



Foreign &
Commonwealth
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3 August 1992

Dear Simon,

YUGOSLAVIA

Before their discussion this morning of future peacekeeping more widely, the Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary discussed aspects of the three questions posed by the Prime Minister on 30 July as recorded in Stephen Wall's letter of that date:

- A full scale military operation designed to separate the warring parties; also, separately, much more limited military action involving air power.
- Protection for humanitarian convoys.
- The establishment of refugee relief zones.

MILITARY ACTION, INCLUDING AIR COVER WITHOUT THE USE OF GROUND FORCES

Major-General Harley said that the paper the Defence Staff had been drafting over the weekend of 1-2 August concluded that large scale military action to bring peace to Bosnia would need something like 16 divisions, three

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carrier battlegroups and a tactical air force. The Foreign Secretary thought that no one was seriously proposing this sort of operation, given the size of forces which would be required. He did not believe that Mr Ashdown, Dr Owen or the Germans favoured it. Use of air cover only, however, was worth further thought.

Major-General Harley said that if air forces could be brought together to impose, from bases in Italy, something like an air exclusion zone over Bosnia (and perhaps Serbia), this should calm the situation even though initially the reaction of the Bosnian Serbs and others might be to grab as much extra territory as possible in the period before the exclusion zone was established. However, the terrain was difficult, the enemy not readily identifiable and the tactical intelligence not available. So the military and lasting effect of an air exclusion zone and selected air strikes might be limited. The Defence Secretary agreed: it might not be possible to stop aggression by the Bosnian Serb militia and other without the deployment of ground forces.

As discussion developed the obstacles to successful air strikes were brought out: artillery was deployed inside villages or hidden in forests and could be moved easily by night or under cover of forest. Mortars were

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more mobile. There might, however, be scope for air strikes to deter any large columns of tanks or artillery moving to reinforce the Bosnian Serb militia.

The Foreign Secretary said one could envisage a Security Council Resolution authorising all available means to help secure a ceasefire, as the basis for possible air strikes and the interdiction of any flying by the Yugoslav air force. But he agreed that air strikes would not necessarily be decisive enough to bring down the government of President Milosevic.

PROTECTION FOR HUMANITARIAN CONVOYS

General Harley emphasised the basic differences between the protection of convoys by the deployment of armed vehicles at the front and back of the convoy, but on the basis that if challenged the convoy would not seek to fight its way through, and a sizeable military force which could clear the way for the convoy if necessary. The forces would have to be very large. 1,200 or 1,500 men would not do.

REFUGEE RELIEF ZONES

The Foreign Secretary thought there might be some need for UNPROFOR to help protect refugee areas in Croatia; this was Lady Chalker's latest information. The bigger issue was the possible establishment of refugee

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relief zones in Bosnia, perhaps with an extended UNPROFOR to protect them.

Major-General Harley drew a distinction similar to that for the protection of humanitarian convoys: a limited UN force with ROEs providing for self-defence only, and much larger UN forces which could defend the refugees themselves.

The Defence Secretary thought that, of two unattractive options, the establishment of refugee relief zones would be preferable to the departure of the refugees from Yugoslavia itself, both because of the difficulties for other European countries of accepting them, and the difficulties of moving them back to their homes in Bosnia in due course.

The Foreign Secretary thought that there was a strong case for a joint UNHCR/UNPROFOR team, with monitors, to go quickly to Bosnia to see what might be possible. He thought that this should be done before the London Conference on Yugoslavia at the end of August. He would want them to examine the possibility of refugee relief zones protected on a traditional UN basis with lightly armed forces, sized to negotiate rather than fight their way through any trouble.

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The next steps are the circulation of two joint papers, an MOD-led paper of what would be involved in a full scale military operation designed to separate the warring parties, and an FCO led paper on the protection of convoys and the establishment of refugee relief zones. Major-General Harley, you, and I agreed after the meeting that these papers should be able to circulate in draft today, 3 August.

I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall (No 10), Jeremy Heywood (HMT) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

R. H. T. Gozney

(R H T Gozney)
Private Secretary

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