

Srebrenica: a 'safe' area

Appendix VII

Resupply by air

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Resupply by air

1. Introduction

As mentioned in various places in this report, shortages of all sorts of supplies started to arise in the three enclaves in Eastern Bosnia: Zepa, Gorazde and Srebrenica. These problems were due to the fact that the Bosnian Serbs were increasingly refusing to let convoys through to the eastern enclaves. This concerned both humanitarian convoys for the population as well as food and fuel convoys for UNPROFOR. As for Dutchbat III in Srebrenica, it was mainly the shortage of fuel that became increasingly problematic.

This appendix focuses on one specific question: if convoys could no longer reach the Srebrenica enclave by road, then why was the enclave not resupplied by air? This could have been done in various ways: for instance, by dropping supplies from planes (air drops) or by getting helicopters with supplies to land in the enclave. Despite these options, no supplies were ever brought in by air during Dutchbat III's presence in the Srebrenica enclave. This appendix looks at the reasons why.

To understand why resupply by air never actually took place, we must bear the command structure of the UN in the former Yugoslavia firmly in mind. As discussed more extensively in the main report, this consisted of four levels: Dutchbat III in Srebrenica; above that came Sector North East in Tuzla; next came Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo (with General Rupert Smith as the most important player in 1995); and finally, at the highest level, UNPF in Zagreb (with General Janvier and Akashi, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN, as the most important players in 1995). To gain a proper understanding of the problem, it is furthermore necessary to remember that the UN headquarters in New York (with Kofi Annan, the then Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, as the most important player), the southern NATO command in the Italian city of Naples (Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH) with Admiral Leighton Smith as the most important player (known as CINCSOUTH in military terms)), and senior military officers and envoys and politicians in the various NATO member states and other troop-contributing nations also played a part.

Battalion Commander Karremans was one of those who saw resupply by air as a simple, practical and feasible option. British Joint Commission Officers (JCOs) who had been attached to Dutchbat had pointed this option out to him early in June 1995. The idea was to drop containers over the enclave with the aid of parachutes controlled from the ground. Karremans decided it was worth sending a message about this option to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo and to the Ministry of Defence in The Hague. Karremans was under the impression that this message never got across to the authorities in question.¹ Even so, resupply by air was a subject that had been on the agenda at many levels for a considerable period of time, though Dutchbat III was largely unaware of this.

The supply problem had in fact already existed before Dutchbat III arrived in the enclave; Minister Voorhoeve spoke of 'convoy terrorization' perpetrated by Bosnian Serbs against Dutchbat.² Dutchbat II had already been deprived of supplies for long periods of time. The option of parachute-assisted air drops to provide UN personnel and the population with supplies was an idea that had also been mentioned then. There were a few temporary interruptions in that 'terrorization' and this gave the battalions some respite – however briefly – but the subject never disappeared from the various agendas.

Resupply was for instance on the agenda of the meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of the NATO member states and other troop-contributing nations in The Hague on 19 and 20 December 1994 (see part II of this report). The twofold objective formulated in this context was: to resupply the UNPROFOR troops and to continue the humanitarian aid to the population. The Chiefs of Defence Staff concluded that UN commanders (in consultation with NATO) needed to work out plans for

¹ Karremans, *Srebrenica. Who Cares?*, p. 147.

² Voorhoeve's Diary, p. 58.

aerial resupply operations with the greatest possible urgency. These plans were to take account of the risks, the consequences for UNPROFOR as a whole and the required resources, while also outlining the Rules of Engagement for the operation. In addition, the need for political support by the troop-contributing nations was emphasized.³

A working group under the direction of Deputy Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army, Major General A.P.P.M. van Baal, immediately took up the task of formulating an outline plan. Their basic starting point was that a plan should be activated if supplies had not been allowed through for a period of thirty days and there was no prospect of any improvement; emergency supplies were sufficient to bridge a period of thirty days at maximum. The results that the working group presented were based on maintaining maximum safety, and for this reason the planning of such an operation would offer little prospect of actual execution.

Srebrenica could only be reached by land with a mechanized brigade; a resupply operation with helicopters was only possible if there was an adequately protected landing zone and that would take six to eight battalions per Safe Area. Neither personnel nor equipment were available in such numbers and, moreover, both options would probably require a new mandate from the Security Council.⁴

After the meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff, the British promised to look into whether they could contribute transport helicopters to UNPROFOR.⁵ The United States would contact Paris about an emergency resupply plan for the enclaves.⁶ Shortly afterwards the British Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Peter Inge, informed his Dutch colleague Van den Breemen that a land corridor or an airlift needed to be established. According to Inge, UNPROFOR was the organization best equipped to undertake this task.⁷

2. Working out the options at Sector North East in Tuzla

Even before the Chiefs of Defence Staff started to address the resupply problem, the Staff of Sector North East in Tuzla was already actively seeking ways of improving the resupply efforts. If resupply by land was no longer possible, then resupply by air might be a viable alternative. The underlying idea was that unless the situation improved, the population could get restless. The discord between the original population of Srebrenica and the Displaced Persons in the enclave would be aggravated and the Displaced Persons would be the first to suffer hunger. Their despair and fury would then be vented on the UN and the Bosnian government could try to make political capital out of this.

Consultation with the higher levels in Sarajevo and Zagreb would remain necessary. Sector North East realized that resupply by air would be complicated, which was why the opportunities for resuming resupply by road had to be explored. One snag was that this would necessitate negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs to persuade them to let convoys through. An offer of humanitarian aid to hospitals in Bosnian Serb territory (in Zvornik and Bratunac), which were also in dire need of supplies, might possibly win the Bosnian Serbs over. Earlier, the 'fuel for passage' concept had worked well in Sarajevo. Other possible bargaining counters were supplies of salt, repairing a road at Bratunac and an agreement about the use of the southern road past Srebrenica. While awaiting further events, the Staff in Tuzla already started to work out a negotiating plan with the Bosnian Serb General Zivanovic, the commander of the Drina Corps.⁸

³ MARSTAF, No. S30859. Memo CDS to BDZ, BLS, BDL, CKMAR, 10[?]/01/95, No. S95/061/116.

⁴ DCBC, 1681. 'Working Group on an Emergency Re-Supply Plan for Sarajevo and the Enclaves', Draft, Confi, undated [12/94].

⁵ DS, S95/061/196. Appendix 2 (Code Biegman 020, 10/01/95) to memo DS No. S95/061/196, 13/01/95.

⁶ DS, S95/061/196. Appendix 2 (Code Biegman 020, 10/01/95) to memo DS No. S95/061/196, 13/01/95.

⁷ DS, No. SN 95/890/399. Chief of Defence Staff Field Marshall Sir Peter Inge to General H.G.B. van den Breemen, 09/01/95, Archive.

⁸ UNGE, UNPROFOR Box 193, File SNE Tuzla, 23/05/95-15/10/95. HQ Sector NE to HQ BHC, 07/12/94 No. 3402-1.

The Staff of Sector North East arrived at four resupply options, each of which had its own complications. These illustrate why resupply by air turned out to be not so simple in practice.

The first possibility was air drops. Air drops had already been used with a reasonable degree of success to provide humanitarian aid, but fuel had not been dropped before and it was uncertain whether this was possible. Before air drops could be carried out, several problems remained to be resolved. One of these concerned the altitude from which the drops should take place. Low altitude had the advantage of greater accuracy (Dutchbat II had been in favour of this for that reason) but entailed the disadvantage of exposing the aircraft to the Bosnian Serb air defences (which was why AFSOUTH, NATO southern command, was against this option)⁹. The higher the altitude, the less accurate the drops would be, thereby also increasing the risk of Dutchbat coming into conflict with the population or the local mafia in their efforts to secure the supplies.

A second option was the use of transport helicopters. The main problem with this option was that UNPROFOR had no such helicopters at its disposal and would therefore have to rely on an individual country to provide these. It was by no means certain that any country would be found willing to do this. And even if helicopters were made available, there were still restrictions attached to their use. The visibility, for instance, would have to be good enough. Moreover, from a geographical perspective the Srebrenica enclave offered few landing opportunities for larger helicopters. Another drawback was that the helicopters would not be able to transport large quantities of fuel. Finally, here too, there was the problem that the Bosnian Serbs might not be automatically willing to accept such transports, for the same reason that they refused to allow convoys by road. This could be solved by bypassing the customary practice of informing the Bosnian Serbs in advance and letting them inspect the cargo, but in that case active protection from NATO aircraft would be required (involving the use of flying radar stations - AWACS – and fighters to provide Close Air Support and suppress air defences). Whether NATO would be prepared to risk aircraft for this purpose remained to be seen.

A third option was to force a breakthrough by road from Tuzla with support from the air. Tanks, armoured vehicles, mine disposal teams and Forward Air Controllers (to guide the pilots to their target) would be necessary in this case. The Scandinavian units in Tuzla had these resources but whether their governments would be prepared to authorize their deployment was by no means certain. Moreover, active support from NATO would again be necessary. Another problem was that the Dutchbat troops could be taken hostage relatively easily. The presence of the media could be harnessed as an extra weapon. The prevailing idea at Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo was that firmness and resolution had to be shown to put the Bosnian Serbs in their place. According to the UN command in Sarajevo, this operation was compatible with the existing Rules of Engagement.

A fourth option was not to resupply by air but to organize an overland supply route through Serbia via the bridge over the Drina at Bratunac. Dutchbat would then have to secure and protect the route to Srebrenica but this option was hardly realistic in view of the expected conflicts with the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁰

3. Earlier problems with resupply by air

'Resupply by air' was also on the agenda of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UNHCR. This organization had already requested resupply by air in October 1994 for the Safe Area of Bihac. Then too, the main problem was that Admiral Leighton Smith was unwilling to approve the deployment of NATO aircraft as these would be exposed to surface-to-air missiles of Bosnian Serbs around Bihac. Food drops could only go ahead if escorting aircraft were allowed to suppress the air defences. And NATO was only permitted to suppress air defences upon a request from the UN in

⁹ DS. Memo CDS to the Minister, 23/12/94, No. S/94/061/4497.

¹⁰ UNGE, UNPROFOR Box 193, File SNE Tuzla, 23/05/95-15/10/95. Chief G2/G3 to Chief G3 HQ BHC, Srebrenica – Options, 04/12/94, No. SREB009.

New York. The UN, however, was not prepared to make such a request for fear of escalation and retaliation on the ground if NATO aircraft were detected by Bosnian Serb radar and immediately responded with strikes against Bosnian Serb positions.¹¹ This was by no means the only time that support would be sought from the UN in New York to enable resupply by air.

In February 1995 the situation in Bihac was once again at the centre of attention.¹² The Netherlands also played a role in the question as to whether air drops should be carried out over Bihac after UNHCR had reported that an emergency situation had arisen and had made an urgent appeal to the Western countries for assistance. Minister Voorhoeve mooted the idea that the NATO countries involved should inform the warring factions that drops were to be carried out on a particular day. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed the Permanent Representatives at NATO and the UN to gauge the level of support within the UN for authorizing such air drops. One practical point was that virtually all aircraft to be deployed in this mission were American.¹³ (The C-130 aircraft that the Dutch had recently acquired were not yet operational.) The Americans would only be prepared to carry out such an operation according to their own rules and these conflicted with the existing procedures under which the UN and NATO carried the joint responsibility for such operations.

A further complicating factor was that four parties were involved in the hostilities in Bihac; if any aircraft came under fire, it would be difficult to establish which party was to blame. And there was the problem already touched upon in relation to air drops: the aircraft would have to fly at very low altitude because the dropping zones in Bihac were very small.¹⁴

In the specific case of Bihac other concerns cropped up later and ultimately resupply by air never took place. The Croatian President Tudjman had announced that the UNPROFOR mandate in Croatia would not be extended after 31 March 1995. This decision could also have negative consequences for Bosnia-Herzegovina. On top of this, the truce in Bosnia was due to expire at the end of April and the US Congress was in the process of determining its standpoint concerning the arms embargo against Bosnia.¹⁵ All these matters could re-ignite the hostilities and put a further damper on the plans to resupply by air.

Until 18 February 1995 the Bosnian Serbs had allowed Dutchbat to receive fuel supplies with intervals of about one week. Thereafter, they regulated the supplies either by blocking convoys or by means of bureaucratic obstructionism: permission for a convoy had to be requested 48 hours in advance. If the Bosnian Serbs refused to honour the request, the procedure had to be started up again. It was not possible to request permission for several days.¹⁶ The problems afflicting UNPROFOR supplies concerned all eastern enclaves incidentally.

UNHCR convoys with food and fuel for the population were intermittently allowed through by the Bosnian Serbs but fuel convoys for UNPROFOR were systematically blocked. Dutchbat later benefited from the fuel brought in by the UNHCR convoys: in March General Smith agreed with the UNHCR that UNPROFOR could make use of (38m³ of) the UNHCR fuel supplies stored in the eastern enclaves if their own supplies ran out. Commanders and local UNHCR representatives were to work out the details amongst themselves. This agreement was not to be made public and was only intended to cover UNPROFOR's minimum needs. Smith wanted to leave the Bosnian Serbs under the delusion that their 'sanctions' were having effect.¹⁷

The possibility of smuggling in supplies when leave-takers returned to the enclave was rejected by the Chief of Defence Staff. It would only have a counterproductive effect. After all, if the Bosnian

¹¹ DCBC, 377. Memo PCDS to the Minister, 10/02/95, No. S/95/061/598.

¹² For plans for helicopter operations in Bihac, see the OP Order 36/94 (UNNY, UNPROFOR Box 87295, Office of the FC, 30/10/95-25/10/95) signed General de Lapresle on 11/02/95.

¹³ This applied to all aircraft whose task was the *Suppression of Enemy Air Defences* (SEAD) as well as the transport aircraft.

¹⁴ DCBC, 383. Memo CDS to the Minister, 16/02095, No. S/95/061/696.

¹⁵ TK, 1994-1995, 22 181, No. 90 (10/02/95).

¹⁶ DCBC, 402. Memo CDS to the Minister, 08/03/95, No. S/95/061/1013.

¹⁷ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander BHC Directive 1/95, 15/03/95. Confi.

Serbs found out they might also start blocking convoys of leave-takers.¹⁸ As it happened, the Bosnian Serbs were to do this anyway at a later stage.

