

The strategic shift in Bosnia and Croatia

by Michael Liebig

The situation in Bosnia and Croatia is marked by a strategic shift. It had become obvious, at the very latest by the beginning of May, that the Serbian forces in Bosnia and Croatia had been put on the defensive strategically. Last November, the Serbian attempt to inflict a decisive defeat upon the Bosnian Army in and around Bihac had run aground. That played out the last possibility for them to consolidate the Serbian conquests of 1992-93. The Bosnian people and their leadership have—amid unimaginable sacrifices and with unbelievable courage—built up an Army which has now grabbed the military initiative away from the Serbians. All along the nearly 2,000-kilometer front line in Bosnia, the Bosnian Army is undertaking more and more offensive operations against segments of the front, and with ever-increasing frequency. For the most part there have been no spectacular conquests of terrain, but cumulatively, more and more of the Serbian-occupied zones are being won back.

The military situation

The Serbian units are numerically too weak to stand up against the plethora of often simultaneously mounted Bosnian attacks. The Serbian infantry units are laboring under serious problems in their fighting morale. Only the continuing, massive artillery superiority of the Serbians has prevented deeper breaks in the front, long since. Here it is once again very clear that the United Nations weapons embargo imposed by Great Britain was from the outset a deliberate measure taken in support of the Serbian aggression against Bosnia and Croatia, after those nations declared their independence from the former Yugoslav confederation. Meanwhile, in the liberated zones of central and northeast Bosnia, a significant production of infantry armaments and grenade-launchers has been built up, which supplies the more than 200,000 Bosnian soldiers

to some extent. Some matériel also succeeds in getting into Bosnia from outside, despite the weapons embargo, but no heavy equipment. Since grenade-launchers only have a short range, the long-range Serbia artillery has continued to inflict heavy losses on the Bosnian soldiers—and civilians as well.

Since early May, the Bosnian Army in the area around Tuzla, in central Bosnia, and in the Sarajevo region, has won back important Serbian positions. In the Sarajevo region it is primarily a matter of a slowly progressing “encirclement” of the Serbian besiegers, and only secondarily a “blowing up” of the siege ring from the inside. In this, an important role is being played by the collaboration between the Bosnian Army and the Bosnian-Croatian HVO formations. The HVO has significant artillery forces at its disposal, which are also already being deployed in the “Battle of Sarajevo.” The Bosnian Army is striking against the Serbian besiegers from the southwest and north, while the center of gravity of the attack lies outward from the encircled battlefield in a southerly direction—toward Gorazde. The Battle of Sarajevo may well last for months, but the Bosnian leadership is determined not to allow a fourth winter under siege for Sarajevo’s war-weary population.

The most dangerous situation is that of the Serbian offensive formations in the far northeast of Bosnia. The author has just had the opportunity to get a personal overview of that situation. In Possavina, the Serbian supply corridor from Serbia to the Serbian-occupied regions of western and central Bosnia, as well as those in Croatia, is only a few kilometers across. Between Orasje and Gradacac the corridor could be cut through, but it is not certain whether the blockade could hold up long against massive Serbian artillery bombardment. The Possavina corridor is so important for Serbia, because the occupied territory under the rule of “Bosnian Serb” chief-

tain Radovan Karadzic is not economically viable. Hence the Serbian forces in Bosnia and Croatia are dependent on deliveries of weapons, munitions, fuel, and food from the Serbian regime in Belgrade. Despite contrary assertions from Belgrade, this supply line runs on full steam and has never been interrupted.

The main problem of the liberation strategy of the Bosnian leadership is the Bosnian "enclaves" in southeastern Bosnia, namely Gorazde, Sepa, and especially Srebrenica. In the besieged area of Srebrenica there are some 60,000 people. While it is conceivable that Gorazde and Sepa could be liberated by the Bosnian Army, the Serbians, if their military situation were to further worsen to the extent expected, could take Srebrenica by storm.

