

Bosnia's Sacirbey: U.N. role is finished

Speaking at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on July 17, Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey said that the United Nations is finished in Bosnia, that any nation that wants to help Bosnia should do it bilaterally. Here is Sacirbey's statement, and excerpts from his responses to questions. The transcript is by Federal News Service.

First of all, the U.N. mission in Bosnia and Hercegovina is at an end. The U.N. framework is no longer an acceptable basis for the presence of international troops within Bosnia and Hercegovina.

Second, the arms embargo must be lifted, and it has been left as the only option through which the Bosnians can defend themselves.

Three, while others argue about where the line should be drawn in reasserting international credibility in Bosnia, we believe there's only one line right now, and that is at Zepa. Those who, in fact, wish to draw the line somewhere else are trying to find an easy way to reassert their own credibility by effectively using the capacity of the Bosnian forces to actually do the job for themselves.

In my recent visit to France, in several meetings at the highest level, I was asked, "Are the Bosnians willing to fight for Gorazde?" I said, "We're willing to fight for Zepa and Gorazde." The next question was, "Well, are the British, in fact, willing to join the French in fighting with the Bosnians to save Gorazde?" That's, of course, a question for the British to answer. "Are the Americans willing to provide lift support and equipment to the French and the British to defend Gorazde?" That is a question for the Americans.

Interestingly, though, while everyone focuses on whether or not the Bosnians are willing to fight to save Gorazde or Srebrenica or Sarajevo, no one asks, "What is it going to take for the Bosnians to be able to execute this themselves, to be able to, in fact, fight alongside these allies?" It seems that some want us to fight alongside of them and still continue to deny us the weapons to be able to carry the fight most effectively. I find this position incomprehensible and morally flawed.

If, in fact, you do want someone to fight alongside of you to defend their territory and defend your honor, then they're entitled to the means to defend themselves. And, by the way, the story of Srebrenica is by no means over. Thousands of people are missing—civilians, mainly. The men and young boys who have been taken away to uncertain futures must be accounted for. The women, raped and others taken off to once again a most horrible future, need to be accounted for

and brought to safety. And finally, we know that there are many Bosnian refugees, columns, now trying to find their way back to government-controlled territory as they have become separated from the main body of refugees within Srebrenica itself.

[Question regarding the presence of United Nations peacekeeping forces in Bosnia.]

The U.N. mission will either voluntarily withdraw, or at the latest by November, we will, in fact, look for it to be terminated. I must emphasize that the uncertainty in our timing only has to do with the practical consequences and [inaudible] the situation to bring about the least risk to both the U.N. and the civilian population. That can, to some extent, be still impacted by an Unprofor withdrawal. But the U.N. framework for the current mission, as far as we're concerned, must end as soon as possible. And that really means even before November. . . .

First of all, if, in fact, all U.N. troops are to withdraw, we're ready to live with that contingency. Second, to those who, in fact, believe they can accomplish some good in Bosnia, whether on behalf of the Bosnians or on behalf of the international community, we certainly are willing to work with them on a bilateral basis or through a different framework to allow them to continue to do their good work.

As an example, we know that some troops within central Bosnia engaged in a more traditional peacekeeping mission are being productive in that mission. But you do not need 30,000 U.N. troops within Bosnia and Hercegovina to, in fact, do the job of no more than 3,000 to 5,000. The other troops are in excess both from an economic and political perspective. They, in fact, have become a hindrance, a clumsy reminder of the U.N.'s failures. And needless to say, I think it is never an interest to either find a new mission for these forces or to pull them out. But the U.N. framework has shown itself to be flawed and extremely inadequate. . . .

Clearly I think that some within the U.N. structure are more inclined to see a dead Bosnia than a live Bosnia which fights back. Explicitly, I'm not sure that anyone is willing to admit that. But the response of the United Nations and many in Europe to Bosnia's struggle for life has been one of describing it as an inconvenient factor to the building of a new Europe. . . .

Time is of the essence. I'm not sure that we have any other alternatives, though. If, in fact, the international community wishes to act to prevent the types of tragedies that you're speaking of, then they do have forces on the ground and they can use those forces to act outside the U.N. framework. It's up to them to decide to do that or not. Clearly the withdrawal of the U.N. forces from Bosnia-Hercegovina will require, according to some, a NATO presence in Bosnia. No such NATO presence has been approved.

So to the extent that we're talking about some forces coming in to help bail out Unprofor, I think we should also speak of some potential force that could come in or could

stay in to help the Bosnians. But I emphasize, we are prepared to live without any forces. And as a consequence, we think that even under those difficult circumstances, the Bosnians are better off with that future than the status quo. Effectively, as a whole, not in every instance but as a whole, the U.N. presence in Bosnia has become an impediment for greater, more effective action to help the Bosnians defend themselves or even to administer humanitarian assistance to our civilian population. . . .