Medical supplies presented a big problem. Efforts on the part of UNHCR to send medical supplies along with the convoys failed. The International Red Cross and *Médecins Sans Frontières* deliberated on how to tackle the situation in the eastern enclaves. This problem was also discussed only sporadically and only after the exertion of considerable pressure. This pressure was brought to bear when the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Yasushi Akashi, took an interest in the problem. He sent the President of the Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic, a letter outlining the serious shortage of medical supplies in the eastern enclaves. Since November 1994 supplies had been consistently refused and after 19 January blockades had been thrown up to stop most medical convoys. Akashi pointed out to Karadzic that under Resolution 771 (from 1992) all parties were bound to comply with the Geneva Conventions. He made an urgent appeal to Karadzic to issue instructions in order to permit the resumption of medical re-supplies. Failing this, Akashi would find himself compelled to put the matter to the Security Council.¹⁹ Following this pressure from UNPROFOR, a UNHCR convoy which included medical supplies was allowed through by the Bosnian Serbs on 5 March.²⁰

Karremans meanwhile expressed his concerns to the Commander of Sector North East in Tuzla. He requested air drops unless the situation improved. Air drops remained an option, but not much more than that. The stumbling block was still that NATO wanted to knock out the Bosnian Serb air defences first (which obviously entailed substantial risks).²¹ And, as before in the case of Bihac, there was the added problem that NATO felt it needed the UN's political support for such an operation. Within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN, the alternative of high-altitude air drops had been mentioned but soon dismissed on account of the rough terrain, the small area in which the supplies were to be dropped and the fear that dropped supplies might fall into the wrong hands. In addition, the UN also feared that such operations might infuriate the Bosnian Serbs and cause the existing contacts with the VRS (Bosnian Serb Army) to be broken off.²²

4. Sarajevo intervenes

In Sarajevo the Commander of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command, Lieutenant General R.A. Smith (not to be confused with the commander of the southern NATO command, CINCSOUTH Admiral Leighton Smith), played an active role in the efforts to restart the flow of supplies. When Smith met Mladic upon the latter's invitation on 5 March in Pale, the discussion largely revolved around the problem of resupplying the enclaves.

Mladic, for his part, complained about the sanctions imposed on the Bosnian Serbs. He tried to elicit a condemnation of the sanctions from Smith and asked him to have a report drawn up by the humanitarian organizations. His aim in this connection was to secure an equal distribution of the aid between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs. Mladic demanded - and was to do so repeatedly - that for every UNHCR convoy that went to the enclaves, one convoy would go to the Bosnian Serbs. Mladic also suggested that UNPROFOR would buy supplies for its own use in Bosnian Serb territory. Unless his demands were met by 15 March, he would impose blockades against all enclaves. Another suggestion made by Mladic was that Smith would make sure that each convoy would include two vehicles with fuel and that Smith would allow Mladic to have one of these. The meeting produced no

¹⁸ DCBC, 405. Memo CDS to the Minister, 09/03/95, No. S95/061/1034.

¹⁹ UNGE, UNHCR, Bijleveld files. Code Cable Annan to Gharakan, 04/03/95, No. Z-359.

²⁰ DCBC, 402. Memo CDS to the Minister, 08/03/95, No. S/95/061/1013.

²¹ UNHCR Briefing 01/03/95. From private source.

²² Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

tangible result other than an arrangement to meet again on 7 March in Vlasenica after Smith had returned from a visit to Srebrenica.²³

This second meeting on 7 March was largely a repeat of the meeting in Pale two days earlier. Mladic made no further mention of sanctions or the deadline for meeting the Bosnian Serb demands, but he did explain that the reason for not allowing any future convoys through was that he was expecting the military forces of the ABiH (the army of the Bosnian Muslims) to launch an attack from Tuzla in the direction of Srebrenica and Zepa and from Trnovo in the direction of Gorazde in an attempt to create a corridor to the eastern enclaves. Fears of such an attack had made him decide to restrict the amount of food, medicines and fuel going to the enclaves.²⁴ More in general, the obstruction of the convoys remained a Bosnian Serb reaction to the economic sanctions and the closure of the border between Serbia and the Republika Srpska.²⁵

Smith was fully aware of the seriousness of the supply problem during these talks. He knew that Dutchbat and *Médecins Sans Frontières* had run out of supplies. Smith was determined to resupply the enclaves by air if overland convoys were not allowed through. He informed Mladic of his intention.²⁶ Smith was not bluffing either; he emphatically wanted to put himself on the map as the UN commander in Bosnia, and this was his first opportunity. During his meeting with Mladic on 5 March he had already said that a blockade of the Bosnian Serbs would result in resupply by helicopter with NATO involvement. Mladic was in a position to know that preparations had been made and that the plans had been rehearsed on 4 and 5 March. The helicopters were ready for action at Split airport.²⁷ Smith's plan was to use Ukrainian civilian Mi-26 transport helicopters supported by British Lynx Helicopters armed with anti-tank missiles. Transport helicopters alone would not be sufficient; other helicopters were necessary to protect the transportation. Smith had planned the safety measures surrounding the operation in consultation with the Staff of the NATO's Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force (5ATAF) in Vincenza.²⁸ One positive factor in this operation was that the threat of the radar-guided air defences of the Bosnian Serbs posed no real problem in the mountainous area between Tuzla and Srebrenica.²⁹

The governments of the United Kingdom, Norway and France, which were to provide the helicopters for the operation, had agreed. Smith had discussed the matter in person with the British Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Peter Inge, who had given him the green light as far as the use of British military resources was concerned.³⁰ Because a convoy had been let through on 5 March (also after Smith had exerted pressure on Mladic, and Akashi on Karadzic), the need for resupply by air had become a little less urgent, but the pressure would soon build up again if no further convoys were allowed through. Smith was in the advanced stages of setting up a resupply operation by air but had not yet obtained permission from New York. Within the UN hierarchy, it was the responsibility of the headquarters in Zagreb to pass that request on to New York.

As things turned out, obtaining permission from New York for a resupply operation with helicopters as envisaged by Smith was a problem. Minister Voorhoeve found this out for himself when he, together with Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen, spoke with Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan on 17 March in New York. On that occasion Voorhoeve requested that Dutchbat be resupplied

²³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan 06/03/95, No. Z-363, with attached notes of a meeting held between Gen Smith and Gen Mladic, 06/03/95, Ref. 8594.

²⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 08/03/95, No. Z-377, with attached Summary Meeting Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 07/03/95, Ref 8594. This account outlining Mladic's intentions reached the Netherlands with Fax BHC Fwd Sarajevo to DOKL09/03/95, Outgoing fax 122/95. UNGE, UNPROFOR Box 215, File BHC95 07/03/95-14/03/95

²⁵ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander BHC Directive 1/95, 15/03/95, Confi.

²⁶ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

²⁷ See also Ripley, *Operation Deliberate Force*, p. 48.

²⁸ DCBC, 405. Memo CDS to the Minister, 09/03/95, No. S95/061/1034.

²⁹ See also Ripley, *Operation Deliberate Force*, p. 48.

³⁰ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00

with the aid of helicopters, with an armed air escort if necessary. This was precisely what Smith was organizing at the time. Kofi Annan's response was that this option 'would be actively pursued'. The military adviser to the UN Secretary-General, the Canadian General Baril, added that this concept – discussed in December during the first conference of Chiefs of Defence Staff in The Hague – was still being emphatically considered.³¹ These were reassuring and optimistic noises from the UN top, which however would never come to anything.

Encouraged by his visit to New York, Voorhoeve reassured Parliament that if the food supplies to the Dutch soldiers were in danger, then air drops or helicopter flights would be carried out, either with or without permission from the Bosnian Serbs.³² But, as it later transpired, it was really impossible to make this claim with such certainty at the time. Plans for air drops had not yet been worked out in detail in early March, the main problem still being that the lack of precision of these air drops meant that the supplies might end up in the hands of the Muslim population instead of reaching the units. That would be very hard to swallow for the Bosnian Serbs who might then use their air defences against the aircraft or helicopters to prevent any further drops. This, in turn, could trigger an air war aimed at the destruction of the Bosnian Serb air defences.³³

Meanwhile Smith stuck to his plan to deploy helicopters if the Bosnian Serbs continued to deny UNPROFOR access to supplies by land. This resupply by air would be announced beforehand and also in the media. Smith deliberately wanted to manoeuvre the VRS into a position where they would be challenged to use force. Smith had prepared plans for resupply using helicopters with NATO air support. The concept needed to be perfected further but what it also needed, above all, was the support of the will of the international community to carry it out.³⁴

Smith saw a comparison with the airlift to Berlin in 1948. His prime concern was to give a convincing display of willpower, and to demonstrate that if the VRS refused permission to fly over Bosnian Serb territory, then the flights would take place without their permission. The VRS and Mladic in particular were to be taken down a peg or two, but without provoking war and jeopardising the mission. It had to be made clear to the VRS that there was a credible capability to resupply the enclave, and Smith wanted to use this to his advantage in the negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs. The execution of the operation had to be timed to perfection, which could mean the enclaves suffering temporary shortages. That too was a test of national and international willpower. Smith had even taken into account that if the VRS succumbed to this pressure and allowed overland convoys after all, it might have one of these convoys ambushed and robbed by its own 'bandits' to test the strength of the national and international willpower.

Smith subsequently wanted the plans to be worked out in greater detail, but in view of the nature of the operation he felt that this was really a task for the UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb. He had discussed the outlines of his plan with General Janvier, and had entrusted the further detailing to the Chief of Staff in Zagreb, Brigadier General Denaro.³⁵

At the end of March Smith spoke both with the UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb and with the NATO Staff of AFSOUTH in Naples about the issue of resupplying the eastern enclaves. From these talks it emerged that General Janvier had certain reservations. Janvier did not want a resupply operation to be exclusively left to Sarajevo, but actually thought it was mainly Zagreb's affair. Furthermore, he did not yet see eye to eye with Smith as regards the possibilities for carrying out such an operation. Janvier foresaw a conflict with the Rules of Engagement and therefore concluded that any decision on deployment should be taken at the highest level: by the UN in New York.³⁶

³¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 17/03/95, No. 879.

³² TK, 1994-1995, 22 181, No. 92 (23/03/95).

³³ DCBC, 405. Memo CDS to the Minister, 09/03/95, No. S95/061/1034.

³⁴ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Commander BHC Directive 1/95, 15/03/95. Confi.

³⁵ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Smith to COS HQ UNPROFOR, Brig Gen Denaro, 15/03/95, Confi.

³⁶ NIOD, Coll. De Ruiter. Diary of Lieutenant Colonel De Ruiter, 31/03/95.

At the same time Smith forged ahead with the organization of a resupply operation by air. His preference was for a daytime operation, which was possibly less safe but technically less complicated. A daytime operation would also make it easier to establish who had fired on the helicopters if there were any shooting incidents. Meanwhile Smith continued to lobby for three heavy-duty Chinook transport helicopters at the British headquarters for operations in the former Yugoslavia (the *Joint Headquarters* in Salisbury). Fall-back options also formed part of his plans: if the Chinook helicopters were not released, Smith still wanted to press ahead with the execution of his plan. The French were now considering sending four extra Puma transport helicopters. Smith emphasized to the British national headquarters that – judging by his earlier experiences with Mladic - the threat of resupply by air might already be sufficient to obtain some freedom of movement and it was this freedom of movement that it was all about: as soon as that was guaranteed, there was no further need to deploy helicopters as resupply operations could then be resumed by road.

Smith also stressed that in view of the seriousness of the situation, there was ample reason to proceed with the operation without delay. He also underlined that this was not to be a one-off operation. The UN, NATO and the participating countries had to be prepared to sustain the operation over a longer period of time. The troop-contributing nations had not yet been approached about the plans of the operation that Smith had planned for early March (but which was not necessary because a convoy was allowed through after all). The United Kingdom, France and Norway had expressed their willingness to take part in the operation. The Norwegians did insist that any subsequent operation could only take place with full NATO support; so far, Smith had only had informal contact with that organization. Smith had gathered from these contacts that NATO embraced his concept wholeheartedly, but as yet no formal requests had been made to NATO, which had therefore not yet formally agreed to the operation.³⁷

5. Smith seeks permission at top level

Meanwhile, however, it had become clear that NATO's thoughts about the operation were actually different from those of General Smith. His namesake at NATO, Admiral Smith, was eager to ensure that the NATO aircraft ran as little risk as possible and therefore insisted on pre-emptive strikes to suppress the air defences of the VRS. General Smith saw no need for this, arguing that the Bosnian Serbs would consider this a hostile act.

Smith had in the meantime informed the British headquarters that Janvier had agreed 'in principle' to the plans but had not yet approached Akashi about the matter. Smith's expectation however was that Akashi would support the plans provided that the troop-contributing nations also endorsed the operation. He emphasized, however, that the UN headquarters in New York would also have to support the operation.³⁸

General Janvier, for his part, was trying to form a clear idea as to whether the operation as envisaged by Smith stood any chance of success. Janvier asked the UN in New York to arrange with the British that they would provide the Chinook helicopters, as Smith had in fact already requested. Janvier pointed out that the British had already offered these helicopters during the meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff at The Hague in December 1994. At the time, the UN had contracted two Ukrainian civilian Mi-26 transport helicopters, but UNPROFOR could not do much with these.

At the same time Janvier explained to New York that it would be ideal to have the Bosnian Serbs' permission for the flights but that in an emergency it would possibly be sufficient to merely give the Bosnian Serbs notification of the flights.³⁹ The UN headquarters in New York replied that the British were indeed prepared to send Chinook helicopters immediately if this was necessary.⁴⁰

³⁷ CRST. HQ BH Command to JHQ Salisbury, 312030B Mar 95, UN Conf.

³⁸ CRST. HQ BH Command to JHQ Salisbury, 312030B Mar 95, UN Conf.

³⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan for Baril, 21/03/95, No. Z-455.

⁴⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Baril to Akashi, 29/03/95, No. 987.

