

Foreign &
Commonwealth
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From The Secretary of State

6 August 1992

Stephen Wall *File*

Dear Margaret,

Thank you very much for your letter of 29 July about Bosnia-Herzegovina. The horrors there pile up day by day, and could spread elsewhere. Every serious person with any imagination knows we must do our utmost to bring them to an end.

Truth is one of the first casualties. In order to take the best available action we each have to make our own best analysis of what is happening, at a time when virtually all those concerned distort the truth. Like many travellers to Sarajevo, for example, I have no difficulty at all in believing that all parties are capable of staging incidents for the world media gathered there. Our analysis is not exactly the same as yours, but there are many common points. It runs as follows.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has to a large extent disintegrated. As you say, there is no "equal guilt". We have made this clear for many months. In Bosnia, as previously in Croatia, the bulk of the blame belongs to the Serbs. They started the conflict. It is true that the Serbs fighting in Bosnia are now overwhelmingly from Bosnia itself. There is not a conquering army pushing into the

Margaret, The Lady Thatcher OM PC FRS



republic from Belgrade. Nor could the Serbian authorities quickly stop the fighting by a single command, or by cutting off supplies. The republic is full of arms and ammunition. But the influence of the authorities in Belgrade, if fully exercised, could over a reasonably short time bring the Bosnian Serbs to stop fighting and halt the appalling "ethnic cleansing". President Tudjman has a similar influence over the Bosnian Croats. He is tempted by the thought of partition of Bosnia with Serbia, but his main aim remains to prevent Serb dominance.

If that is the analysis, what can be done to stop the fighting and secure a just and peaceful future for Bosnia, and indeed for the other republics?

A MILITARY ACTION

UNPROFOR preserve a fragile peace in Croatia, which may collapse disastrously if President Tudjman fails to renew their mandate in the spring. UNPROFOR have secured Sarajevo airport and made possible an intermittent airlift of supplies. You suggest an ultimatum to Serbia on specific points followed if necessary by military action. Others, like David Owen and Paddy Ashdown have made more modest proposals (and I found today that the latter has returned from Sarajevo, as I did, in a markedly realistic state of mind). We have of course taken professional advice, and did so again early this week. It cannot be ignored. The judgement is that air power alone, though it might have a deterrent effect, would probably not be enough. Targets are hard to identify. The fighters live and operate among civilians. Airpower cannot deal with mortars or hand-held missile launchers. Without a corresponding operation on the ground, we might find



ourselves killing large numbers of civilians from the air without ending the fighting. The dangers of a ground operation against opposition in that terrain have been so often described that they need not be rehearsed. This is guerrilla country, as the last war showed. No government is arguing for such a ground operation. There is also some risk that present UN operations would become unsustainable if much broader military activity was planned. General MacKenzie has already said on U.S. television that if even air cover was introduced UNPROFOR would withdraw.

This does not mean that military action cannot be extended in any way beyond present bounds. We are working on two possibilities:

(1) Escorts for UNHCR humanitarian convoys Supplies are reaching Sarajevo and other towns by land. (4,500 tonnes by land to Sarajevo, as compared to 6,000 by air.) The agencies are still doubtful whether armed protection will work, but it might. (At present they prefer to gain access by negotiation.) We certainly need to build up the flow of land supplies before summer turns to autumn.

(2) Reception zones for refugees, under protection. Difficult and dangerous, but worth serious work.

We must be open to other proposals which make professional sense.

B SANCTIONS

As you say, they are having an effect on Serbia and Montenegro. In Belgrade there is open criticism of Milosevic, indeed a more vigorous political debate than I



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had expected, or found elsewhere. Sanctions are the first reason, growing international isolation the second. We do not propose to extend them to Croatia. We are working to tighten them, against Serbia, particularly on the Danube. Romania has just agreed to accept monitors.

C POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

There is scope for local peacemaking. For example, the EC monitors do a good job village by village in Croatia. As you know, this is dangerous work - six monitors have already been killed. There is scope for similar activity on the dangerous borders with Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. With luck, thanks to British initiative and talks held on HMS Avenger, there may be a local agreement to safeguard Dubrovnik.

More widely, the aim should be as you say the restoration of the Bosnian state. We are not interested in what you call a "quick fix", ie partition between Serbia and Croatia with humanitarian help for the Muslims. The best answer is a single Bosnian state, with clear rights within it for the three main groups. The Muslims have to be ready to discuss the latter if they are to achieve the former. At the moment they are not. This is understandable, but a mistake.

We are preparing for the London Conference which John Major will open on 26 August. This will not be a substitute for other measures described above. Nor do we expect it to reach early agreement on a political settlement. We are broadening and intensifying what Peter Carrington started, bringing in more formally the Russians, the Americans and the UN Secretary-General,



building up continuous international pressure on all the Yugoslav parties, and particularly the Serbs. In the end a lasting settlement will come from a combination of pressure and persuasion, and the Conference will aim to provide this.

Events are moving on constantly. If you would wish, the Prime Minister and I would be glad to see you later this month to brief you on what is going on. I have, of course, consulted him about this reply.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Douglas Hurd'.

DOUGLAS HURD

A second handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Douglas Hurd'.