

Statement

95/34

AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
TO THE NATO COUNCIL

"THE SITUATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA"

NOORDWIJK, The Netherlands
May 30, 1995



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For over three years now, the UN troops deployed in the former Yugoslavia have been working valiantly to minimize the effects of the war on the civilian population and to keep the conflict from spilling over into the neighbouring countries. A number of soldiers have paid for these efforts with their lives, and I would like to pay tribute to them today. Nor must we forget the tragic death of Mr. Irfan Ljubijankic, the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Our governments recognize and accept all the risks involved in peacekeeping operations. But this cannot diminish in any way the pain felt by the families of those who have died, or the anxiety felt for the soldiers who are there now carrying out the task assigned to them by the international community.

To illustrate the great concern felt by Canada over this issue, our Parliament yesterday held a four-hour emergency debate on the situation in the former Yugoslavia.

The dramatic events of recent days have crystallized public attention around the role played by UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They have also brought to the fore the question of whether the UN and the international community are really capable of promoting conditions that can lead to the cessation of hostilities and bring the belligerents back to the negotiating table. The parties to the conflict are very aware of the media impact of the current crisis on the voters in our countries and will continue to do everything they can to play on the frustration and impatience of public opinion.

So far we have been able to convince our publics of the importance of this operation, despite the periodic crises that have arisen. However, the use of hostages as human shields against NATO air strikes and the confrontations between UNPROFOR and the Bosnian Serb forces mean that this time we must seriously question the credibility of the UN forces and of the international community's efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

The present crisis brings us up against a number of contradictory aspects of the UNPROFOR mandate, mainly where the "safe areas" and the "exclusion zones" and the use of force to support humanitarian aid operations are concerned. The situation also brings to light the discordant nature of the actions taken by various players. The lack of a strong consensus in the Security Council and in the Contact Group, certain diplomatic initiatives that have been taken, the differing views among groups of troop-contributing countries, all these factors leave the door open for manipulation by the parties to the conflict. This way of doing things, too often dictated by domestic policy considerations and narrow national interests, cannot be allowed to continue.

At this crucial time for the future of UNPROFOR, Canada believes that three conditions must be met if the international community is to take back the initiative.

To begin with, the multiplicity of approaches has created ambiguities on which the parties to the conflict are capitalizing in their relations with the various players. Consequently, the political negotiating process must be returned to a common denominator. The international community must establish a common negotiating position and speak as one.

Second, the spearhead of our collective efforts must be the restoration of a functional link between the negotiating process and military operations in the field. As demonstrated by recent events, if it is disassociated from its political role, UNPROFOR runs the risk of quickly becoming a bargaining tool at the mercy of the belligerents. Under such circumstances, every setback every difficulty encountered by UNPROFOR will oblige us to reassess its existence. To achieve this close link between the negotiating process and military operations, all players must work to develop better co-ordination between the Contact Group and troop-contributing countries.

Third, we must take steps to restore UNPROFOR's credibility, which has recently been questioned by the parties to the conflict. Canada feels that, in the immediate future, the credibility and viability of peacekeeping forces depends on four factors:

- the consolidation of troops to avoid scattering and weakening the defence capability of UN forces;
- a review of UNPROFOR's mandate, with emphasis on those activities that are most likely to succeed, considering the resources currently available to troops and their safety;
- the withdrawal of military observers from Serb-controlled territory to reduce their vulnerability;
- the use of force to counter violations of resolutions passed by the UN, including the willingness to use close air support to protect peacekeeping forces.

In the longer term, it will also be of primary importance for the international community to indicate clearly that UNPROFOR will not be able to carry out its mandate unless all parties observe a set of conditions whose basic elements were originally proposed by the UN and the Contact Group in July 1994. By way of indication, I will mention only a few of these positive and negative conditions designed to modify the behaviour of the belligerents.

- The international community should require Bosnian Serbs to observe exclusion zones and to reopen humanitarian assistance supply routes.

- The Bosnian government should immediately cease using safe areas to organize and launch military offensives.
- We would demand that Belgrade set a firm date for recognizing Bosnia in exchange for more flexibility in the lifting of sanctions.

The crisis of the past few days has shaken the UN and sown seeds of doubt as to whether the international community is willing and able to intervene effectively in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. We must continue to support the UN and to face opposition from Bosnian Serbs, even if this involves using force to ensure the protection of peacekeepers. Likewise, it is essential that Bosnian Muslims cease using UNPROFOR as a shield to protect them and to advance their military objectives.

On several occasions since the start of the conflict, Canada and many others have stressed the need for concerted action to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict. For all sorts of reasons, some players have chosen to act on their own. Better coordination of the activities of the international community is now demanded, not by Canada or any other country, but by the situation itself. Troop-contributing countries and the UN cannot negotiate piecemeal with Serb forces in the event of hostage takings and confrontations. We must seize this opportunity to renew our collective efforts and to bring them to fruition, if we wish to ensure the security of our soldiers and to continue making progress in seeking a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

Thank you.