Smith also spoke to the visiting Dutch Chief of Defence Staff, Van den Breemen, about his plans for resupplying by helicopter. According to Smith, the plan might become topical 'sooner' than expected on account of all sorts of strategic developments. Van den Breemen took measures: he asked Battalion Commander Karremans to give his criteria for determining when the aerial resupply plan should be activated. Van den Breemen also realized that the Netherlands needed to make a timely decision about its standpoint in the international context concerning the question when the plan should be put into effect.⁴¹

On 4 April Smith again discussed his plan with the staff in Zagreb. This sparked a conflict between Smith and Janvier 'about being forceful' in relation to the deployment of helicopters and the air force for resupplying the enclaves. According to Smith it was the only time that Janvier and he had really disagreed. Smith asserted that at a certain point the 'young firebrands' in Zagreb even turned against Janvier because they agreed with Smith: force had to be used. Janvier was opposed to this.⁴²

When he presented the strategic situation in Bosnia to Janvier and Akashi, Smith argued that there were four options for tackling the deteriorating logistical situation in the enclaves. The first option was: agree to the Bosnian Serbs' demand that they should get half of the humanitarian aid. The second option was to fight a way into the enclaves with a convoy. Both these options however fell outside his mandate: it was the UNHCR and not Smith who was to decide where food and medical supplies should go. For this reason, Smith was not free to consider these options. The third option was to continue negotiating with the Bosnian Serbs and accept that UNPROFOR had been taken hostage in the eastern enclaves, which would mean that UNPROFOR was no longer effective there. The fourth and last option was Smith's 'helicopter plan'. This required transport helicopters and helicopters to provide protection, while NATO aircraft would be kept in reserve in case the Bosnian Serbs were to fire at the helicopters. If this option was accepted, Smith wanted absolute assurances that the helicopter-contributing nations accepted the risk of losing these helicopters; that these countries were prepared to support NATO air strikes if necessary; and that they were prepared to accept a widening of the conflict. If any of these three conditions was not satisfied, Smith would abandon this option.⁴³

6. Plans are refined further in Zagreb

Janvier's staff in Zagreb subsequently worked out Smith's plans in greater detail. The detailed plan was unveiled on 9 April. In Zagreb too resupply by helicopter was preferred to air drops. The latter option was no longer considered.

The plan to resupply by helicopter was intended for the three eastern enclaves: Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde. One essential thing, incidentally, was to give advance warning to the VRS (and also the Bosnian Muslim Army for that matter) that any attack on the helicopters could result in an armed conflict with NATO. UNPROFOR was to carry out the plan with determination and be prepared to accept losses. The condition that the troop- and helicopter-contributing nations had to endorse the plan was reiterated. NATO was capable of suppressing the radar-guided air defences of the VRS, but the biggest threat came from heat-seeking missiles, anti-aircraft artillery and gun fire. These risks could be reduced by carrying out the operation by night, which Smith had opposed.

The involvement of land forces was indispensable, even if only to take action in the event of incidents or to protect helicopters on the ground. The endurance of the helicopters entailed that the operation had to be launched from Central Bosnia from where an enclave could be reached, via a corridor, with NATO aircraft and armed helicopters escorting the transport helicopters. Such protection was a minimum condition for winning the consent of the troop-contributing nations. The best way of implementing the plan depended on how the VRS reacted to a request for permission to

⁴¹ CRST, CRST/2191. Travel report CDS visit to the former Yugoslavia [31 March – 4 April 1995], without number.

⁴² Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/00.

⁴³ NIOD, Coll. Smith. BHC Situation Report signed Lt Gen R.A. Smith, 05/04/95.

carry out these helicopter flights. The VRS would undoubtedly refuse permission, but the reaction of the VRS when they were subsequently told in reply that the flights would be carried out anyway was by no means certain. They might threaten to attack the helicopters, but they might also ‘merely’ answer that the safety of the flights could not be guaranteed.⁴⁴

The deployment of armed UN helicopters to protect the transport helicopters was a particular problem. It was not certain that the risks to the transport helicopters warranted the use of armed helicopters, while the deployment of armed helicopters might endanger routine helicopter flights. This risk had to be set off against the short-term gain of supplying the eastern enclaves.

The plan was that the Mi-26 helicopters would supply Srebrenica and Gorazde simultaneously. Smaller helicopters would then be able to resupply the smaller garrison in Zepa. An Mi-26 helicopter could carry a maximum load of twenty tons from Central Bosnia, but a load of ten tons would increase the flying range and permit the use of other starting points and corridors.

An alternative plan would have to be followed if the VRS posed a significant threat: in that case the Mi-26 helicopters could not be used and the operation would have to be carried out with military transport helicopters such as the French Puma and the British Seaking. These would then need to be escorted by armed helicopters: the Lynx, Gazelle and Arapaho. The drawback of these military transport helicopters was that their smaller capacity necessitated the additional deployment of the earlier-mentioned British Chinook transport helicopters, particularly if the operation was to be sustained for an extended period of time.

If the Bosnian Serbs attacked the helicopters, a rapid reaction would be essential. The authority to deploy Close Air Support therefore had to be transferred to the Commander of UNPROFOR in Sarajevo, General Smith. In that case the NATO aircraft would interpret the right to self-defence in a broad sense. From a safety point of view it would be wiser to eliminate the air defences of the VRS beforehand, but this option did not seem viable as it contravened one of the principles of the operation, namely that the VRS would only be attacked if it dealt the first blow.⁴⁵ As for the further discussions about the decision-making surrounding the deployment of NATO’s Air Force, reference is made to Chapter 3, Part III.

7. What will the VRS do?

The detailed plan for a resupply operation by air was signed by General Janvier on 9 April. Certain complications remained on account of the uncertainties regarding the reaction of the VRS. For if the operation went ahead, the VRS could carry out all sorts of counteractions. For this reason, a long list of foreseeable reactions of the VRS was attached to the plan. It was however also conceivable that the VRS would not dare to take any action against the helicopters for fear of NATO intervention. But it did seem likely that the longer the resupply operation by air lasted, the more aggressive the Bosnian Serb reaction would become.

Remarkably, NATO’s reaction was evidently also still an uncertain factor for Janvier: in his view, there was a serious possibility that NATO would refrain from action if the VRS fired on the transport helicopters; after all, the actions of the VRS against the aircraft maintaining the airlift with Sarajevo had also gone unpunished by NATO. Another alternative was that the helicopters might not come under fire from the VRS as such but from individual soldiers or – if their situation deteriorated – units of the VRS.

It was also possible that the VRS might react to the resupply operation by firing on the population of the enclaves or that VRS snipers would target civilians working at the supply centres in an effort to hinder the resupply process. It was less likely that the landing sites of the helicopters would come under fire as the VRS would realize that this would provoke an immediate reaction from NATO.

⁴⁴ CRST. Helicopter resupply of the Eastern Enclaves, 09/04/95, No. COS 3070 (signed Lieutenant General B. Janvier).

⁴⁵ CRST. Helicopter resupply of the Eastern Enclaves, 09/04/95, No. COS 3070 (signed Lieutenant General B. Janvier).

A further danger was that the resupply of the eastern enclaves could lead to a military reaction in Sarajevo: the VRS could step up the pressure on Sarajevo to such an extent that the Bosnian government would be forced to call a halt to the resupply by air of the eastern enclaves. In the worst case, the airlift to Sarajevo could even fall victim to the operation. The resupply operation could also cause the VRS to question the neutrality of UNPROFOR and consequently to boycott all ceasefire negotiations.

Furthermore, the VRS might feel compelled to break the military resistance of the ABiH from the enclaves or even to capture the enclaves if they interpreted the supply activities as a contribution towards the Bosnian Muslim war effort. Attacks of the VRS on the enclaves might provoke intervention by NATO or UNPROFOR, but that would be an acceptable risk for the VRS if it basically already wanted to release military resources around the enclaves for redeployment in the west of Bosnia (as was to prove all too true in July 1995).

If the VRS were to gain the impression that UNPROFOR was indirectly supplying the ABiH, it might decide to restrict UNPROFOR's freedom of movement in the entire mission area. This could involve the hijacking of UNPROFOR vehicles on the grounds that UNPROFOR had become a party to the conflict and was therefore no longer a peace-keeping unit. They could even use this as a pretext for retrieving heavy weapons from the Heavy Weapon Collection Points.⁴⁶

General Janvier presented his plan to Kofi Annan, noting that it had been drawn up with the Air Planning Staff of NATO, but that further detailing was still necessary. Janvier asked the UN headquarters in New York to approach representatives of the potential helicopter-contributing nations (France, Norway and the United Kingdom) and to request their support for the plan.

Janvier also pointed out that once the execution of the plan had been set in motion, it had to be brought to a successful conclusion. Everyone was to be aware of the consequences for the mission if the plan failed.⁴⁷

8. The ball in New York's court: the UN ponders the options

From New York, Kofi Annan reported to Akashi that the options were being carefully studied in New York. However, in view of the implications of the plan, the UN headquarters wanted to know exactly how serious the supply situation was. They consequently needed a clear overview of that situation. According to the situation reports several convoys had got through by land, though none of these carried fuel supplies. Information from UNHCR suggested that the humanitarian aid situation was really not as bad as suggested: 75% of the required aid was covered. New York had however heard reports that the British in Gorazde had started to use mules in order to save fuel.⁴⁸

Janvier subsequently took a cautious stance. He had no objection to New York approaching the British representative at the UN with the request to keep three British Chinook helicopters ready for action within three days, but he didn't want to go any further than that. If the plan went ahead and the helicopters were moved to Central Bosnia, then in Janvier's eyes that was not just a military measure but also a powerful political signal. In his view, such a step was not merely a technical measure but a 'major command decision'. First of all, New York needed to secure a commitment from the countries supplying the helicopters. They would have to accept the risks involved and not distance themselves from the operation at any time. As a first step in this direction, New York had to give its formal approval to the operational concept.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ CRST. Annex A to UNPF-HQ 3070, dated [9] April 1995.

⁴⁷ DCBC, 441. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 11/04/95, No. Z-581.

⁴⁸ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves 17/04/95-11/07/95. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 17/04/95, No. MSC-1205.

⁴⁹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95-11/07/95. Note Col F. Bureau [MA to FC] to DFC, COS, 17/04/95.

But New York was not yet ready to approve resupply operation by air; UN headquarters still saw quite a few obstacles that needed to be overcome. First of all, Annan wanted to know why the VRS was obstructing the normal UNPROFOR convoys. Was there no longer any dialogue with the VRS?⁵⁰ Janvier replied that the plan to resupply by air was merely the consequence of the VRS's intransigence and their persistent refusal to allow convoys through to Sarajevo and the three eastern enclaves. All three were without fuel although Smith had arranged for the use of 38 m³ of UNHCR's diesel.⁵¹

Talks with the Bosnian Serbs about the urgency of the supply situation were still taking place incidentally: Akashi and Smith raised the issue with Karadzic. His reply was that the clearances for letting a UNPROFOR convoy through were denied because of irregularities in the paperwork (the convoy manifests). Smith doubted this as Mladic had cited a different reason to him, namely that the rejection was a retaliation for the measures imposed on the Bosnian Serbs. The problem was to be discussed further between the military people, so Smith said; in this way he hoped to drive a wedge between Mladic and Karadzic.⁵²

From the UN headquarters in New York, Director of Communications and Special Projects Sashi Tharoor also wondered whether the Bosnian Serbs were following a strategy 'to squeeze UNPROFOR out of the enclaves'? Had the UN headquarters in Zagreb studied the possibility of (reinforced) convoys by land? Tharoor pointed out that plans for such reinforced convoys had been made earlier, namely when Dutchbat relieved the Canadians in Srebrenica.

What struck New York as a particular problem was that such a complex operation as resupply by air with helicopters was not necessarily compatible with the applicable arrangements governing requests for NATO support. As this was an entirely new operation, political permission would have to be requested from the separate countries within NATO, and that meant going back to the North Atlantic Council. New York appeared to be uncertain about whether the North Atlantic Council should be involved; remarkably enough, New York instructed Zagreb to find out through military channels whether this was a matter for the North Atlantic Council. Moreover the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN was to keep the UN Security Council informed of such plans. After all, if the operation failed, this would mean the end of UNPROFOR. The UN also foresaw problems in relation to the leadership of such a complicated operation which, so it claimed, went beyond the capabilities of UNPROFOR. On the other hand, New York also believed that it would be difficult to justify placing the leadership of the operation in NATO's hands.⁵³

New York did continue to actively seek the support of the national governments of the countries that were to supply the helicopters. The representatives of France, the United Kingdom and Norway had been asked to consult their governments about the use of their helicopters.

The British wanted the planning to continue though they saw no need for resupply by air as yet. First, further attempts needed to be made to get supplies through by road. The UN was only permitted to embark on such an operation if there was really no alternative. It was to be a UN operation with NATO in a supporting role. The operation was to be in accordance with the neutrality concept of UNPROFOR: force was only to be used in self-defence. London was only prepared to take part in an operation if it was clear that the French were willing to participate. It had to be made clear to the parties involved that military intervention in such an operation would meet with a military response.

During Anglo-French military talks, the French supported the plan to resupply the enclaves by helicopter and were prepared to participate with twelve helicopters. Apart from that, the French were more concerned about the prospect of a VRS attack on the enclaves and on Sarajevo. The British replied, however, that there were no indications that the VRS was preparing to attack the enclaves.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 18/04/95, No. MSC-1218.

⁵¹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95-11/07/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 18/04/95, No. Z-613.

⁵² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 22/04/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-644.

⁵³ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 18/04/95, No. MSC-1218.

⁵⁴ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

9. Between Sarajevo, Zagreb and New York: can the operation go ahead?

Meanwhile General Smith, still unperturbed, took the bull by the horns in Sarajevo. On 18 April he issued a warning order. His plan was to assemble three packages of helicopters, one for each of the eastern enclaves. At his disposal were two Mi-26, three Chinook and four Puma transport helicopters. The available Seaking, armed Arapaho, Lynx and Gazelle helicopters were intended for Command and Control, troop transportation, an armed escort and the evacuation of the wounded.

The plan was to get as much fuel as possible into the enclaves in a single day. In view of the distance from Split to the enclaves it meant that only two trips could be made. Whether the resupply operation needed to be continued until supplies had been replenished to a certain level depended on the situation.

Earlier the other helicopters had already been stationed at various bases in the UNPROFOR Sector South West. The Mi-26 helicopters were to be loaded in Split and after refuelling in Tomislavgrad would subsequently fly with the other helicopters via Kiseljak to an area to the north and east of Sarajevo. From there, they would fly along corridors to Srebrenica and Zepa, on the one hand, and Gorazde on the other. Apart from fuel, the commanders of the various sectors in Bosnia could set priorities for other critical items, such as medical supplies and communication equipment.⁵⁵ Akashi had been briefed on the plan.⁵⁶

Meanwhile Zagreb replied to the questions asked from New York. The use of a reinforced land convoy had not been considered; that would have meant fighting a way into the enclaves, which was not desirable. Moreover, UNPROFOR did not even have the equipment required for such an action. Another factor was that the local terrain made it easy for the VRS to cut off the routes to the enclaves. Also relevant was the fact that NATO Admiral Leighton Smith had said that it was not necessary to request NATO's permission for the operation; existing arrangements were sufficient in his view. According to him, Bosnia-Herzegovina Command in Sarajevo had the necessary means to lead the operation and the commander on the ground was the most appropriate person to be put in charge. An arrangement for the command and control relationship was still being worked out with NATO.