[Question on the possibility of international brigades coming to fight with the Bosnians.]

As far as I know, in this country alone, there appear to be 5,000 people who are willing to go into Bosnia, non-Muslims, as I understand it, to fight on behalf of Bosnia. Certainly Bosnia is much more, bigger than an Islamic crusade. In fact, it is an international crusade. If I may paraphrase President Havel of the Czech Republic when he recently convened the opening of the Human Rights Building in Strasbourg in France. He said the war in Bosnia is between the Serbs and the others, and he said the others are us. So there are plenty of us, in America, in Africa, in Asia, and in Europe.

We are not waiting for anyone anymore. The only thing that I wish to do is be cautious so that I give the maximum opportunity for those who are effectively trapped by the U.N. framework to survive over the next few weeks, in particular the people of Zepa and the people of Gorazde. But frankly, it seems that even their future has very little to do with the U.N., and frankly has everything to do with our own capacity to defend ourselves.

I note one point that you made, and that is that under the conditions which Senator Dole has established for U.S. participation in a NATO withdrawal of Unprofor, it is explicitly stated that the U.S. in fact will not rescue weapons but only Unprofor personnel. . . .

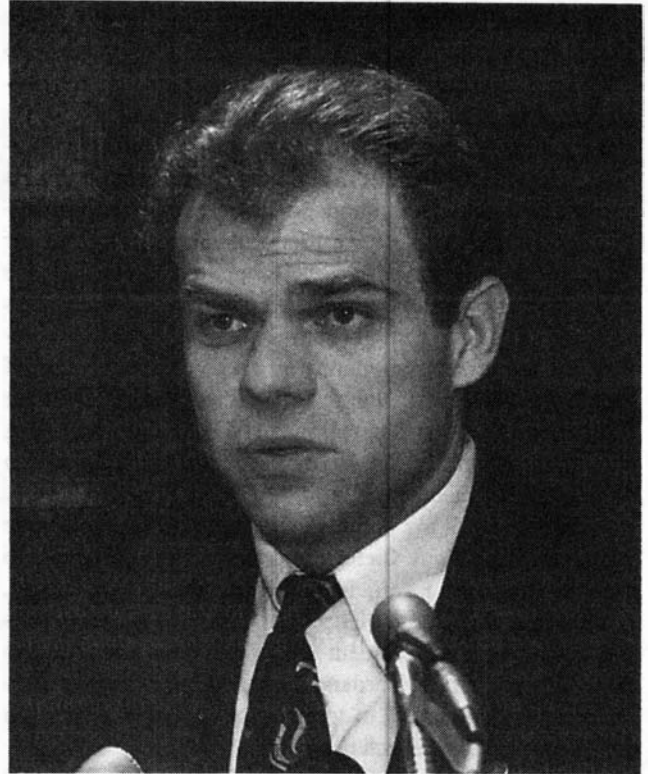
[Question about the French and British approach.]

Clearly the French and, I emphasize, British approach has not worked. Therefore, we're already to the next stage. What happens between Greece and Turkey is not so much a factor of what is done in Bosnia, but in fact what has not been done in Bosnia. The failure to take constructive measures to bring this war to an end has created a new set of potential confrontation lines. Those confrontation lines cannot be eliminated by covering up Bosnia. In fact, they seem to be only heightened. I emphasize once again that we are not asking for foreign troops to come to Bosnia. I emphasize once again that we are only prepared to count on ourselves and no one else. But at the same time, those who believe they have a constructive role to play in Bosnia, we're prepared to receive them, to cooperate with them in the context of a bilateral relationship or something else.

But the U.N. framework has in fact failed.

[Question about the role of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic.]

Mr. Milosevic's role in the latest assault has been evident



Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey: "I think that some within the U.N. structure are more inclined to see a dead Bosnia than a live Bosnia which fights back."

by the following: I have good information that while Mr. Carl Bildt [the former Swedish prime minister] met with Milosevic this last weekend and the weekend before the assault on Srebrenica, that General Mladic was with him. Neither Mr. Milosevic nor Mr. Bildt were able to dissuade Mr. Milosevic [sic] from undertaking his assault on Srebrenica. I think this has been long described, by at least me, as a story of Frankenstein and his monster, and the monster sometimes is under the control of Mr. Milosevic and sometimes he acts like he's out of control. But I can assure you at all times, it is Frankenstein who in fact has the influence.

It is sometimes more convenient to acknowledge it, sometimes less convenient, and to make it seem like the monster is out of control.

Therefore I would like to announce one, I think, important change in our policy, and that is that we have come to the conclusion that the current dance with Mr. Milosevic undertaken by Mr. Bildt and in the past through Mr. [Robert] Frasure and the Contact Group, has shown itself to be at an end, and in fact to have been converted into, effectively, a tune of continued aggression in Bosnia, rather than harmony for peace.

