

NATO 'humanitarian aid' to Bosnia a farce

by Katharine Kanter

"Thousands of Bosnians will die anyway, so why hurry?"—
Spanish officer at Split, Croatia

Having allowed the Serbians to seize 30% of Croatia and 70% of Bosnia, leaving a quarter of a million dead and at least 2 million homeless, NATO forces, which could have stopped the Serbians in June 1991 before a shot was ever fired, are now dressing up in "U.N. Blue Helmets" costumes, painting their tanks white, and streaming into Bosnia and Croatia under a "humanitarian" cover. The Bosnians call them the Ice Cream Soldiers because they "melt with pleasure" when they see Serbian soldiers. In fact, these troops are there to guard Serbian territorial gains, keep the Bosnians fenced in, and make sure they die quietly. About 1.5 million Bosnians are about to do so.

Keeping the dying quiet has given the NATO forces some trouble, because so many refugees have reached Germany and Austria that their tale of woe cannot be kept from the public. So, a dog-and-pony show called "aid convoys" has been set up for TV consumption for western viewers. As one Spanish officer put it to the Madrid daily *El País* on Nov. 10: "It may sound mean, but it's too late to save thousands of people in Sarajevo anyway. They're going to die of cold and hunger, so there's no point in rushing now just to gain a few days?" The Spanish contingent at Split has received instructions from Madrid not to move until Nov. 15, and to refuse all U.N. requests for early action. An additional 6-7,000 men have been flown into the area, mainly from NATO armies, purportedly to guard aid convoys going into Bosnia. Bosnia's terrain is mountainous, cut by narrow, winding roads which by November lie under heavy mud, and by Christmas become impassable from ice and snow. For Serbian ambush parties, it is child's play to rout convoys on such roads.

On Sunday, Nov. 8, a U.N. convoy "protected" by Spanish legionnaires which attempted to break through to Sarajevo, was shot up by the Serbians in the area of Mostar and turned back. At Bratunac on Nov. 7, dozens of shrieking, hysterical Serbian women, dressed in black, forced a U.N. aid convoy escorted by high officials of the ACNUR (U.N. Refugee Commission) to turn back. They threatened to throw themselves under the wheels of the trucks, laden with supplies for 50,000 Muslims on the verge of starvation in the besieged town of Srabanica. A local Serbian official told the

U.N. drivers that, should their theater performance fail, "the women have pistols and grenades." This "crazy female" trick has become popular with Serbian commanders.

On Nov. 11, a Spanish patrol reconnoitering the paths into Bosnia from Split was stopped by a hail of shells and turned back. On the same day, a British convoy was attacked at Metkovic; it retreated, dumping its laden trailers—which doubtless fell into Serbian hands. Interestingly, the British convoy drivers are *not* professional soldiers; many, like a man of 55 interviewed by the London *Times*, are "ordinary people out of work, with mortgages, and prepared to do something unusual." As in World War I, the ongoing Balkans war, and those which are now being planned to succeed it, may turn out to be a meatgrinder which will chomp up those "surplus" armies of unemployed from post-industrial wastelands like the United States and Great Britain.

Many don't want to leave

On Nov. 12, José María Mendiluce, the ACNUR delegate for the Balkans, told the Madrid press that the aid convoys are being "deliberately attacked. A million people may die. . . . The first reports we have from the new 6,000-man U.N. contingent are not encouraging." Although the U.N.'s policy is to encourage the Bosnians to clear out of the areas the Serbians want, Mendiluce let slip that the benighted Bosnians were not performing as planned. "The problem with evacuation," he said, "is that many people don't want to leave!"

The British government, meanwhile, made known on Nov. 6 that it was imposing visa requirements effective from that day, for people from former Yugoslavia. Only persons presenting visas stamped Belgrade or Zagreb would be allowed in. Airlines flying in refugees without such visas will be fined £2,000 per illegal traveler, an unprecedented step. This means, de facto, that henceforth, *no one* fleeing Bosnia will irritate England with their presence. On the weekend of Nov. 14, some 181 Bosnians who had spent a week on a freezing hillside on the Austrian border awaiting permission to fly to England, where charities had already found homes for them, were notified by the Home Office that they would be "dealt with on a case-by-case basis," i.e., left until they were dead of cold. At that point the Spanish government stepped in and took the refugees.

For his part, British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd wrote a thriller, *The Last Summer*, while on holiday in August in Devon. War has not kept Hurd from hitting the cocktail party circuit to promote it. (Slicker to pick up a penny this way, than by dirty arms deals.) The plot, he told the *Daily Telegraph*, he got on his recent trip to Sarajevo: "Neighbor killing neighbor, Croat against Serb." Thanks to the old boy network in the Arab world, Hurd has got his little opus translated into Arabic; signed copies are being delivered to Middle East potentates, such as Saudi Arabia's King Fahd. Meanwhile, honest Muslims expire in the snows of Bosnia.