In reply to the question why the VRS were blocking the overland supplies, New York was told that General Mladic had already informed General Smith on 5 March of his intention to impose sanctions against UNPROFOR. Mladic claimed this was in response to the sanctions that the international community had introduced against the Bosnian Serbs. The sanctions of the Bosnian Serbs, so the reply continued, were primarily aimed at impeding fuel resupplies. On several occasions the VRS had offered to allow fuel through, provided that UNPROFOR surrendered half to the VRS. UNPROFOR never took this offer up. They saw it as clear proof that the sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs were beginning to have an effect. Smith, so Janvier said, considered the continuation of this sanctions policy as a matter of the utmost importance, even if it meant that no further fuel would reach the enclaves.⁵⁷

According to the Chief of Land Operations (known in military terms as the G3 Land Ops) in Zagreb, Colonel De Jonge, a decision on the resupply operation by air was to be taken on 19 April. The biggest fear was still a negative attitude of the VRS towards Dutchbat, which might possibly be expressed in the actions mentioned earlier.⁵⁸

But the Chief of Land Operations in Zagreb had been too optimistic about the decision date. New York was still not willing to give the operation the green light. No consultation had taken place

⁵⁵ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 246, File 2200-2 AVN General 10/08/95-04/10/95. HQ BHC FWD, Warning Order 005/95, 181500B Apr95, No. G3 Ops 3217.

⁵⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 246, File 2200-2 AVN General 10/08/95-04/10/95. Fax Lt Col Baxter, MA to Comd to HQ UNPF Zagreb, 23/04/95.

⁵⁷ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves 17/04/95-11/07/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 19/04/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-627.

⁵⁸ CRST. G3 Land Ops to KL Crisis Staff, 14/04/95.

yet with NATO in Brussels. Despite the serious fuel shortages, General Smith also refused to mention a date though he was prepared to say that the operation would definitely not be carried out before 30 April. The circumstances did not permit this, also in view of the fact that the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was due to expire on 30 April. Another restricting factor was that units in Sector South West were on the point of being relieved: this was not to be put in jeopardy.⁵⁹

Smith had publicly announced that resupply by air was being considered. As was the case earlier in March, this was intended to put pressure on the VRS. The critical point would be reached in mid-May, after which the fuel shortages would make measures imperative. Another problem, alongside the fuel supplies, was Dutchbat's limited supply of ammunition (for the TOW anti-tank weapon) and the quality of that ammunition. By that time, UNPROFOR had received ample medical supplies thanks to the fact that convoys had been let through on an incidental basis.⁶⁰

The Permanent Representatives at the UN of the countries involved discussed Janvier's plan on 21 April in New York. The parties at the table were the helicopter-contributing nations (the United Kingdom, France and Norway), the troop-contributing nations in the eastern enclaves (alongside the United Kingdom, also Ukraine and the Netherlands) and the countries that were to supply the ground troops required for the operation (Canada and New Zealand).

Chairman Sashi Tharoor made it clear that New York wished to go no further than study the opportunities for carrying out the plan. Given the risks for the future of the mission there was no intention 'to rush into action'. After all, so Tharoor went on, the operation effectively amounted to telling the Bosnian Serbs that the enclaves could also be resupplied without their permission. The Bosnian Serbs would see this as a challenge. And whatever way you looked at the situation, it would be utterly irresponsible to embark on an operation without consulting the Security Council and the North Atlantic Council. The Secretary-General of the UN and NATO in Brussels had not even been informed yet of the plans, Tharoor said. It was also desirable in his view to include the Russian Federation in the plan. In fact, it might even be necessary to adopt a new Security Resolution for this operation.

The French UN representative felt, however, that UN Resolution 836 was sufficient for the purpose. The British agreed to this in principle but also said that Tharoor was right in saying that the Security Council and the North Atlantic Council had to be informed.⁶¹

At this point it emerged that the officials at the UN headquarters in New York were not well-informed. Tharoor, for instance, asked whether fuel was also to be supplied by helicopter. As we have seen, this of course formed part of Smith's plans and Janvier's elaboration of these plans. Furthermore, New York was also opposed to a night-time operation, as proposed in Janvier's plan. This, they said, would impair the transparency of the operation. New York also wanted UNPROFOR to inform the Bosnian Serbs in advance of the plans, arguing that this in itself would go a long way towards making a resupply operation unnecessary.⁶² Also, as soon as resupply by land could be resumed to any extent, the plan for resupply by air was to be immediately shelved.

Here the British UN representative, Sir David Hannay, hardly promoted the cause of resupply by air by contending that the supply problems were not nearly as serious as suggested. He pointed out that national reports indicated higher stock levels than the figures of the UN secretariat.⁶³ As a result, the British government in London was no longer convinced that an operation was necessary. Moreover, food convoys had reached all three enclaves in mid-April (fuel, the biggest problem, was not mentioned here).⁶⁴ The British also made it known that they were actually not at all enthusiastic about

⁵⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 246, File 2200-2 AVN General 10/08/95-04/10/95. HQ BHC FWD, Warning Order 005/95, 181500B Apr95, No. G3 Ops 3217.

⁶⁰ DCBC, 2379. Report of bunker meeting DCBC dated 21/04/95. Conf.

⁶¹ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 21/04/95, No. MSC-1286.

⁶² NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 21/04/95, No. MSC-1286.

⁶³ ABZ, DPV/ARA/00581. Code Biegman 335, 21/04/95.

⁶⁴ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 21/04/95, No. MSC-1286.

the plans, which they feared might lead to a total ban on overland convoys. The whole intention of General Smith's plan, however, had consistently been to have an alternative for resupplying the enclaves in an emergency situation.⁶⁵

Subsequently New York asked the individual capital cities to give their reaction to the plans.⁶⁶ The fact that the Permanent Representatives at the UN did not arrange a follow-up meeting to report the reactions from the capital cities indicates that there was no real sense of urgency in New York. Whatever happened, the plan would not be carried out before 1 May 1995.

The question as to which organization would direct the operation led to differences of opinion. The French had suggested in the North Atlantic Council that NATO should be put in charge of the operation in analogy with the NATO plan (Determined Effort, Oplan 40104) for withdrawing UNPROFOR from Bosnia in case of emergency.⁶⁷ The UN by contrast saw this as a UN operation governed by the Rules of Engagement for a peacekeeping operation, with NATO only in a supporting role.⁶⁸ The French were considerably more amenable to Janvier's plan than the British. The French were of the opinion that resupply by air could take place within UN Resolution 836 and the existing arrangements made between the UN and NATO. The French even wondered why it was necessary to start up a lengthy and complicated consultation procedure about this matter. They were in favour of a night-time military operation with transport helicopters escorted by armed helicopters. The operation was to have a high profile and be surrounded by publicity. For safety reasons, the French were keen to have Russian UN peacekeepers on board the helicopters but stopped short of stipulating this as an absolute precondition.⁶⁹ The Chiefs of Defence Staff naturally welcomed the French contribution. The Netherlands expected the plans to be discussed at the meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff on 19 May in Soesterberg. Until now, the Netherlands (and Ukraine) had not been involved in the plans for resupply by air.⁷⁰

10. Further reactions to Janvier's plan

Zagreb drew encouragement from the positive reactions of the troop-contributing nations. They would be ready to launch the operation at any time after 1 May. The UN command in Zagreb was concerned however about the question marks that the United Kingdom had placed behind the plans and – as it was perceived in Zagreb – the details that were receiving attention in London. The British government, so they said, could rest assured that General Smith and his officers were fully aware of the necessary 'battle procedures': force would only be used in self-defence.

From Zagreb it was re-emphasized that General Smith and the UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb were unanimous in their opinion that overland resupply could only take place if the parties agreed. The political risks were fully understood and Zagreb saw no need for further comment. Zagreb also reported that Admiral Leighton Smith was looking into the question of NATO authorization.

Finally Zagreb pointed out that it would be a good thing for the UN headquarters in New York to get in touch with NATO themselves. In a message to the UN in New York, Janvier's Deputy Force Commander, the Canadian Major General R.R. Crabbe, wrote that he believed that 'you clearly understand our logic in planning'.⁷¹ Judging by the above, this was very much open to question. According to UNPROFOR, the supply figures for 21 April were as follows:⁷²

⁶⁵ DCBC, 453. Memo CDS to the Minister, 02/05/95, No. SN/95/061/1788.

⁶⁶ ABZ, Coll. Hattinga van 't Sant, 05277. Code Biegman 335, 21/04/95.

⁶⁷ DCBC, 453. Memo CDS to the Minister, 02/05/95, No. SN/95/061/1788.

⁶⁸ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 21/04/95, No. MSC-1286.

⁶⁹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 25/04/95, No. MSC-1354 with attached fax Mission Permanente de la France pour Mr Annan, 25/04/95, No. 454/MPF/CM.

⁷⁰ DCBC, 453. Memo CDS to the Minister, May 1995, No. SN/95/061/1788.

⁷¹ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves 17/04/95-11/07/95 Code Cable Janvier (signed R.R. Crabbe) to Annan, 21/04/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-635.

⁷² UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves 17/04/95-11/07/95

(days of consumption)	Fresh food	Rations	Diesel
Zepa	1	23	0
Gorazde (BRIT)	19	54	0
Gorazde (UKR)	0	8	0
Srebrenica	5	26	0

Six days after this list was made available, New York reproached Zagreb that this kind of information was hardly helpful. After all, Annan had asked for an overview of the *situation*, not for this. This came on top of the confusion over the supply situation which had already arisen on 21 April during Tharoor's meeting with the Permanent Representatives in New York and a press release from Sarajevo in which the UN Public Relations Officer had sketched an extremely gloomy picture of the fuel situation. Annan therefore told Akashi that he had still not received any comment on the supply *situation*.⁷³

After the discussions in New York and the various capital cities, Janvier had taken stock of the situation. He reiterated that the aim of the operations had to be absolutely clear: it was all about fuel supply.

On 26 April he came up with the following scenario: the first step, as before, was New York's approval of the plan. The next step was the announcement of the plan both in Pale and Belgrade. Janvier wanted to do this during his next trip to Pale, and in the first week of May in Belgrade. As soon as the reactions of the Bosnian Serbs were clear, he would inform the UN in New York. Next, he proposed to ask the UN and NATO to approve the operation and to bring the military helicopters into Bosnia as a warning.⁷⁴

Janvier and Smith spoke to each other in Sarajevo about this plan. Akashi was still to travel to Pale but Janvier and Smith doubted whether there was any point in Akashi making a further diplomatic *démarche* to urge Karadzic to allow convoys by land. Without that permission, Janvier too would move a step closer to 'a more forceful option'. Ahead of Akashi's trip to Pale, Smith again drew his attention to the state of affairs in the eastern enclaves. He gave a fairly grim portrayal of the situation. The lack of fuel for the generators in Zepa had caused a loss of communications with that enclave. For this reason Smith was considering withdrawing the military observers of the UN, the UNMOs, from Zepa: they were unable to do their job under these circumstances. In Gorazde the Observation Posts could no longer be manned from 14 May 1995, and in Srebrenica the UN soldiers would be able to hold out until the end of May if they kept their fuel consumption to a minimum. Earlier, incidentally, the Netherlands Ministry of Defence had assumed that fuel would only last until mid-May; the new estimated date, i.e. end of May, was the direct result of different calculations at various different headquarters and Dutchbat, which led to different results. This problem was to crop up again later (see Chapter 4, Part III). During the visits to Pale, Smith was keen to establish a connection between the worrying supply situation and the plans for resupply by helicopter.⁷⁵

Meanwhile the discussion about the supply operation continued in the various countries involved. After the note of concern struck by London, the Canadians now also raised objections to the plan. So much so, in fact, that Canada no longer wished to supply Tactical Air Control Parties and armed troops to man the helicopters. As far as the Canadians were concerned, a helicopter operation represented an unjustifiable breach of the UNPROFOR mandate. It would send the Bosnian Serbs a signal that one of the most fundamental aspects of the mission – Freedom of Movement – could be breached with impunity. That this Freedom of Movement no longer existed *de facto* was evidently of no

Code Cable Janvier (signed R.R. Crabbe) to Annan, 21/04/95, No. UNPF-HQ Z-635.

⁷³ NIOD, Coll. Brantz. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 27/04/95, No. MSC-1407. The press release was from AFP dated 27/04/95.

⁷⁴ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95-11/07/95.

Fax FC's Office to BH Command, 26/04/95, Ref FC/95/0649.

⁷⁵ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17/04/95-11/07/95. Fax LtCol Baxter MA to Comd to HQ UNPF Zagreb attn COS, 28/04/95.

significance. According to the Canadian authorities, the Bosnian Serbs would treat an airlift with helicopters to the eastern enclaves in exactly the same manner as the airlift to Sarajevo. The Bosnian Serbs also regularly fired at that, just to show that *they* were the ones who decided when and under what circumstances the airlift could be open.

The Canadians pointed out that even with more helicopters than provided for in the plan, UNPROFOR would still be unable to feed the population in the enclaves whereas UNHCR was able to do this overland. Couldn't that organization also take along food for UNPROFOR, so the Canadians wondered. But this line of reasoning completely ignored the biggest problem: the need to supply the UNPROFOR units with fuel. Canada was in favour of informing the regime in Pale that UNPROFOR was going to resume heavily protected convoys by land.