We think that we need to find once again, a new framework by which Mr. Milosevic is convinced for peace.

[Question about the Jewish community.]

I'm glad you brought the point up. In the past under maybe less urgent circumstances, I've had the opportunity to fully acknowledge the role of the American-Jewish community in helping the Bosnian people, politically and practically in addressing this aggression, this genocide. I think the Bosnian people, Muslims, Serbs, Croats, Jews, and others, as well as the Jews of the international community, in particular, the United States, have found common ground in the words of "Never again." While others tend to look at the Holocaust as a hurdle by which all other acts of war crimes and genocide are to be judged, the American Jewish community and the Jewish community as a whole have recognized that that is not a hurdle but in fact it is a commitment of the Jewish community to stand up against all genocides including those that, in numbers at least, may seem small in comparison to what happened during World War II.

I have made it my policy to recognize the Jewish people for their tremendous friendship and their commitment, to state it whenever I can, including in Muslim gatherings, including to skeptical audiences. And over the next few weeks I will direct our government policy to extend friendship to any Jewish community around the world, including the Jewish community in Israel, to continue the cooperation between our people and the Jewish people.

In this context, I think it is also important to note that Bosnia is not just a beneficiary of help. Bosnia, given the opportunity to succeed and persevere as a multi-cultural society, as a society whose survival is dependent on Jew, Christian, and Muslim alike, would in fact be once again reestablished as the bridge between religions, between cultures, between countries, between, effectively, East and West.

[Question about whether the Bosnian government has been in consultation with the U.N. Security Council.]

I have been in consultation with the U.S. administration on this point today and over the last several days. As you know, on June 28th I wrote a letter to the United Nations Security Council indicating that we are reviewing our consent. I think that letter says it all until such time that I am prepared to send the final letter, which says that our consent no longer exists. I have not sent that letter yet, but it may be forthcoming very, very soon. . . .

[Question concerning where Bosnia could get heavy weapons.]

There are numerous sources of weapons, including, of course, the United States. The U.S. Congress has contemplated providing us with defensive weapons, and we would certainly welcome that. Under all circumstances we would not be looking for, quote-unquote, "advisers" to come to our country and to help us use those weapons. We think that there are weapons out there that we are more than familiar with and could be most effective.

What someone keeps telling us is, "You have basically right now not much more than simple mortars and rifles. Do you know how to use F-16s?" And the answer is, we just

need something that's going to allow us to match up against the Serbian forces, just have a little bit more, just have ammunition. So I think those who keep asking us if we need F-16s are either badly misinformed as to what the war in Bosnia is all about, what's the sophistication of the weaponry, or in fact they are trying to undermine our legitimate call for discussion about what weapons could be useful in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

I think estimates of \$500 million to \$5 billion worth of weapons being needed for the Bosnian Army are not legitimate. I think they're inflated to scare off congressional decision-makers about the support that the Bosnians need. We need no more than a few hundred million dollars worth of weapons—much less, certainly, than what in fact Unprofor's costing the United States and the international community right now.

And when I say what Unprofor's costing, I'm talking about financial terms there. I'm not talking about terms of credibility and effectively the slow destruction of the United Nations system itself.

[Question about Sen. Robert Dole and his call to lift the arms embargo, saying that the lifting of the arms embargo unilaterally by the United States could foreclose the possibility of a beefed-up force to defend or protect the remaining safe havens, and asking if he is willing to foreclose that option by getting the arms embargo lifted.]

It's a tough question, of course. And the question really is, to what extent is that option real?

It appears it's not very real on the basis of what's happened in London, and I have pointed out in the United Kingdom that the call by Prime Minister Major for a meeting of foreign ministers and defense ministers in London on Friday was a delaying tactic trying to avoid the very steps needed to defend the safe areas.

It certainly is a measure that is intended to allow Zepa to die. On this basis, I question Prime Minister Major's integrity on this point, or at least I question his judgment as being reckless.

Now, taking those matters into consideration, I think that the only conclusion that we can come back with is that it is us who have to do the job. It is we who have to do the job, and on that basis, let's not expect anyone to come, as once Foreign Secretary Hurd put it, for the cavalry to come around the hill. We're going to have to be our own cavalry and our own defenders, and it's best right now that we in fact address our future in that context. I don't think, frankly, that we are foreclosing any options and, as I made clear in the discussion between the French and ourselves, [we] assumed that in fact the Bosnians would carry the bulk of the obligation to defend Gorazde anyway. So what I'm really asking is to what extent is it inconsistent to arm the Bosnians to help defend Gorazde, with the British and French or without the British and French; or effectively, are we in fact going to be the ones left to defend the British and Ukrainians there anyway? . . .