In that case it would be practically certain that the population which is trapped in there, would be massively slaughtered. It is difficult to conceive how, without external military support, a mass murder in the worst Nazi style could be prevented. It was precisely with the situation in Srebrenica and the other Serbian-encircled cities in mind, that the appeal which Lyndon LaRouche directed to President Clinton on June 14, 1995 should be understood, in which he proposed immediate American precision air attacks to destroy the heavy Serbian weapons in Bosnia (see *EIR*'s June 24 issue, p. 39).

The character of the Serbian soldiery

In the observation of the Serbian units in Bosnia and in the occupied zones of Croatia, it becomes very clear that this is not an "army" in the normal sense of the word. The Serbians depend on good weapons, especially artillery, but most of the units in the infantry division are a very low level of fighting force. It of course looks different when they are marching against weaker soldiers who have been largely beaten down by artillery, and especially against Bosnian civilians. The author recently had the opportunity to see former Serbian military barracks in Stara Gradiska. The barracks were abandoned when the occupants fled during the Croatian military actions to free West Slavonia at the beginning of May. The conditions we encountered are barely conceivable for former members of the armies of either NATO or the Warsaw Pact. The hygienic conditions, the state of the sleeping quarters, and the residues of alcohol and drug consumption defy all description. It was immediately clear that the Serbian military units in Bosnia and Croatia resembled much more the soldiery of the Thirty Years' War than any European army of the 20th century.

That was also manifest during a visit to the liberated villages in West Slavonia, which had been occupied by the Serbians for four years. These villages were totally "ethnically cleansed" in 1991, i.e., the Croatian population was killed or expelled. Since the Serbs lacked the human potential to resettle them, most of the villages were turned into almost depopulated, plundered and wasted "ghost towns." There

was no reconstruction of any kind to be observed in the last four years of Serbian occupation.

The psychological state of the population

Despite the long-lasting, unspeakable sufferings of the Bosnian population, a grim determination may be perceived there, to hold out and to drive the Serbs bit by bit out of the country. There is a feeling in the Bosnian population that the low point for Bosnia has been crossed. Despair is slowly giving way to a certainty of triumphing in the end. In this, people are only trusting to their own forces, because the disgust for the attitude of especially Great Britain, but also of Russia and France, can scarcely be described. Toward the United States and Germany, alongside gratitude for their help, an enormous disappointment and bitterness has become widespread. The U.N. leadership and the Anglo-French Unprofor "peacekeeping" troops are viewed as factional allies of the Serbian aggressors. Above all, the stationing of the Anglo-French "Rapid Reaction Force" in central Bosnia, between the Bosnian and Bosnian-Croatian alliance lines and the military production sites, is deemed an attempt to hinder the Bosnian military operations. On the other hand, there is high respect for individual Unprofor soldiers and United Nations High Commission on Refugees spokesmen, who, in contrast to their political and military higher-ups, often take great risks in order to help the people with food and medical supplies. In Bosnia and Croatia the dominant impression is that the Unprofor strike forces will have left the Balkan countries by the onset of winter. It is often doubted whether the Unprofor evacuation will be carried out in as orderly a fashion as is generally presumed. In fact it cannot be ruled out that for Great Britain, the way is being paved in Bosnia for a "second Suez disaster." In 1956 the Anglo-French attempt to violently seize the Suez Canal, was forced to a most humiliating halt.

The situation in Croatia

Also in Croatia, the mood has changed. Certainly the key factor has been the operation at the beginning of May to retake West Slavonia, which was carried out with the maximum military efficiency. There can be no doubt that Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic held back, and that he had signaled to Croatian President Franjo Tudjman that he could put up with the loss of these areas—in contrast to the other occupied territories. The Tudjman government and the ruling HDZ party can only be understood as "institutionalized coexistence" of completely contrary objectives. For the moment, therefore, we will set aside domestic and especially, economic, policy issues. These contradictions, bordering on schizophrenia, are particularly evident in the case of Tudjman himself. The so-called Hercegovina Group in the government and HDZ around Defense Minister Susac, has all along been angling for a deal with Milosevic to carve up Bosnia, even though this is publicly denied. But the majority of the HDZ

party, led by Tudjman, is for the strategic alliance with Bosnia and the serious realization of the "Washington Accord" for a Croatian-Bosnian alliance. This position has been consistently represented by the Croatian opposition. The opposition includes the HND party of the former chairman of Parliament, Stipe Mesic, the former HDZ leader Josip Maolic, and the former Defense Minister Martin Spegelj; the regionally influential Liberal Party; the Christian Democrats under Marco Veselica; as well as a number of well-known, strong personalities from Croatian intelligence, who do not have party affiliations. Also the leadership of the Catholic Church under Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, along with Cardinal Pulic in Sarajevo, are unanimously for the Croatian-Bosnian alliance.