The noises from New York were not particularly encouraging either. The UN headquarters had already warned Zagreb that the loss of a single helicopter would force the UN to decide whether or not to leave the enclaves. That could mean the end for UNPROFOR.⁷⁶

Though the political outlook was not auspicious, UNPROFOR in Sarajevo went ahead with the planning of a resupply operation by air: a timepath had been plotted, an official line had been formulated for the media and a 'coordination conference' had been planned. New York was to give the green light no later than four days before the operation was launched. Other conditions were that the helicopter- and troop-contributing nations consented to the operations and that NATO made all relevant arrangements. The pressure on the VRS to let through fuel convoys had to be stepped up and concerns about the situation were to be given public expression as a further signal to the Bosnian Serbs. Visible preparations were to be made four days in advance and the operation would be rehearsed three days beforehand. Two days before the operation, a meeting was to take place with (a) representative(s) of the VRS and General Smith would issue a statement. On the eve of the operation, the flights would be announced and the UN organization in Zagreb and NATO would issue statements.⁷⁷ During the coordination conference that had been held in the meantime, agreement had been reached about the commander of the operation: this was to be the Norwegian T. Johansen, a Lieutenant Colonel of the Air Force who was in the possession of the necessary qualifications and was well-known to all helicopter squadrons. The Norwegian Chief of Defence Staff had already expressed its agreement. His presence was required for discussions on 3 and 4 May in Sarajevo and on 5 May at NATO.⁷⁸

Meanwhile Dutchbat III was facing an increasingly acute shortage of fuel. The battalion had not received fuel resupplies for two and a half months (since 18 February). For this reason, Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen had asked Battalion Commander Karremans to indicate the criteria for determining when resupply by air would be necessary. As for water and food, Dutchbat set the criterion at nine days' rations. Of these nine days, seven were intended to give the higher levels time to take measures. If that failed, two days would remain to leave the enclave. As for diesel, the warning level had already been passed; according to Dutchbat's count, the supplies had formally run out.

Dutchbat could still make use of UNHCR supplies. But if the VRS also continued to block the UNHCR convoys, the fuel supplies would be exhausted by the end of May. Moreover UNHCR had already indicated its wish to stop supplying diesel to Dutchbat. Faced with this situation, Dutchbat wanted to maintain a supply of 6000 litres of diesel so that it could withdraw from the enclave to safe territory in case of an emergency.

If fresh supplies were brought in by air, there would also be the possibility of taking along anti-tank weapons plus testing equipment and (light) mortar grenades if that were necessary. Due to the

⁷⁶ Confidential information.

⁷⁷ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 215, File BHC95, 7 Mar-May95. Fax HQ BHC FWD to HQ UNPF Zagreb, 26/04/95.

⁷⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Fax HQ BH Command to HQ UNPF/COS, 261445B Apr 95, Outgoing Fax No. 0876/95. Because the person in question was in Norway, sent with Code Cable Janvier (signed R.R. Crabbe) to Baril for Annan, 28/04/95, No. Z-681 with the request to take up the matter with the Norwegian government.

poor storage facilities, the anti-tank weapons had been affected by damp and were possibly no longer functioning properly.

It was all very well for the Netherlands to set its own criteria, but the key to the execution of the operation was and remained in the hands of the political and military leadership in Zagreb and New York.⁷⁹

Janvier in Zagreb had meanwhile sent the framework for a plan of operations to New York. At the same time he tried to dispel some of New York's concerns about the plan and to demarcate the tasks. Janvier felt that an analysis of the political consequences and of the military limitations of the plan should be left to Akashi and himself. If the plan were executed, this would take place 'with utmost transparency' towards the warring factions. In addition, Janvier pointed out that only he, as Theatre Commander, could be responsible for drawing up the guidelines of such a complex and difficult operation.⁸⁰

On 4 May 1995 the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van Mierlo, informed Parliament publicly (this had previously taken place behind closed doors) that the supply of fuel was an increasing source of concern. Patrols in the enclave could now only be carried out on foot. The minister said that things might come to such a pass that the UN and NATO would have no other option than to resupply the enclave by air, even against the will of the Bosnian Serbs if need be. In this case, precautions had to be taken on the ground in collaboration with the allies because of the risk of reprisals by the VRS. The Dutch government continued to put the safety of the Dutch soldiers first 'as an absolute priority'.⁸¹ The same applied to the governments of the other countries, particularly after the expiration of the truce, the Croatian offensive in West Slavonia and the outbreak of hostilities in Bosnia.

11. Support for resupply by air starts to crumble

After voicing hesitations about resupply by air, Canada became the first country to definitely pull out of the operation. The Hague woke up to this fact early in May. Resupply by air had proved to be an unviable proposition for the Canadians. The country had come to the conclusion that the operation would be an unjustifiable breach of the UNPROFOR mandate (UN Security Council Resolutions 824 and 770). It would give the Bosnian Serbs a signal that a contravention of the most fundamental aspect of the mission - Freedom of Movement – would be accepted. The statement made by the UN headquarters, i.e. that if a helicopter was brought down the UN would have to consider abandoning the enclaves, was the final straw for the Canadians: this would give the Bosnian Serbs an opportunity to humiliate UNPROFOR, Ottawa claimed. After all, the power to end the UNPROFOR operation then no longer rested with the highest political level but with the lowest conceivable level on the ground, namely the VRS.⁸²

The Canadian stance did not prevent the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York from pressing on with the planning process. Early in May the British were requested to supply a Royal Air Force officer with expertise on Chinook helicopter operations as a matter of urgency. The request was met with surprise in the United Kingdom because nothing more had been heard about the plan for resupply by air since the meeting of the troop- and helicopter-contributing nations on 21 April and the Canadian rejection of the plan.⁸³

Early in May the French were still prepared to resupply the enclaves by helicopter, but were also hoping that the British would take part. The French government would not be happy if the British

⁷⁹ DCBC, 453. Memo CDS to the Minister, 02/05/95, No. SN/95/061/1788.

⁸⁰ UNNY, UNPROFOR, DFC Files. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 29/04/95, No. Z-683.

⁸¹ TK, 1994-1995, 22 181, No. 94 (02/05/95).

⁸² ABZ, DPV/ARA/00581. Milad PVVN to Min. of DEF/DS and DAB, 08/05/95, No. NYV-2814. See also DCBC, 462. Code Biegman 393, 08/05/95.

⁸³ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

decided to withdraw their troops from Gorazde and the Dutch government were to do the same with its troops in Srebrenica. That would leave France as the only remaining western country with troops in an enclave (in Sarajevo).⁸⁴ The French military were prepared to do everything in their power to avoid a unilateral French withdrawal. They wanted the UN headquarters in Zagreb to take a more robust stance. French military personnel hinted to British diplomats that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juppé, was not a strong proponent of withdrawal. In this phase the French military top was emphatically seeking British support in order to prevent the policy of President Chirac, and possibly also that of Minister Juppé, being thwarted. This was one reason why the French military wanted to resupply the enclaves with helicopters.⁸⁵

Early in May both Force Commander Janvier and the UN delegate Akashi in Belgrade re-opened the discussion about the problem of resupplying the enclaves. On 5 May Janvier spoke with the Yugoslavian Chief of Staff Perisic. According to Janvier, Perisic was perfectly aware of the seriousness of the problem, but saw the deployment of helicopters as a dangerous solution. Perisic therefore promised to exert pressure on Mladic so that resupply by road could be resumed.⁸⁶

Shortly afterwards, on 10 May, the UN delegate Akashi spoke with the Serbian President Milosevic. On that occasion, Akashi raised the issue of the VRS blockading the resupply of UNPROFOR in the enclaves. Milosevic was prepared to help but said he had little practical support to offer. It was up to the Generals Smith and Mladic to get round the table and sort things out. But that was precisely what Mladic obstinately refused to do. Milosevic did however promise to do his best to arrange a talk, 'to try to solve those banalities' (i.e. the resupply of the enclaves).⁸⁷

Later too, however, Mladic would continue to refuse a meeting with Smith. During a telephone conversation with General Mladic on 24 May, Smith also said he wanted a meeting with him at the earliest opportunity to speak about the urgent need to resupply UNPROFOR in the enclaves. At the time Mladic said he fully understood the problems of the enclaves but that his soldiers faced much greater problems. Mladic was unwilling to arrange a meeting in the short term because he was not feeling well.⁸⁸

Around the same time that Akashi spoke with Milosevic, Smith had a secret meeting with President Karadzic. Karadzic explained that the VRS had decided to introduce sanctions against UNPROFOR in the form of a blockade of (fuel, food, mail and leave-taker) convoys. The Bosnian Serbs were no longer willing to cooperate with the international community and had already taken this decision before the Croatian offensive. 'The Security Council is the enemy of the Serbian people and the instrument of hostile US policy', according to Karadzic. The UN had been biased in favour of the adversary during the Croatian offensive in West Slavonia. Furthermore, the Bosnian Serbs had heard that the ABiH had started an offensive aimed at breaking through the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo.

The VRS had also convinced Karadzic that there was sufficient fuel in the enclaves, so Karadzic said; it was even alleged that the ABiH in Srebrenica had built up a large stock of fuel from UN supplies. Smith denied this; he said that the fuel situation was so acute that this problem would soon be out of his hands. Karadzic was only prepared to reconsider his stance if the Bosnian Serbs received 30,000 tons of fuel for humanitarian purposes. Karadzic was told that a decision on this matter did not rest with UNPROFOR, but with the Sanctions Committee of the UN in New York.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

⁸⁵ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

⁸⁶ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88041, File 4-4 Notes on Meetings. Interoffice Memorandum FC to SRSG, 06/05/95, 'Rencontre avec le Général Perisic Belgrade 5 Mai 1995'.

⁸⁷ Confidential information.

⁸⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Telephone call Gen Smith and Gen Mladic 20.45 hrs [24/05/95] attached to Code Cable Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 25/05/95, No. Z-861.

⁸⁹ UNGE, UNPROFOR, Box 92, File 4.2.1. Office of the Commander BH Command to UNPF Zagreb attn Mr. Akashi, Gen Janvier, 091900B May 1995, UN Confi; See also letter Smith to Akashi sent by fax Office of the Commander BH Command to UNPF Zagreb, 091615B May 1995, UN Confi.

As Gorazde would run out of fuel on 10 May and Srebrenica in mid-May, the plan for resupply by air remained high on the agenda in Sarajevo and Zagreb. Planning and technical preparations between UNPROFOR and NATO had been set in motion and the expectation was that Akashi and Janvier could be briefed about this shortly.⁹⁰ It was also expected that the announcement of the plan would induce the Bosnian Serbs to allow a quantity of fuel to be supplied by road after all.

A reaction of the Bosnian Serbs on the ground to the announcement of the resupply operation by air could not be ruled out: for safety reasons, the military observers and civilian police of the UN (UNMOs and UNCivPols) were therefore to place themselves under the protection of the local UN troops and all convoys were to be stopped 72 hours before the operation started.⁹¹

On 9 May Dutchbat still had 4258 litres of fuel. With effect from 10 May additional measures were taken to further reduce the consumption of fuel to 450 litres per day. This meant switching over to rations to save fuel for the kitchen trucks; disconnecting refrigerating and freezing installations; stopping supplies to the observation posts; stopping the medical evacuation of civilians; and no longer giving fuel to the police (UNMOs and UNCivPols). In this way, the tasks could continue to be carried out for a further ten days. Resupply was now an urgent necessity. The Chief of Defence Staff, General Van den Breemen, spoke about this with the UNPROFOR Chief of Staff in Sarajevo, Brigadier General Nicolai. He said that if there was no change of circumstances a decision to resupply by air could be on the agenda in the week of 15 May.⁹²

This issue was also mentioned in passing in the Ministerial Council, though mainly in the form of a statement that the situation was becoming increasingly difficult for Dutchbat because there was virtually no fuel left. A decision to resupply by air was therefore probable. Such an operation was not without risk, so it was said, as it could elicit a reaction from the Bosnian Serbs. The Ministerial Council was told that the Bosnian Serbs would be informed in advance if the resupply operation by air went ahead.⁹³ Note that at the time Serbia had nothing to do with the problem of resupplying the eastern enclave, their involvement only started in June. No doubt, the minutes were actually referring to the Bosnian Serbs instead of Serbia.

At the end of May the resupply question was raised again in the Ministerial Council; not to discuss the substance of the problem, but merely as a matter of procedure. On that occasion, the most closely involved ministers were authorized to hold mutual consultation in order to discuss the day-to-day developments and take care of the logistical interests.⁹⁴

The second conference of the Chiefs of Defence Staff took place in Soesterberg on 19 May. Janvier and Smith had come to Soesterberg for this conference. They said that the fuel situation would become critical in June and that New York was considering resupply by air. The French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, asked whether NATO might be able to take the task of resupplying the enclaves upon itself. Janvier believed this was possible provided that NATO received an appropriate mandate, but the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Shalikashvili, disagreed. He said that such an operation would require a multitude of military resources which fell outside the authority of General Smith.

Smith stated that the lives of the UN people in the enclaves were not in danger, but that their capability to perform their duties was being steadily undermined. He was prepared to continue the negotiations but if these talks failed to produce any result, withdrawal would be the only remaining option. Lanxade agreed that the enclaves would have to be abandoned unless action was taken. The

⁹⁰ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 88040, File 4-2 SRSB Meeting, Srebrenica Staff 95 May-Oct. SRSB, Senior Staff Meeting, 11/05/95.

⁹¹ DCBC, 2013. Briefing Bgen Nicolai, undated.

⁹² DCBC, 477. CDS to the Minister, 11/05/95, No. S95/061/1984, Confi.

⁹³ Objectivized summary of the minutes of the Ministerial Council meeting of 12/05/95, prepared for the purposes of the present NIOD study.

⁹⁴ Objectivized summary of the minutes of the Ministerial Council meeting of 29/05/95, prepared for the purposes of the present NIOD study.

Turkish Chief of Defence Staff, General I.H. Karadayi, felt this was too dangerous as it would cause the total withdrawal of UNPROFOR. The Chiefs of Defence Staff concluded that a resupply operation would be inevitable within a month and that the UN commanders were to send the plans to the political decision-makers as soon as they were ready.⁹⁵

In the meantime Kofi Annan had identified new problems. He informed his chief, Boutros-Ghali, of the results of the conference of the Chiefs of Defence Staff and added that he saw the helicopter operation as a 'high risk strategy' that might entail crossing the notorious 'Mogadishu line'. Annan also believed that formally speaking Boutros-Ghali did not require the approval of the Security Council to resupply his troops in the enclaves; however, a failure of the operation could have such far-reaching consequences that the Security Council should be made aware of this possibility. Furthermore, NATO would also have to ask the North Atlantic Council for permission and NATO would not do this without a written request from Boutros-Ghali.⁹⁶ As will be clear, the need to go through all these channels would hardly promote a rapid decision-making process.

