995.

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