

Report from Paris by Jacques Cheminade

France must not die in Sarajevo

Why no mass outcry, after French troops let Bosnia's deputy premier be killed? asks the Schiller Institute's leader in France.

The assassination of Bosnian Deputy Premier Hakija Turajlic in Sarajevo constitutes a terrible breach of a promise given and a failure of the honor of France. Because it was indeed the French blue helmets of the Unprofor, the United Nations peacekeeping troops, charged with his protection, who delivered the victim into the hands of his Serbian assassins.

The worst is that the vast movement of public indignation which ought to have followed this crime, has not manifested itself.

The worst is that our government continues to sponsor, in Geneva, as if nothing had taken place, negotiations whose flaunted aim is to legitimize Greater Serbian genocide and the territorial conquests of the war of ethnic purification.

The "errors" committed on the ground by our soldiers cannot be explained except by the impossible situation in which they were placed and the nature of the orders they received. Can one imagine, otherwise, how a professional soldier like Col. Patrice Sartre could have opened the door of the French armored vehicle, in which the Bosnian deputy premier was sitting, when it should have been kept shut? Since all inspection inside U.N. vehicles was in fact prohibited, it could not be by ignorance or negligence that a colonel suddenly took it upon himself to authorize it, and to authorize it to people whose intentions could not have been unknown to him. Can one imagine that a colonel, whose competence is recognized, would have agreed, ignoring the danger, to

palaver for more than two hours, without requesting, as he ought to have done, reinforcements or an intervention by General Morillon with the Serbian principals? Moreover, if the French military men have not been sanctioned or have not been fired, it is because they acted according to the orders they had received.

The conclusion that must be drawn is clear: Up to the highest levels, which "covered up the errors," the French government is, along with the U.N., a culprit and an accomplice in the murder which was committed.

Is there anything surprising about this? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Because this assassination takes place in a context which is itself also clear. At the Geneva negotiations, supported by French diplomacy, Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen are handing over to men who have committed crimes against humanity, the territories upon which they committed those crimes. Their cynicism is not limited to the murder of one man; it involves the deaths of hundreds of thousands of human beings and the deportation of millions. And this breach of honor, this abominable breach, is accomplished at the very moment in which the triple alliance—U.S.A., Great Britain, and France—intends to teach a lesson to Saddam Hussein!

Western public opinion can compare the rapidity of the reaction in Paris, London, and Washington, toward this country under embargo, already hungry and crushed, which is Iraq, and the extraordinary immunity which Milosevic and the Serbs in Bosnia en-

joy—to say nothing of the respect which surrounds the Khmer Rouge, the authors of the other genocide of our times. A terrible cynicism, a terrible hypocrisy in plain sight of the whole world.

Now French opinion has not really reacted. Few, very few, voices have been raised to condemn the unacceptable conduct of our government. A sort of "pact of silence," flavored with pathos, weighs on our public life. Ever since President François Mitterrand accepted, with the tacit assent of the (official) opposition, the new world order of the Anglo-American elites, the new "Pax Romana," the intolerable has been repeating itself, and has become more and more tolerated.

This is of the most extreme gravity for the very idea of nation, of our nation. What is left, in fact, of the will to live together, when the state acts against honor and makes itself the accomplice, active or passive, of crimes against humanity? What remains of the nation-state when it is no longer capable of assuring the simple physical protection of those to whom it has been assigned?

It is not a question, here, of a moral breakdown of France vis-à-vis Bosnia and the world, but rather of a moral breakdown within France itself. Men and women of my generation remember family discussions in which people used to say: concentration camps, ethnic cleansing, mass rapes, never again, never again. And behold, now that evil has returned, at our doorstep, how are we able to tolerate it?

The only choice is to fight, to fight today as we did in the dark days of yesteryear, to escape shame.

It is time to ask the question: What then is France, what then is Europe, what are they for? A certain idea of France, a certain idea of Europe died in Sarajevo. It is time to get back to work.