12. A decision about the operation?

Meanwhile General Smith stuck to his line that the operation had to be carried out as soon as possible. He felt supported by the conference of the Chiefs of Defence Staff and asked Janvier on 21 May to take up the resupply plan 'with urgency'. He requested General Janvier to arrange the required units and helicopters through the UN headquarters in New York. A joint planning team of NATO and the UN was to get together in order to work out the command aspects in greater detail. General Smith now set the date that the fuel supplies would run out at 1 June; but on this date, Dutchbat's emergency stock of fuel would also be completely exhausted, while that was precisely intended as a reserve for getting out of the enclave in special circumstances.

Given limited use of the UNHCR stocks of 10,000 litres of diesel, the date that Dutchbat's fuel would be exhausted could be shifted from 1 June to 15 June. But even with this fuel, the abandonment of the observation posts would still be inevitable and the UN soldiers would have to be concentrated on the compounds. Smith insisted that a decision should be taken no later than 24 May, that the required helicopters should already be brought over to Central Bosnia, and that a definite arrangement should now be made with NATO. He drew up a new time schedule with D-day on: 15 June 1995.⁹⁷

In New York, Janvier also continued to emphasize the urgency of the logistical situation in the enclaves. Dutchbat had received 4500 litres of diesel from UNHCR stocks. Leaving aside enough diesel to get out of the enclave and reach Tuzla, the battalion would run out of fuel on 1 June, assuming a consumption of 450 litres per day. UNHCR was keeping a further 10,000 litres in reserve for its own use. Janvier and Smith gave the same forecast: with further support from UNHCR, Dutchbat could hold out until 15 June. In Zepa the diesel supplies had entirely run out; wood was being used for cooking. The last fuel convoy to reach Gorazde had been on 18 February, the same date that Dutchbat had received its last resupply. But the British in Gorazde still had stocks of 16,500 litres, including the fuel tanks of the vehicles. Given minimal consumption, they would run out on 4 July.⁹⁸

Zagreb was increasingly convinced that the fuel situation was now so urgent that an operation was becoming inevitable. Janvier had modified his plan and on 22 May he suggested to New York that they approve his Concept of Operations. This concept emanated a spirit of purposeful action. Countries that were to take part in the operation needed to be asked for approval by the UN in New York. The United Kingdom would be requested to increase the availability of their Chinook

⁹⁵ DCBC, 1793 and 1825. Report Informal CHODs Meeting on UNPF, Soesterberg, 19/05/95. Confi.

⁹⁶ Confidential information.

⁹⁷ DCBC, 505. CDS to the Minister, 23/05/95, No. S/95/061/2184; UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl. 17/04/95-11/07/95. Fax Office of the Comd HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, attn FC, COS, 211000AMay95.

⁹⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan 22/05/95, No. Z-837.

helicopters. Any loss of helicopters was to be accepted. Large-scale NATO air strikes against the most threatening ground targets of the Bosnian Serbs and in retaliation for hostile actions against the helicopters had to be possible. It had to be clear that counteractions of the VRS could not be ruled out and that the UN was thus running severe risks. The reaction of the Bosnian Serbs could also lead to the enclaves being sealed off even more tightly, in which case resupply would *only* be possible by air. That would have major consequences, also for Dutchbat, and could put the relieving of the troops in jeopardy. The key question was and remained: did the supply of diesel weigh up against all the possible disadvantages?⁹⁹

The evident determination in Zagreb also found expression in the fairly hard tone that Janvier now adopted towards the UN in New York. Even so, many hurdles remained to be taken in New York before the operation could genuinely get under way. The simple remark during the Senior Staff Meeting in Zagreb that: ‘cable was sent to NY in order to get into action’ did not mean that everything was now cut and dried. After Kofi Annan, Janvier also recognized that the UN Security Council would have to approve, as would the troop-contributing nations and the North Atlantic Council but NATO had still not been approached by New York.

Efforts had been made in the meantime to sort out the command structure for the operation. One sticking point was that NATO aircraft could not be placed under the command of a UN (UNPROFOR) officer. However, this problem could be overcome if a UN officer authorized to respond immediately to UNPROFOR requests for Close Air Support were present on board an Airborne Command and Control Centre. Janvier furthermore suggested to New York that the authority to decide on the deployment of both Close Air Support and ‘responsive air strikes’ would be delegated to him.¹⁰⁰

But this still did not clear up all the problems between the UN and NATO; there were also matters of principle to be resolved. General Smith (a UN officer) wanted all aircraft involved in the operation, including NATO aircraft, to be under his command. General Shalikashvili, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by contrast, felt that UNPROFOR was insufficiently equipped for such an operation and that NATO should be in charge of the execution. The British Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Peter Inge, noted that this would change the nature of the mission from peacekeeping to peace enforcement. The French Chief of Defence Staff, Lanxade, re-emphasized that without resupplies the eastern enclaves would have to be abandoned and that this might herald the withdrawal of UNPROFOR. French helicopters would however be available at all events, so he affirmed.¹⁰¹

NATO Admiral Leighton Smith felt that the Rules of Engagement needed to be adapted for such an operation. Under the existing Rules of Engagement, NATO aircraft were only permitted to use force if it could be established that a weapon or rocket had been fired at a helicopter. To guarantee success over a longer period, Admiral Smith wanted a mandate to emphasize UNPROFOR’s and NATO’s strength of will to the VRS. This also meant the power to take military action against targets to warn off further attacks on the helicopters. This was an issue which the UN and NATO had not yet sorted out.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ DS, No. SN 93/938/1299. G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb (Col J.H. de Jonge) to Crisis Staff BLS, 24/05/95, without number, UN Confi. UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves. 17/04/95-11/07/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/05/95, No. Z-841 and 842.

¹⁰⁰ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves. 17/04/95-11/07/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/05/95, No. Z-837. UNNY, UNPROFOR New York, Box 88040, File 4-2 SRSG Meeting, Srebrenica Staff 95 May-Oct. SRSG, Senior Staff Meeting, 23/05/95;

UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves 17/04/95-11/07/95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/05/95, No. Z-841 and 842.

¹⁰¹ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

¹⁰² UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol I, Resupply Eastern Enclaves, 17 Apr – 11 Jul 95. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 22/05/95, No. Z-837.

The Hague started to realize that an operation was now a serious possibility. The Ministry of Defence considered issuing a statement just before the operation got under way. Such a statement could emphasize that little cooperation was to be expected now from the Bosnian Serbs, given their strategic objective to gain control of the enclaves. One question that was raised but could not be answered was the line of action to be taken if the countries involved came to different conclusions regarding the risks attendant on the operation. Things had really progressed too far for each separate country to make an individual risk assessment. Such an assessment would have to be made at multinational level. Added to this, there was the increasingly pressing question whether it would still be possible to relieve Dutchbat under these circumstances.¹⁰³ This subject is extensively discussed in Chapter 4, Part III.

13. No decision yet

During his presence in New York, where he briefed the Security Council on 25 May, Janvier also discussed the plan for resupplying the Safe Areas by helicopter. His plea for unconditional support for the operation fell on deaf ears. New York wasn't particularly enthusiastic about the plans in the first place and in a talk with Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, British diplomats, the French Permanent Representative at the UN, Jean Bernard Merimee, and Gharakan (of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations) on that same day, everyone expressed dismay at the idea of using helicopters to supply the enclaves with fuel.¹⁰⁴ Nor did the subject command much interest among the Dutch diplomats in New York. The Military Adviser Colonel R. van Veen said he had repeatedly pointed to the supply problems, but that this had usually led to 'bored faces'.¹⁰⁵

On the same day of these talks, NATO aircraft bombarded a munitions complex of the VRS at Pale. This basically closed the door on the plan to resupply the eastern enclaves by air. At the same time, the air attacks also eliminated any prospect of resupply by road for the time being.¹⁰⁶

The problems in the enclaves obviously remained, however, and the item did not entirely disappear from the agenda in Zagreb. On 29 May Akashi told Annan that the operation was 'clearly justified by safety and logistical needs'. In view of the planning and preparation that was necessary for the operation, 'UNPROFOR must now consider helicopter resupply to the enclaves'. Akashi wanted New York to give some indication as to whether the UN was prepared to accept the risk of a confrontation with the Bosnian Serbs and to carry out a resupply operation that went 'considerably beyond peacekeeping principles'.¹⁰⁷ The fact that on that very same day the VRS shot down a Bosnian helicopter with the Bosnian Minister of Interior Affairs on board will hardly have fanned New York's enthusiasm for the operation.¹⁰⁸

Janvier re-directed his attention towards the possibility of air drops. His staff was working out a plan for this and he asked General Smith to set conditions for resupplying the enclaves with food.¹⁰⁹

Janvier's staff also considered the possibility of a secret, night-time resupply operation with helicopters. The dangers attached to this did not seem so great and the shooting down of a helicopter would be a question of luck rather than accurate firing. Yet the danger that the helicopters would be fired at remained; not only by the VRS but possibly also by the ABiH, which could then pin the blame

¹⁰³ DCBC, 2415. Secure fax DCBC to G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb, Col de Jonge and Milad PVVN New York, Maj Koestal, 241524Z May 95, No. 399.

¹⁰⁴ Interview Lord Owen, 27/06/01.

¹⁰⁵ Interview R. van Veen, 16/08/00.

¹⁰⁶ Confidential information.

¹⁰⁷ Confidential information.

¹⁰⁸ Confidential information.

¹⁰⁹ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. Force Commander to LtGen R. Smith only, 29/05/95, File Ref: FC/95/0801, UN Confi.

on the Bosnian Serbs. Serious risks would be run, however, during the unloading of the cargo from the helicopters at the place of destination.¹¹⁰

UN and NATO assessments followed. It was particularly important to establish how great the chance of success was, what the risks were and whether the Rules of Engagement needed to be altered. Even with extensive NATO support it remained a risky operation. Support from NATO aircraft could not guarantee success, but could minimize the threat of the Bosnian Serbs attacking the helicopters. Adequate support could only be given if Admiral Leighton Smith were permitted to order air strikes in the event that the helicopters were attacked. In addition, he should be authorized to order the retrieval of stranded helicopters by NATO Combat Search and Rescue units at the UN's request. It did not seem necessary to alter the Rules of Engagement. A Combat Search and Rescue operation was in accordance with the existing rules for NATO's *Deny Flight* operation and only required a decision of the North Atlantic Council to extend the scope of these rules to UNPROFOR personnel. Much of the preparatory planning work had already been done by the staff of Admiral Smith. It was now up to New York to approve UNPROFOR's Concept of Operations, after which the UN could direct a formal request to NATO.¹¹¹

NATO Secretary-General Claes subsequently informed his UN counterpart Boutros-Ghali that the NATO military authorities were looking at how NATO air power could be used to help to protect helicopters supplying the enclaves.¹¹²

The issue of resupplying the eastern enclaves was also raised during a meeting of the Ministers of Defence of the WEU countries and NATO in Paris on 3 June 1995. The British and French standpoints were decisive.

The British Minister of Defence, Malcolm Rifkind, contended that if the enclaves could not be resupplied in a normal manner, it would be better for UNPROFOR to leave the enclaves. Rifkind did add that in this exceptional situation resupply by helicopter could be considered on a one-off basis, but for practical considerations and reasons of principle he did not see this as a structural solution. That, after all, would entail an implicit acknowledgement that the VRS could block convoys by road. It forced the UN to take tremendous risks and if a helicopter was brought down, this could provoke a sharp reaction with an enormous risk of escalation. Rifkind also feared provocation by the ABiH.

The French Minister of Defence, Millon, was less outspoken but largely shared this line of thought. He particularly emphasized the risks of the operation and only wished to consider resupply by air in an extreme emergency. General Janvier recognized the risks but thought the operation should still go ahead in view of the plight of the eastern enclaves.

The Dutch Minister of Defence, Voorhoeve, agreed that no unnecessary risks were to be run but also pointed out that Dutchbat had already gone without resupplies of fuel for 105 days and would possibly soon run out of food. Voorhoeve said that the choice was basically between resupply by air or withdrawal of UNPROFOR from the eastern enclaves. In his view, the latter option was equally risky and could even lead to the entire withdrawal of UNPROFOR, which was considered a highly undesirable scenario. Other resupply options were discussed but did not lead to new standpoints.

The US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Shaliskashvili, pointed to the dangers to which the aircraft would be exposed in the case of air drops.

The French suggested that resupply by road be resumed by deploying the Rapid Reaction Force which happened to have been set up at this very meeting with the participation of France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (this is discussed at greater length in Chapter 1, Part III). The task of this Rapid Reaction Force would then be to break through the blockades of the Bosnian Serbs.

This French suggestion was sharply rejected by the British Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Peter Inge. The conclusion of the meeting therefore was that a one-off resupply operation by air was the

¹¹⁰ NIOD, Coll. Theunens. Interoffice Memorandum G2 UNPF-HQ to G3 Land, G3 Plans, 02/06/95.

¹¹¹ Confidential information (179).

¹¹² UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Letter Willy Claes to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 31/05/95, No. SG/95/MIN.2. Confi. Attached to Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 31/05/95, No. 1831.

most that could be done, and even that only in an extreme case of emergency.¹¹³ This conclusion was hardly different from the standpoint taken by New York. On the day of the ministerial meeting in Paris, Kofi Annan also said in the talks with the troop-contributing nations that resupply by air was a 'last resort'.¹¹⁴

At the beginning of June, during following meetings about the Rapid Reaction Force, the resupply of the eastern enclaves was again placed on the agenda, but it was not a major item of discussion. There were differences of opinion between the troop-contributing nations and those contributing helicopters. It was mainly the helicopter-contributing countries that wanted to proceed with the planning for the helicopter operation, so that NATO could rapidly decide on a request for support if the UN wanted to set the operation in motion. Other countries, by contrast, thought it was not proper to continue the NATO planning before the UN had submitted a formal request. The chance of success was small and the risks high: it was the very last option and not an alternative for getting sufficient fuel into the enclaves. The Dutch agreed with the conclusion that the chance of success was small. However, as Minister Voorhoeve had observed four days earlier, the possibility of an operation had to remain open in view of the dramatic situation in the enclaves. No decision would be taken about NATO support until the UN had submitted a formal request for this. The preparation of the plans could continue, however, to permit a rapid response to any request for support.¹¹⁵

During the ministerial Defence Planning Committee on 8 June about the Rapid Reaction Force that had been set up in Paris, Voorhoeve once again called attention to Dutchbat's precarious position. While hoping that resupply by air would not be necessary, Voorhoeve said that Dutchbat should be helped and that they were already practically being held hostage. In such a situation it was important to keep the communication channels open with the hostage-takers. In this connection, Voorhoeve was hoping for the support of the Greek Minister of Defence Arsenis who had 'entrées' in Belgrade and Pale. Voorhoeve's intervention did not lead to any further discussion of the problem of resupplying the eastern enclave.¹¹⁶

On 4 June Generals Janvier and Mladic spoke to each other in Zvornik. The resupply of the eastern enclaves was also mentioned in this context. Janvier said that the situation was no longer acceptable; the military personnel needed food and fuel. If Mladic continued to block resupplies by road any longer, then Janvier would find himself compelled to resupply by helicopter. As Mladic would understand, that could lead to provocation and escalation. Moreover, so Janvier argued, it would give Mladic a disastrous image and totally undermine his credibility among the international community. According to Janvier, that same international community was exercising pressure to resupply the UN troops in the enclaves through use of force (this statement was not wholly without bluff). Janvier acknowledged that the Safe Area concept was unsatisfactory and needed to be discussed, but the overriding priority now was to resupply the enclaves. In view of the situation in Central Bosnia, and assuming that the authorities in Belgrade would agree, this could be done by road via Serbia. The need was now so great that the Serbs could expect a request for a clearance to let a convoy through very soon.

