

MARGARET, THE LADY THATCHER, O.M., P.C., F.R.S.

Coverage letter



Thursday

30 July 1992

Dear Douglas,

I am appalled that the countries of the west have taken no effective action to deal with the massacres taking place in the midst of Europe. It isn't that we can't, it's that we won't. I have spent some time this week getting as many of the facts as I can and talking to recent observers. Here the enclosed letter.

No one with a conscience can let this go on. Previously, in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, we were not able to take action because of the risk of a

third world war. No such explanation
exists now. At that time ⁽¹⁹⁵⁶⁾, I remember
visiting a Hungarian woman saying
'the West will not help us, freedom is
selfish.' At the time I thought she
was wrong. Now, I am beginning to
think she was right.

I shall be away in Switzerland
from Sunday - but my office will be in
touch. Please do not give me a
brush-off letter.

Yours ever

Margaret



29th July 1992

Dear Douglas,

I have been giving much thought - as I know you will have done - to the terrible situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I have also been making every effort to find out precisely what is happening and to consider what should be done. I have no illusion about the difficulties. But I believe that urgent action to save the situation is both necessary and possible and I am confident that no one is better able than you, during this crucial British Presidency, to oversee it. There are five basic propositions I would make.

1. Something needs to be done urgently about the situation in Bosnia, which is deteriorating daily. While the talks in London have been taking place this week, another Serb offensive has started in northern Bosnia near the key river port of Brčko. Another is taking place in the region of Cazin, Velika Kladusa and Bosanski Novi, close to the Serb-controlled areas in Croatia, presumably with the aim of strengthening Serbia's direct link across Bosnia with those areas right down to the Adriatic coast near the city of Zadar.

These operations are being carried out in the framework of the policy of "ethnic cleansing" - the expulsion of the non-Serb population. In many cases, the deportees, prior to being moved out (often at short notice), are obliged to sign papers confirming that they are selling their property voluntarily.

In eastern Bosnia, the town of Goražde on the Drina river, which forms the border between Serbia and Bosnia, is besieged. A large number of Moslem refugees from other towns along the Drina are in the town, which could fall any day. A large-scale

massacre is feared. New refugees are also arriving in Sarajevo from other areas being "ethnically cleansed" by Serbian forces.

Independent observers blame the sudden deterioration in northern Bosnia on the decision to withdraw by the Croats, who had been fighting there together with Moslems but were then frightened by talk of Western sanctions against Croatia.

Serbian representatives at the talks in London and elsewhere are pressing for a ceasefire, supervised by the UN. This is seen by many observers as an attempt to achieve the "freezing" of the present situation now that the Serbs have captured about two-thirds of Bosnia's territory (they make up 31% of the total population as against 43% for the Moslems and 17% for the Croats).

The Moslems are resisting Western attempts to make them sit down with the Serbs and negotiate, on the grounds that they are being asked - as is indeed being put to them - "to accept that they have lost the war and face the consequences". They deeply resent Western pressure on them in this direction.

2. It is misleading to talk, as some in the West do, of "equal guilt" by all the "warring parties". In the first place, the government of President Alija Izetbegović in Sarajevo is the only legal government of the republic and has been recognised as such by the European Community, by the United States and by many other governments (including those of the Arab and Islamic countries).

In the second, it was Serbia that planned and carried out an aggression against Bosnia in April from its own territory. The pretence that Serbia has nothing to do with what goes on in Bosnia should not be taken at face value. There is still, as at the beginning, close coordination between the forces in Bosnia (now supposedly independent) and the Serbian high command in Belgrade. Belgrade is providing financial and military means for the war in Bosnia - including the all-important petrol

for the Serbian forces. It has been reported this week that 60 - 100 Serbian tanks from across the border have joined the offensive in northern Bosnia.

The Americans, who are closely monitoring the war in the former Yugoslavia, know all this from satellite surveillance. They also know that Croatia has been helping militarily the government in Sarajevo, not just in northern Bosnia but also in Hercegovina. This Croatian-Bosnian cooperation was formalised in an agreement between Presidents Tujman and Izetbegovic in Zagreb earlier this month.

