

Bosnian Army battles to save Gorazde, West surrenders without a fight

by Katharine Kanter

"Here is Sifat Cibo. I am the head doctor of the Gorazde Hospital. Serbian tanks are fanning out around the hospital, they are 500 m away. Shells are falling closer and closer. . . . We are operating without anaesthetic, the instruments cannot be sterilized. Wounded are pouring in. We are running out of food and water. Help us! Villages are on fire all around the city. *This is the end. But we will never, never surrender.*"

That report was captured on short wave radio on April 16 by the Paris daily *Le Figaro's* correspondent in Sarajevo, Xavier Gautier. Since that day, the hospital has taken direct hits, patients have been killed and wounded, and the roof of the hospital has been blown off by shells. We have reprinted it, because press coverage of the appalling events in Gorazde—a U.N. "safe haven"—has deliberately been kept so sparse, that neither the European nor the American public, unless they have the time to piece together reports from 10 or 15 daily newspapers, can possibly form any idea of what is really taking place there. The Serbians have up to 30,000 men, thousands of whom are regular soldiers of the Yugoslavian National Army, surrounding the city; they have at least 130 pieces of heavy artillery, surface-to-air missile-launchers, 25 modern tanks, and an unlimited supply of ammunition.

As in every other siege they have conducted, the Serbians have sat in the hills for weeks, eating, drinking, and firing down endless salvos upon the defenders' lines and upon the targeted city; once they have broken the spine of the defense with overwhelming firepower, they roll their tanks into the city and flatten it, expelling all survivors into the waiting arms of their cronies in the U.N.

Chronicle of the Serbian assault

Here are the diary entries for April 17, as published in the Danish daily *Politiken*, by two surgeons from the French organization "Doctors Without Borders" who are still in Gorazde. "At dawn we heard the opening thunder of cannon, accompanied by machine gun and mortar fire. It could have been any other day in Gorazde, but the explosions were closer, the machine gun salvos were longer, and the destructive force of the cannons greater. . . .

"This afternoon, the besieging troops are clearly advancing. . . . Now they are up on the hills and look down upon the suffering citizens. It is a long-awaited moment, and they

enjoy it. In the hospital, chaos . . . the windows of every ward are splintered by bullets, shells struck the hospital garden, and this so-called 'neutral bastion' is shaken by endless detonations. The emergency ward is full of the wounded and the dead, civilians as well as soldiers. We hear their screams and weeping above the whistling of the bullets, the machine gun salvos, and the heart-breaking pounding from the cannon. The blood of the wounded is compounded with the tears of the staff.

"Here in the hospital, we are preparing ourselves for the onslaught. Shoulder to shoulder, doctors and soldiers are going to take up weapons and defend the hospital and the patients. The building is almost a bunker. Unfortunately, it will also be a main target. Only a few shells from the besiegers' cannon will rob 60,000 people of their only hope to get medical care. The tanks have moved into the city. . . . people are forced to flee from the northeastern parts of the city, toward the teeming center. Tonight, women and children will have to sleep in stairwells and corridors. . . . We believe that all the quarters of the city on the right bank of the Drina, where the hospital stands, will fall into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. Soon the tanks in the northeast will roll toward the center. This afternoon an ultimatum—a phony ultimatum—made them withdraw a little, but the infantry stayed. Every day, the courage of the citizens impresses me more and more. Everybody knows that the city is lost. These people have been let down by the outside world. . . . Nobody is ever going to make me turn my face away from massacres of women and children, and in this case, they all happen to be Muslim."

According to reports, at least 1,200, and not 200 people have been killed in the 10-day Serbian offensive. Bodies are strewn in the streets of Gorazde and cannot be taken up because of unceasing sniper fire. The streets stink of decomposing flesh. The entire sanitation system has broken down. Hundreds lie in a hospital built to hold 35. No food can be got from U.N. stocks because Serbian snipers are taking out everyone seen on the streets. Shells have been falling at the rate of 20 per second.

The countryside around Gorazde has been burned and devastated. More than 38 villages have been razed to the ground.

On April 16, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic put out

Mod Stor-Serbien



A cartoon in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, April 20: "Toward Greater Serbia." Left to right: Thorwald Stoltenberg, David Owne, Slobodan Milosevic, Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

a message to Gorazde not to surrender, not to give in to panic, and to prepare to defend the city inch by inch. His orders have been carried out to the letter: Pushed back from every strategic point, the Bosnian Army, joined by militia men from the town, is engaging the Yugoslavian National Army in the suburbs and street by street in the center; they have almost run out of ammunition and are down to hand guns and hunting rifles. Having no other means, men have been running from the shelled houses hurling Molotov cocktails at Serbian tanks.