Mladic in turn pointed out once again that the resupply problems were directly related to the restrictions imposed on the Bosnian Serbs. The checks at the crossing points over the Drina also formed a big problem for the Bosnian Serbs, so he argued. It was not reasonable to expect him to devote attention to the resupply of the enclaves if he was not given any prospect of the sanctions being relaxed in return. These sanctions, he said, had to be mitigated or suspended. Mladic did not see the arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force as helpful either. Not that he, Mladic, was in any way daunted by its presence, but he said its size was exaggerated and claimed that its deployment would merely serve to fuel the spiral of violence, which was precisely what Janvier wanted to avoid.

¹¹³ DCBC, 1876. Min of Foreign Affairs to Paris embassy, 06/06/95, No. paru072, Confi.

¹¹⁴ ABZ, DPV/ARA/02110. Code Biegman 499, 05/06/95.

¹¹⁵ Confidential information (181).

¹¹⁶ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05278 Code Veenendaal 870, 08/06/95.

Mladic added that nobody could fool him regarding the supply situation in the eastern enclaves: he claimed to have recent data on the food and fuel stocks in the enclaves. Nevertheless Mladic was prepared to make a gesture and said he would allow supplies through via Serbia. To this end, he was to be contacted two days later at 12 noon for details of the exact rendezvous points for each enclave.¹¹⁷ For the discussions resulting from this, reference is made to Chapter 4, Part III.

On 5 June, the day that Battalion Commander Karremans sent out his 'cry for help' regarding the situation in which both Dutchbat and the population of Srebrenica found themselves, Chief of Defence Staff Van den Breemen visited Janvier. Janvier believed there was no way that the Bosnian Serbs would give permission for resupply by air or road under the current circumstances. The hostage crisis was dragging on and Mladic had linked the blockade of Srebrenica to the economic blockade of the Bosnian Serbs, so Janvier said. Janvier felt that a forced resupply by helicopter was too risky at that particular moment. He had now pinned his hopes on an agreement with the Bosnian Serbs so that the enclaves could be resupplied by road via Serbia.¹¹⁸ Janvier did not entirely rule out a resupply operation with helicopters, but resupply by road was clearly the preferred solution at this juncture. The Rapid Reaction Force which was in the process of being set up could possibly provide support in this connection. What that Rapid Reaction Force could not do, however, was keep a land corridor to the enclaves open on a sustained basis.¹¹⁹

The fact that the Intelligence and Security Section of the Royal Netherlands Army carried out a tactical weather and terrain study in June to identify dropping zones and landing sites for helicopters in the enclave (which, incidentally, had already been studied by Dutchbat I) was therefore merely a rearguard action.¹²⁰

It was clear that resupply by air was no longer an option. The individual countries (except Norway) were no longer prepared to provide helicopters.¹²¹ Not only Janvier had come to find the operation too risky, Smith now also saw resupply by air as 'potentially destabilising and escalatory'. Smith started to look for ways of resupplying the enclaves with permission from the Bosnian Serbs.

The problem here was that the ABiH might oppose this. And even if Janvier managed to reach an agreement in principle with Mladic and then a definite agreement with the VRS, this would make UNPROFOR even more dependent on the VRS and possibly result in negative publicity for the UN. Belgrade would demand a price for allowing resupply operations via Serbia. But by this time, Smith badly needed any solution he could get to avoid the eastern enclaves having to be abandoned purely because of resupply problems.¹²²

14. Overland supplies after all?

General Smith warned Janvier on 11 June that difficult decisions had to be made within a few days. For six weeks no leave-taker convoys or mail had been allowed through and the relieving of troops had been stopped. Mladic had allowed Gorazde and Zepa to receive food supplies, but a clearance for Srebrenica had been rejected, though there was still hope that Mladic would let food through to Srebrenica after all. There was still no permission for fuel, however.

Sarajevo had recalculated the supply situation yet again. Fuel remained the central problem: the stock of fuel in Srebrenica would reach its critical point on 15 June, even though there were also some UNHCR stocks. In Gorazde the UN soldiers would run out on 26 June and in Zepa the Ukrainians

¹¹⁷ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 15/06/95, No. Z-995. With attached 'Rencontre entre le General Janvier et le General Mladic, Commandant en chef les Forces serbes de Bosnie, Bosnie 04/06/95.

¹¹⁸ Bstas. Memo CDS to the Minister, 06/06/95, No. S/95/061/2330.

¹¹⁹ DCBC, 1878. Force Commander's Intent on the Employment of the Quick Reaction Force, undated [06/06/95].

¹²⁰ MID/KL. TWTS Srebrenica, June 1995 ed. 1. Conf.

¹²¹ Interview R.A. Smith, 12/01/01.

¹²² NIOD, Coll. Smith. Lieutenant General R. A. Smith, Eastern Enclave Operations Assessment, 06/06/95, No. 8940.

were completely without fuel. Unlike the Dutch and the British, they didn't even have fuel in their vehicles in case of an emergency. The fuel shortages entailed the threat that the observation posts (OPs) at both Srebrenica and Zepa could no longer be manned. Smith therefore proposed to withdraw the OPs at Srebrenica and Zepa. After all, without fuel the OPs would be bereft of supplies and could not be reinforced in the event of an attack by the VRS. The lack of fuel also meant that communications could no longer be maintained.

Smith worked out three options for solving the resupply problem. The first option was to bring the matter to a head by publicly announcing that the OPs at Srebrenica and Zepa would be pulled back around 14/15 June. The possibilities for performing observation and reporting duties in and around these Safe Areas would thus be severely curtailed. Such a measure would not remain without consequences for the ABiH in the enclaves and for the humanitarian situation there. The measure would meet with resistance from the Bosnian government. It was expected that as a result of this the troop-contributing nations would no longer be able to remain on the sidelines and would therefore probably undertake action to stabilize the situation in Bosnia. The second option was to postpone a decision. That was only possible if the UNHCR permitted the use of its fuel supplies in Srebrenica or if fuel supplies could be guaranteed via Bosnian Serb territory. The latter would make UNPROFOR even more dependent on the Bosnian Serbs; either way, they would be at the mercy of the Bosnian Serbs' whim. This option would make it possible to put a decision off for a few more weeks. If the resupply problem had not yet been solved by that time, then it would be necessary to fall back on the third option: i.e. to declare that Dutchbat was no longer operational or to re-open negotiations with the VRS. And then UNPROFOR would be the requesting party; concessions would have to be made repeatedly to the VRS in exchange for the fundamental right to resupplies.¹²³

Three days later, on 14 June, Smith continued to press his case, sending Janvier yet another personally written fax concerning the resupply problem. Despite the sparing use of fuel, Srebrenica would run dry on 18 June, Sarajevo on 21 June and Gorazde on 26 June. Zepa was already without fuel. All enclaves were also in need of other supplies and the troops needed to be relieved. The direct attack that the VRS was carrying out against the sanctions imposed on the Serbs had to be stopped.

Smith therefore again recommended a hard line. The Bosnian Serbs had not been particularly cooperative in the past and further negotiations were not justified, so he argued. It had to be made clear through the highest international and national channels that the sanctions would not be lifted and that the right to Freedom of Movement was absolute. UNPROFOR had been forced to stand back and watch its convoys being searched, checked and regulated, without being able to do anything about it. Without Freedom of Movement UNPROFOR was unable to function and the VRS was managing to turn all this to its own advantage. Smith rejected the idea of further negotiations; he now simply wanted to announce when convoys would be dispatched and to where. Nor did he want to tolerate convoys being stopped and searched any longer. The convoys were to be escorted and if the Bosnian Serbs attacked the convoys, Smith wanted to be able to carry out a strong counter attack with all possible means. The alternative was to declare that the UNPROFOR units were no longer operational, in which case the enclaves would have to be abandoned.¹²⁴

15. Resupply by land after all – negotiations with the VRS

As a result of the arrangements made between General Mladic and Janvier during their talks on 4 June, food supplies were eventually allowed through to the UN troops in Gorazde and Zepa. A clearance to resupply Srebrenica submitted on 9 June was rejected, though the hope remained that Mladic would also let food through to Srebrenica.

¹²³ NIOD, Coll. Smith. The Office of the Commander HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, 111900BJun95.

¹²⁴ NIOD, Coll. Smith. The Office of the Commander HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, 141730BJun95.

On 12 June Mladic wrote to Janvier about the resupply issue, but he never mentioned fuel in the letter. He expressed his willingness to honour the arrangements made on 4 June with Janvier. Mladic would allow the most essential supplies through in accordance with the needs of the UN military personnel stationed in the enclaves. Mladic did add incidentally that it would be wise to report the free passage of the convoys to the Yugoslavian authorities. Before the convoys started, Mladic also wanted the release of four of his soldiers being held in UN hands. He, for his part, had already released 231 hostages, so Mladic claimed. Mladic also promised to discuss the times and routes of the convoys at a next meeting with Janvier.¹²⁵

On 17 June Janvier and Mladic spoke to each other again. Apart from supplies for the UN personnel, humanitarian aid for the population and Displaced Persons was also on the agenda. Mladic was adamant that this humanitarian aid would not be resumed unless an equal share went to the Bosnian Serb population. The discussion subsequently turned to the issue of resupplying the UN military personnel in the eastern enclaves. Janvier said that they not only needed food and fuel to perform their tasks but also for their safety and survival. The authorities in Belgrade had meanwhile agreed to a resupply operation via Serbia; it was now up to Mladic to actually permit the execution of this operation which had already been postponed several times. Failure would have a disastrous effect on Mladic's image, so Janvier asserted. Mladic said that he understood the need to supply the troops, but in view of the fact that ammunition and goods had been smuggled through for the black market with previous convoys, Mladic wanted to check the convoy at Zvornik in Bosnian-Serb territory. Mladic saw this convoy as a test.¹²⁶

As early as 12 June a convoy of fifty lorries destined for Dutchbat had departed Split for Zagreb. On 19 June twenty vehicles of this convoy went ahead, leaving Zagreb for Belgrade.¹²⁷ The prevailing mood among the Staff at Zagreb was that the Bosnian Serbs would again refuse to allow the convoy through. In this case, Dutchbat could continue to man the OPs but no longer be operational as a unit. A similar situation had already been accepted for the British battalion in Gorazde. At that time, Zagreb had not worked out any policy for its further actions but, whatever happened, Janvier certainly did not want to force anything. If nothing was done, the pressure on Janvier would be increased. In fact, the Bosnian government had already started doing this by declaring that it would intervene of its own accord to help the population in the enclaves. Differences of opinion and irritations arose between the headquarters in Zagreb and Sarajevo, which was in favour of taking a harder line. But Janvier was evidently having difficulty making up his mind; he put the issues to New York which, in turn, replied that the solutions had to be found in Zagreb.¹²⁸

Earlier Kofi Annan had asked Akashi from New York what he proposed to do after political agreement about resupply had been reached in Pale on 9 June; this was probably the result of the contacts between the American negotiator Robert Frasure and Milosevic which had been maintained despite the hostage crisis. During these contacts, the need to resupply the enclaves in the shortest possible term had been pointed out to Milosevic.¹²⁹

Evidently, however, the Bosnian Serb military leaders had simply ignored the political agreement of 9 June. Was there any prospect whatsoever of Zagreb being able to convert this political agreement into concrete action to force local commanders to comply, so New York wondered.¹³⁰

The question was whether New York was prepared to accept any escalation of a resupply operation. Resolution 998 of the UN Security Council of 16 June demanded unhindered access for humanitarian aid, particularly for the Safe Areas. Akashi again underlined to Karadzic that this was one

¹²⁵ NIOD Coll. Smith. Letter Mladic to Janvier, 12/06/95, No. 06/17-430.

¹²⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF Code Cables 14/06/95-30/06/95. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 20/06/95, No. Z-1025.

¹²⁷ DCBC, 2512. Memo Voorhoeve [?] 'Noodkreet Karremans' ('Karremans' Cry for Help'), *Algemeen Dagblad*, undated.

¹²⁸ CRST. Fax G3 Land Ops HQ UNPF Zagreb (Col. J.H. de Jonge) to CDS (in hands) and BLS (in hands), 17/06/95, no number, UN Conf.

¹²⁹ ABZ, Code Jacobovits 378, 08/06/95; DCBC, 2811, Code Veenendaal NATO 870, 08/06/95.

¹³⁰ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 15/06/95, No. 1981.

of UNPROFOR's principal objectives.¹³¹ This resolution received no powerful endorsement from New York, however (see Chapter 1, Part III).

Smith in Sarajevo was still more inclined to take robust action than Janvier in Zagreb; Smith held that the willingness to accept escalation should be evident. If the cards were to be laid on the table, then a resupply plan needed to be more than bluff alone. Smith therefore issued a new operational order on 17 June. Though the plan concentrated on Sarajevo in this particular instance, it would also be applicable to the eastern enclaves in the future.¹³² With the last hostages being released around this time, Smith also saw fresh scope for a round of negotiations. To this end, he wanted to coordinate a negotiating plan with Zagreb. One of the priorities that Smith mentioned in this context was the safety of the military personnel, and resupplies were part and parcel of this.¹³³

On 20 June the VRS eventually let 23 of the 56 vehicles in the convoy through. Of these 23, six were destined for Srebrenica. This entailed that 50% less food and 70% less fuel was delivered than if the entire convoy had got through.¹³⁴ As regards further resupply operations, Akashi wanted to avoid risks as far as possible until the situation changed. Consequently, his efforts were aimed at achieving resupply 'in the normal manner'.