Extraordinary statements from UN staff in Sarajevo, including that by General Lewis Mackenzie that the Moslems as well as the Serbs are shooting at their own positions (presumably, in the Moslem case, to provoke outside military intervention), have not been backed by any published evidence. Western reporters in Sarajevo think that UN people may be trying to rationalise the failure of their own mission by putting the blame on the "local barbarians".

3. It is not correct to say that nothing can be done by the West (except by persuasion) without being sucked into a Vietnam- or Lebanon-style conflict involving Western casualties and very large land forces. Serbia could - and should - be given an ultimatum to comply with certain key Western demands concerning Bosnia. These should include:

- cessation of Serbia's economic and military support for the war in Bosnia to be monitored by international observers placed on the Serb-Bosnian border (as demanded by the government in Sarajevo);
- recognition of Bosnia's independence and territorial integrity by Belgrade and a formal renunciation of any territorial claims against it;
- formal guarantees of access from Serbia into Bosnia for international humanitarian teams;

- formal agreement to the demilitarisation of Bosnia within a broader demilitarisation agreement for the whole region;
- promise of Serbian cooperation with the return of refugees to Bosnia - including Serbian ones.

It should be made clear to Serbia that if those demands (which should be precisely formulated and be accompanied by a deadline) were not met, military retaliation would follow including aerial bombardment of bridges on the Drina linking Bosnia with Serbia, of military convoys, of gun positions around Sarajevo, Gorazde and some other towns and of military stores and other installations useful in the war effort. It should be made clear that this was not war against the Serbian people, but that even installations on the Serbian side of the Bosnian-Serbian border could be attacked if they played an important role in the war.

Serbia is weak, sanctions have been biting despite some sanction-busting (particularly along the Danube) and there are no powerful outside backers such as the Soviet Union might have been or a possible neo-Communist Russia might be some time in the future. Serbia should not have been allowed to get away with all that. It has up to now been encouraged by Western inaction, not least explicit Western statements that force would not be used. A clear threat of military action would at long last send the right signal and force Serbia into thinking of pulling of the war.

4. The West's aim should be the restoration of the Bosnian state, backed by international guarantees within a regional pact, perhaps under CSCE supervision. This would be an internationally supervised regime, guaranteeing the rights of all the three main groups in Bosnia (but not allowing for its formal partition into three cantons).

Such a solution for Bosnia would prevent future irredentist wars that its partition between Serbia and Croatia would lead to. Also, keeping the Moslems in a united Bosnia would prevent that community's inevitable radicalisation that would happen

if the Moslems were dispersed and placed under alien rule. In such a situation, a desperate Moslem diaspora could turn to international terrorism. Europe would have created an Islamic time-bomb right in its centre. In other words, a problem not unlike the Palestinian one in the Middle East.

5. Britain as the current EC Chairman has two options. It can go for a "quick fix" - in effect, ratify Serbia's victory and ease the Moslems' lot by help for refugees and some help for those staying on under Serbia. This would not work. Britain would end up by being associated with a Munich-style deal.

The other option is to take the lead - no such crisis can be resolved without someone leading - in a more long-term solution that would involve not just diplomatic brokering a la Carrington as up to now but also the military sanction. Germany's participation could be necessary along with that of France, Italy and other Europeans as well as the United States. Serbia will not listen till it is forced to listen. Why should it? But if it is forced to do so, this will help with the resolution of other problems such as that in Kosovo. Only the prospect of defeat will lead to political change in Serbia that would bring to power a more democratic and peaceful leadership. The alternative - leaving it all to developments, waiting till the conflict "burns itself out" - will be not only dishonourable but also very costly - refugees, terrorism, wars in the Balkans affecting other countries and so on. Hesitation up to now had already proved costly. The matter is urgent. There are perhaps a few weeks left for a serious initiative before it is too late and the Serb victory is complete with terrible long-term consequences.