At the time of writing, April 21, the Bosnian Army and militiamen have still not surrendered the city, although the latest Serbian push cut off the northeastern hills; they are now fighting literally house to house.

Although few appear to register what is actually going on, the Bosnian defenders will go down in history as one of the greatest and most heroic resistance movements ever known.

The Serbian plan

The Serbian plan is simple; in the words of the London *Times*'s Eve-Ann Prentice (she was, incidentally, expelled last year from the U.N. press pool in Geneva for publishing material unflattering to European Community "mediator" David Owen), "General Mladic may now cease shelling the town and leave the U.N. to carry out the dirty work of moving people out under the cloak of allowing evacuation of the besieged. If this does not work, he may move his tanks back into the center of Gorazde." Prentice believes that "U.N.-assisted evacuations" of Zepa and Srebrenica, the other enclaves in eastern Bosnia surrounded by the Serbs, are also in the cards in the near future.

Gorazde is strategically critical to Greater Serbia: It lies

astride the pathway from Belgrade to the sea, and was the nodal point for the Bosnian counteroffensive against the Serbians in all directions. It is also the site of a huge weapons factory supplying the Bosnian war effort in the whole eastern part of the country. Needless to say, this is now cut off.

U.S. "inaction," if that is the right word, having freed the Serbians to move their toys and games to the next battlefield, a euphoric Gen. Manilo Milovanovic, leader of the Radovan Karadzic forces in Bosnia, told the press on April 19: "We have decided to concentrate our forces and defend Serbian territory between Brcko and Doboj." This is a narrow point along the corridor around Brcko on the Sava River, connecting Serbia with its conquests in western Bosnia and Croatia.

The Serbians could have been stopped

So, you know what the Serbians are doing, and you know what the Bosnians are doing to stop them. The question is, why was the Serbian offensive on Gorazde not stopped, when it were child's play for the United States to do so?

On April 10 and 11, the United States, acting, de facto, unilaterally, carried out bombing raids against Serbian positions around Gorazde without telling the Russians in advance. A couple of tanks and a tent were hit, but nonetheless, the raids were harbingers of something more to come. For some hours, the Serbians called off the attacks. On April 12, the Russians screamed bloody murder, but did nothing. Then, on April 14, unbelievably, two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters were shot down over Iraqi Kurdistan by "friendly fire," under conditions of perfect visibility, the F-15C pilots having been informed beforehand of the helicopters' movements. At the time, Malcolm Rifkind, the British secretary of defense, was in the Pentagon.

This act, said American statesman Lyndon LaRouche, was an undisguised threat to President Clinton to call off the air raids against Serbia, issued by a suspect "with the Union Jack tattooed all over its bare buttocks." He said, "The British control the U.N. forces in Bosnia. The U.N. operation is run by a British commander, by Gen. Michael Rose in this case. Mysteriously at the same time . . . somebody . . . caused the impossible to occur over the air of northern Iraq. That is absolutely impossible if the rules are followed, which means that somebody in the U.N. command in northern Iraq, which is under British influence, set this up. Then we have the same British command, including Malcolm Rifkind, who comes out and attacks the United States on the attempted use of air power in Bosnia."

At that point, the weekend of April 16, the U.S. administration began to issue statements indicating that there would be no further air raids, that the United States might even consider lifting the economic sanctions against Serbia, that in future Russian approval would be sought for every U.S. move, and so forth. So frightening was the administration's slide backwards that Congress broke out into tumult. As the *Washington Post* wrote: "By positioning himself as the *pawn of a self-driven international machine*, Mr. Clinton has abdi-

cated what ought to be a great power's *serious effort to win*" (emphasis added).

Tearing off the U.N. mask

At the Luxemburg European Union foreign ministers' meeting on April 18, which ended in a "unanimous" decision to do absolutely nothing, British diplomats told the London *Daily Telegraph's* correspondent: "We can't achieve what we want by brute force. Any solution to the problem of Gorazde must involve the Russians. We have to look to the Russians for diplomatic efforts, and we have to try to get more money from the Americans for more U.N. troops." The same officials added that it was the *Russian reaction to air strikes* which meant that the strategy had effectively been abandoned so quickly.