The winning back of West Slavonia

The military operation for the reconquest of West Slavonia, carried out with the highest precision, proved the sharply increased fighting strength of the Croatian Army. Also the quantity and quality of weaponry has clearly improved. As for the Croatian population, one senses, that after nearly four years of helplessly standing still while the Serbian invaders marched in and seemed to consolidate more and more regions of the nation under their control, now confidence has returned. This mood among the Croats, it goes without saying, is also affecting the Tudjman government. I hold that further Croatian military operations against the Serbian occupiers are probable. One has to consider that the Serbian lines reach into Croatia as close as to 40-50 kilometers from Zagreb, the capital. From this region in central Croatia, south of the Sisak-Karlovac Line, Serbian short-range rockets have even been fired on Zagreb. Important for the further development of the situation in Croatia and Bosnia is the advance of the Bosnian-Croatian HVO units toward the "capital" of the occupied region of Croatia, Knin. The HVO has pushed so far in the direction of Knin that the strategically important road linking Knin to Banja Luka, the center of Serbian-occupied Bosnia, could be broken at any time.

The "shift" in Bosnia and Croatia sketched here, should in no wise lead anyone to jump to flippant conclusions. The almost incomprehensible sacrifices, for those outside, which have been brought upon the Bosnian people and also those of Croatia, are by no means at an end: quite the contrary. But the victims of the aggression are no longer unarmed victims, who must practically await their own annihilation helplessly. Already the Serbian aggression in Bosnia and Croatia has been "rolled back." A decisive military action by the United States from the air, and the lifting of the arms embargo against Bosnia, could bring the war to a rapid end. The political result of that would be that London would be forced to look reality in the eye: British geopolitical warfare in the Balkans, which first was waged against Germany and then against the United States, has failed. Belgrade would be forced to see that the "Greater Serbia" war of annexation has failed, and then, finally, it could agree to real peace talks.

Vatican hits 'imbalance' in Beijing draft

On June 20, Joaquín Navarro-Valls, the Holy See Press Office Director, held the first briefing on the U.N.-sponsored 4th World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing on Sept. 4-15. He spoke on the Draft Platform for Action and outlined the themes that will be discussed. Following are excerpts from the briefing, as provided by the Vatican Information Service:

This 4th conference will deal with topics such as dignity, the rights and the roles of women in every aspect of social life, equality and human development. The point of departure for every other consideration for the Holy See is the human dignity of women, which is the foundation for the concept of universal human rights recognized by the United Nations Charter.

The document that will be discussed in Beijing—"Proposals for Consideration in the Preparation of a Draft Declaration and the Draft Platform for Action"—favors the operative aspects of the diverse topics. The Holy See shares this definition: The dignity of women in too many social and geographical contexts is far from being fully recognized.

At the same time, the Holy See sees in this document pressure of an ideological character which seems to want to impose on women all over the world a particular social philosophy belonging to some sectors of western countries.

If, on the one hand, the document wishes to liberate women from certain cultural conditioning, on the other hand it seems to wish to impose a western model of female advancement which does not take into account the values of women in the majority of countries of the world.

The Dignity of Women and Universal Human Rights. One has the right to think that the unanimous goal in Beijing will be to attain a common operative effort for the defense of the dignity of women and the promotion of their universal human rights. Incidentally, it becomes paradoxical and incomprehensible that the word "dignity"—referring to women—appears systematically within brackets throughout the document. In the same way the term "universal" is placed in parentheses when referring to the human rights of women.

One reason among many for which the Holy See has insisted that the Platform for Action include some reference to the universality of human rights is that women in many countries do not enjoy the human rights recognized by the International Declarations. We think that it is not possible to promote and defend that which has not been defined. If