The main thing however was that at least some supplies had got through, though not nearly in the quantities required. A more robust approach at that point would have been premature and would have given rise to risks to which UNPROFOR was unable to respond adequately as long as the Rapid Reaction Force had not yet arrived. While this Force would have the capability to open resupply routes more robustly, it would not be able to do so on a permanent basis.¹³⁵ This was the last convoy to reach Srebrenica before the town fell; other convoys were not allowed through.

Janvier did continue his efforts from Zagreb to resupply the eastern enclaves via Belgrade and Zvornik, even though this meant a tremendous detour for the convoys. Apart from the Croatian authorities and the Croatian Army, the Bosnian government also raised objections to this. In addition, the Bosnian government created problems when it got wind of UNPROFOR's intention to re-route convoys through Yugoslavian territory. Minister Hasan Muratovic vigorously protested against this to Akashi. In his view, it was in contravention of Resolution 820 (which stipulated that any flows of goods, other than for humanitarian purposes, that went through territory controlled by the VRS would only be permitted after authorization from the Bosnian government). Akashi had no objection to exploring alternatives more in accordance with the wishes of the Bosnian government, but did not wish to rule out this option. According to Akashi, Muratovic's considerations appeared to be based on the wish to maintain the isolation of Belgrade and Pale and to protract the logistical crisis in the enclaves in an effort to tempt UNPROFOR to take more extreme measures.¹³⁶

The long detour that the convoys would have to make via Belgrade led to the idea of using transport aircraft which had little to do now that all supply routes to Sarajevo had been cut off. These transport aircraft could carry supplies to Belgrade from where a transport detachment to be stationed in Belgrade could take the goods to the enclaves. This, incidentally, came too late to alleviate the plight of Dutchbat. For the Bosnian Serbs had already launched their attack on the enclave when this idea was being developed.¹³⁷

Until Srebrenica fell, the question of resupplying the enclaves virtually disappeared from the agenda. The few times that the issue was raised, the demands made by the Bosnian Serbs continued to

¹³¹ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Letter Akashi to Karadzic, 19/06/95, attached to Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 19/06/95, No. Z-1022.

¹³² NIOD, Coll. Smith. HQ UNPROFOR Sarajevo, Operation Order 011/95, 171800B Jun95, UN Conf.

¹³³ NIOD, Coll. Ashton. The Office of the Commander HQ UNPROFOR to HQ UNPF Zagreb, attn COS, 161330BJun95.

¹³⁴ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 20/06/95, No. UNPF Z-1026.

¹³⁵ Confidential information.

¹³⁶ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Akashi to Annan, 16/06/95, No. Z-1011.

¹³⁷ UNNY, UNPROFOR, Box 87305, File 3300 SEE Vol. I Resupply Eastern Encl, 17 Apr-11 Jul95. UNPF Zagreb Interoffice Memorandum, COS Log & Adm & CISS to DFC & DOA, 07/06/95.

stand in the way of a solution. This became clear during the third talk that Janvier and Mladic had with each other on 29 June in Zvornik. When the matter was broached again, Mladic repeated his standpoint that he would agree to the delivery of humanitarian aid, provided that 50% of this aid went to the Bosnian Serb population. They, after all, were in the same needy circumstances as the UN troops in the enclaves, so Mladic claimed, and the international community was also under an obligation to keep them alive.¹³⁸

The talks with Mladic were fruitless and the risks of a resupply operation by air remained as great as ever. This transpired during a talk that the Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic had with the Secretary-General of NATO, Claes. Claes felt that resupply by air without political agreement about the consequences of such an operation was too dangerous for the UN mission. If the operation went wrong, then the political conclusion would probably be to withdraw from Bosnia.¹³⁹

EU negotiator Bildt subsequently again raised the issue of resupplying the enclaves during his talks with Milosevic, but by then the fighting around Srebrenica had already started.¹⁴⁰

16. Conclusions

The issue of resupplying the eastern enclaves was a never-ending story. The most important conclusion to be drawn from the above is that there was no political will to undertake such a risky operation as resupply by air. It initially seemed as if a certain will existed among the countries involved and UNPROFOR to set up an operation, but the more they were confronted with the risky prospect of a counteraction by the VRS, the less eager they became to approve an operation. The momentum that had existed earlier in March 1995 petered out.

The lack of clarity concerning the exact period of time that the UN troops in the enclaves could hold out with the existing stocks did not help the decision-making process either. That the UN and NATO failed to answer essential questions about the mutual division of tasks and powers in the event of an operation was partly due to the fact that the UN headquarters in New York did not send NATO a formal request for support. As a result, though NATO was preparing for an operation, there was no immediate need to make hard-and-fast decisions.

It is, incidentally, not entirely clear what would have happened if the UN had decided to go ahead with the operation. When asked about this, the Commander-in-Chief of NATO's Southern Command, Admiral Leighton Smith, said that he would have been prepared to grant NATO support for the operation if UNPROFOR had asked him for this. In that case, he would not have asked NATO for authorization.¹⁴¹ This, however, was said after the event. Admiral Smith was all too willing to assist UNPROFOR but he had already been personally rapped on the knuckles by NATO Secretary-General Claes because of the insistence with which he had pressed for bombardments in contravention of Security Council resolutions.¹⁴²

From Dutchbat's perspective the supply situation in the enclaves remained serious throughout; the supplies became progressively depleted. Freedom of Movement had become a dead letter for the UN. With the exception of a small consignment at the end of June, Dutchbat received no resupplies of fuel from 18 February 1995 until the fall of Srebrenica.

Apart from supply convoys, the Bosnian Serbs also obstructed leave-taker convoys. Food supplies for Dutchbat also only came through in dribs and drabs. And as soon as any overland supplies, no matter how meagre, reached the enclave, the resupply issue was swiftly taken off the agenda. This, of course, was not the way to reach a structural solution to the problem. UNPROFOR was thus trapped in a vicious circle. The UN units in the enclaves were like lemons being squeezed to the last

¹³⁸ UNNY, DPKO, UNPF. Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 01/07/95, No. UNPF Z-1082.

¹³⁹ Confidential information (181).

¹⁴⁰ ABZ, DEU/ARA/05244. Madrid Coreu 454, 11/07/95.

¹⁴¹ Interview Leighton Smith, 06/06/00.

¹⁴² Interview W. Claes, 12/03/01.

drop. These problems incidentally were not unique to Srebrenica: Zepa and Gorazde were in a comparable position.

To General Smith in Sarajevo, resupply by air was primarily a form of psychological warfare to put Mladic in his place and to persuade him to allow resupply by land. Time and again, he took the initiative to look at alternatives and options, advantages and disadvantages, and the reactions of the warring factions. Smith continued to emphasize the problem to his superiors in Zagreb. He revealed himself to be an imaginative thinker who continued to look for a solution that took the complicated military and political circumstances into account. In doing so, he was prepared to run a certain risk and put the VRS on the spot. His basic arguments hardly changed; the problem was serious and remained serious. The reaction to Smith's plans also hardly changed: these were repeatedly found to be too risky.

Smith thus displayed greater resolve than General Janvier in Zagreb. Janvier was more cautious. He usually supported Smith's plans after some hesitation, but his problem was then to obtain permission from New York. The UN in New York, in turn, was in no hurry to force through a solution. Several times, New York also expressed doubts about the seriousness of the situation.

It seemed as if New York did not really understand the concept of resupplying the eastern enclaves by air. Though the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN did look at the possibilities for planning such an operation, it appeared to have little faith in the helicopter option.

Resupply by air was not seen as a structural solution. This view, incidentally, was held more widely and was also shared in Zagreb and Sarajevo. The preference was to stick to overland convoys, which had a much greater capacity, and to seek permission for these from the Bosnian Serbs.

New York was also loath to compromise the peacekeeping nature of the operation. If a helicopter had been brought down, the line of demarcation between peacekeeping and peace enforcement might have been blurred, thus putting the entire UNPROFOR operation in jeopardy; this fear also explains why New York kept such a wary eye on NATO Admiral Leighton Smith's persistent urging to suppress the Bosnian Serb air defences in order to pre-empt Bosnian Serb attacks on NATO aircraft.

This general picture is confirmed by the German General Manfred Eisele, Assistant Secretary-General for Planning and Support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the UN in New York. He said that he had worked on improving the political climate for resupplying UNPROFOR units within the UN. But resupply with helicopters and support from NATO aircraft turned out to present far too many difficulties which, in his view, were mainly caused by the risk of possible counteractions by the VRS. The NATO member states, so he said, were also insufficiently willing to give air support. According to Eisele, the chance that the plan for resupply by air would actually be carried out was not 'close to zero: it *was* zero!'.¹⁴³

There was nothing unique about the constant hesitations at the UN in New York. UN operations by definition depend heavily on the governments of individual countries. The British government was non-committal on the whole; the French were more cooperative. The British Minister Rifkind made it clear that the British government had serious doubts. He reiterated this on 20 June to Annan in New York, but he had already reached his standpoint that such an operation was too dangerous well before then. The Canadian government had withdrawn its support for the same reason. Rifkind then reaffirmed his support for resupply by road with the permission of the VRS; failing that permission, the British government doubted whether there was any point in maintaining a presence in the enclaves.¹⁴⁴ There were even suggestions that the British Permanent Representative at the UN, Sir David Hannay, had deliberately misrepresented the concept of resupply by air because the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office was against any resupply operation based on force; the British

¹⁴³ Interview Manfred Eisele, 14/10/99.

¹⁴⁴ NIOD, Coll. Smith. Code Cable Annan to Akashi, 20/06/95, No. 2042.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs felt it was more important to keep NATO together. Meanwhile, it was all too true that 'NATO was standing by as an irrelevance'.¹⁴⁵

The Bosnian Serbs gave no quarter and saw the obstruction of UNPROFOR as a means of paying the UN back in kind for the increasingly painful UN embargo. The Bosnian Serbs wanted to punish UNPROFOR for the sanctions imposed against them and demanded that half of the contents of convoys be surrendered to them. In addition, their strategy was a deliberate effort to restrict the logistical support of UNPROFOR in the enclaves and the supplies to the population. UNPROFOR and the population were to be made dependent on the good will of the Bosnian Serbs. Their aim was to create an unbearable situation without any hope of improvement. In an international context, it was expected that if the Serbs were prepared to block convoys by road, they would also have no qualms about undertaking action against resupply operations by air.

If there was any time that resupply with helicopters and NATO air support had been possible, it was at the beginning of March. Faced with the threat of concrete action, the VRS relented and allowed a convoy through, although again without fuel. The success of this resupply mission was largely attributable to a solo effort by General Smith who managed to persuade the British Chief of Defence Staff to give him permission to use British Chinook helicopters for this purpose.

The Bosnian government was not very helpful either. When a small convoy managed to reach Srebrenica from Yugoslavia in June, this elicited protests from the Bosnian government which Minister Muratovic expressed in a letter to Janvier: 'UNPROFOR yielded to the blackmail of the Serb Aggressor side and accepted to receive supplies from and via Serbia'. According to the Bosnian Muslims, all this was one of the results of the secret meetings between Janvier and Mladic (for a more extensive discussion of this, see Chapter 2, Part III). It was unacceptable to the Bosnian people to see that those responsible for the safe delivery of humanitarian aid were negotiating with the party who had caused all the misery. For this reason, the Bosnian population might respond in an unpredictable manner to vehicles bringing supplies from 'occupied territory'. Muratovic also questioned the fact that UNPROFOR was going to such lengths to supply its own personnel without doing a thing to provide the population of Sarajevo with food 'which was your mission in the first place'. Janvier had no intention of responding to Muratovic's letter.¹⁴⁶

There were also a number of external factors that thwarted the initiatives to resupply by air. The hostage crisis after the bombardments on Pale only made the possibility of a solution more remote than ever. The announced arrival of the Rapid Reaction Force also had a counterproductive effect. In contrast to what the Netherlands had hoped, this unit's task was not to obtain access to the enclaves through the use of force. Moreover, Janvier also felt that the Rapid Reaction Force had been foisted upon him; he feared that its deployment would expose UN personnel in the eastern enclaves to reactions of the VRS.

Looking back with hindsight, the then Chief of the Directorate for Atlantic Security of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, F. Majoor, ventured that the Netherlands should possibly have spoken out at the meeting in Paris on 3 June to say loudly and clearly that Dutchbat could no longer accept responsibility for the safety of Srebrenica.

On the other hand, such a statement might have made the Ukrainians think twice about relieving Dutchbat precisely when the agreement was politically close to finalization. Another not inconsiderable problem was that such a stance would have placed the population at the mercy of the Bosnian Serbs.¹⁴⁷

Even so, this frank admission raises the question as to whether the Netherlands should not have exerted more vigorous pressure on New York to take measures to improve the resupply situation. Ministers Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve had spoken to each other regularly about the rapidly deteriorating

¹⁴⁵ Interview J. Baxter, 16/10/00.

¹⁴⁶ NIOD, Coll Ashton. Hasan Muratovic to General Rupert Smith, 27/06/95, No. 01-91-1158/95. Sent with Code Cable Janvier to Annan, 28/06/95, No. Z-1070.

¹⁴⁷ ABZ, DAV 999.241. Memorandum DAV to RPZ (H.J. Hazewinkel), 16/11/95, No. 95/1225. ABZ, DAV 999.241.

situation, but this had not resulted in any strong signals indicating to New York that, unless the UN changed its policy, the Netherlands would find itself compelled to discontinue its task in the enclave. Such a signal, as was said retrospectively at Foreign Affairs, would have been the obvious course of action after Karremans had made the hopelessness of Dutchbat's position clear to The Hague.¹⁴⁸

Representatives of the Ministry of Defence who visited the UN headquarters in Zagreb and New York did repeatedly raise the resupply issue. Janvier's staff in Zagreb needed no convincing, however. The problems lay with the UN in New York which, in turn, pointed to the individual governments whose hesitations steadily grew as time progressed.

The Hague, too, failed to send any powerful diplomatic signals to New York. Whether the Netherlands could have achieved anything there on its own is very much open to question, but a combined effort with the other countries that had supplied troops to the eastern enclaves (the United Kingdom and Ukraine) would at least have made it possible to present a stronger case.

¹⁴⁸ ABZ, DAV/MS, 01100. Memorandum Head DAV/MS to Head DAV, 16/10/95, No. DAV/MS-89/95.