Heartened by the sweet smell of blood, the British promptly gave the green light to Unprofor and the Serbians to move on to the next phase in the temporarily stalled offensive. Although 150 Unprofor soldiers and U.N. officials, kidnapped by Bosnian Serbs following the April 11 U.S. raids, are still in custody, the affair was dismissed by General Rose's spokesman as an "administrative matter." On April 14, a fact made public only on April 20 and only by the Danish paper *Jyllands Posten*, the Danish Unprofor battalion at Tuzla airport was shelled by Serbian forces. The Danes radioed for close air support. This was *denied them by the U.N. command*. On April 19, about 150 Serbian soldiers stormed a U.N. arms depot north of Sarajevo and took back 18 of their confiscated anti-aircraft guns. U.N. sources told the *International Herald Tribune* that the French soldiers guarding them "wanted to resist but were *ordered to stand down*." Other U.N. sources told the British press, "It was decided not to shoot in order to *avoid a bloodbath*!"

Also on April 19, Serbians in the Baranja region of occupied Croatia assaulted U.N. weapons depots and took back their confiscated heavy weapons. A Belgian Unprofor spokesman coolly remarked, "Some of the arms were taken out of a few depots. . . . It happened in a nonaggressive way." By April 21, the Serbians had begun to shell Pakrac in Croatian West Slavonia.

Enter 'Dr. Death'

Enter Lord David "Dr. Death" Owen with his sidekick Thorvald Stoltenberg, who had been sidelined for months by U.S. diplomatic efforts, though Owen kept the *Financial Times* "in close touch with [Serbian leader Slobodan] Milosevic" all the while. As Russian envoy Vitali Churkin left the Serbian stronghold of Pale, mumbling nonsense about how mean the Serbians are to the Bosnians in Gorazde, Owen and Stoltenberg arrived, ostensibly to "mollify" Karadzic. At the time of writing, they are in Moscow, under cloak of secrecy. All that is known, is that after conferring with them—Owen emerged saying something to the press about "everyone having to sing from the same hymn book" (since when does Satan sing?)—Russian President Boris Yeltsin went to a meeting of the Rus-

sian National Security Council, after which he appeared and said that Russia would "not accept" further U.S. raids against the Serbians without U.N. Security Council agreement; he demanded yet another summit among Russia, the United States, and the European Union, in other words, endless palavers until such time as Bosnia is dead and buried and the war can get off the ground in Kosova and Macedonia.

On the same day, April 20, the weekly meeting of NATO ambassadors in Brussels, ostensibly to "discuss" air strikes against the Serbians, broke down in chaos. As British diplomats kept up a stream of appeals to the United States to cough up both more cash for Unprofor and U.S. ground troops—the British recipe for a quagmire—NATO officials said that plans for air strikes would take "several days," that "more meetings" were called for, and that in any event, Russia would have to be consulted.

Looking forward to World War III?

Not everyone is looking confidently forward to World War III, however. On April 19, Misha Glenny wrote in the *London Times*, "These were ten days to shake the world. If the northern Balkan conflict is allowed to continue, an artillery war which may breach the borders of the former Yugoslavia is extremely likely."

In an interview with the *London Observer* on April 17, Warren Zimmerman, the former U.S. ambassador to Belgrade, said, "What is happening in Gorazde is the most important test the West has faced in the entire Bosnian war. Are we going to knuckle under, or are we going to do what it has always been clear we would have to do: escalate air strikes until the Serbs understand that we really mean it? If we are not ready to escalate, we will have told the world that we lack the resolve to defend the basic western values, even when challenged in a totally direct way."

And the former French minister Jean-François Deniau wrote: "There is at least one leader who knows how many of the dead weigh upon his conscience: the U.S. secretary of defense. When he announced a few days ago that Gorazde, although a U.N. 'safe haven,' would not be protected by the U.S.A., it is exactly as though he had himself given the order for the Serbian offensive and shelling against the city."

Attacks have begun to mount against the very existence of the U.N., even from such normally docile quarters as Denmark, including former Foreign Minister Elleman-Jensen, the new head of the Danish Conservative Party Hans Engell, and officers at the Danish War College. Then, on April 20, Belgian and Danish national TV broadcast footage of 200 Belgian paratroopers who were evacuated from Kigali in Rwanda the night before. Wearing black berets, the 200 stepped from the plane onto the Brussels tarmac, took the U.N. blue berets from their pocket, pulled knives, and shredded the U.N. beret before the cameras. One 19-year-old soldier wept as he described the events in Kigali. "Let them court martial me. I will never wear that U.N. beret again. I refuse to be an accomplice to genocide," he said.