

Alija Izetbegović's Speech at the OSCE Summit

Budapest, 5th December 1994

“The latest events in our country have filled me with bitterness, so I shall be brief and direct.

There is really something ironical in the fact that I am present at this important forum of an organization created 20 years ago for the purposes of security and cooperation, and that bears those two fine words in its very title, but have to speak of something completely contrary to this: of insecurity and lack of cooperation. For what is happening in Bosnia is, to put it mildly, a failing of the West. Unfortunately, it is also something much more serious.

A month ago, the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina took a new turn. Rebel Serbs in Croatia, in the so-called UNPA Zone, attacked our 5th Corps from the rear, leading to the so-called Bihać crisis. An offensive was organised that was conducted from the protected zone in one state against a safe area of another. Nothing was done, or rather it was claimed that nothing could be done. The entire global community, embodied in the United Nations and the powerful NATO alliance, could not save one town that was at risk. Was it, could it be true?

Here are some facts:

During the six months prior to the offensive, the Bihać region had been starving, for humanitarian convoys were simply not getting through (of 143 convoys, only 12 were allowed to enter and 131 were turned back), and immediately before the attack was launched the French Battalion quit the Bihać region. It was replaced by troops from Bangladesh, few in number and poorly armed. A total media blackout was imposed, for there was not a single foreign correspondent in the entire region, and in its reports UNPROFOR minimised the significance and extent of the offensive. Can all this be a coincidence?

With cynical indifference, one senior office-holder announced to the world at large and to the people threatened with slaughter and annihilation that the Serbs had won – as though this was a football match, and he was blowing a whistle to announce that time was up. But because this was a case of ‘to be or not to be’, it wasn’t the end, and the fighting continued, with the result that Bihać and Kladuša, and Cazin and Krupa, are still holding out after a month-long offensive. I could cite, for the gentleman I have just referred to, a handful of examples of utterly incorrect forecasts by his eminent colleagues. Exactly the opposite of what they foresaw and predicted has happened.

Paris and London have from the very start spoken out as patrons and defenders of the Serbs, blocked the Security Council and NATO, and thereby prevented every step that could have been taken to halt the Serb offensives and the war as a whole. This is not my assertion – it appears in a recent statement by the Society for Endangered Peoples from Goettingen.

And what can I say about Russia's role? It exercises its veto against Security Council Resolutions and votes for the Croatian Serbs to be supplied with fuel oil at the very time that these same Serbs are preventing food and medical supplies from getting through to the starving population of the Bihać region. And there is of course an inescapable question: Karadžić's Serbs have deployed missile systems throughout Bosnia, more than 150 in all. Where did they get them from?

What will be the outcome of the war in Bosnia that is dragging on like this because of this blend of incompetence, vacillation, and sometimes outright ill-will on the part of the West? The result will be: the United Nations discredited, NATO weakened, Europeans demoralised by the sense of their inability to respond to their first post Cold War challenge. It will be another and worse world, in which relations between Europe and America, the West and Russia, the West and the Muslim world, will never be the same again. I would agree with those who predict that (and I quote) 'shame and humiliation because of the shameful withdrawal from Bosnia will characterise the Western world at the end of this century.'

Many have clearly underestimated what is happening in Bosnia. To begin with it was a regional crisis, then it became European, and now, beyond any doubt, it is a world crisis. The defence or fall of Bihać therefore has global implications, and is an issue that concerns all of us in this hall today.

The West reacted to brutal aggression, to a genocide of unprecedented extent, to concentration camps, with a so-called humanitarian response. It used tranquillisers to treat a serious illness, and the illness, as expected or even planned, is worsening. And then that 'humanitarian response' turned into blackmail, and of late into the double blackmail, of our people.

We have deserved assistance, for we did not simply sit back and wait with arms folded. We put up an unexpected, and for many inexplicable, resistance. At the beginning of the war, with a mere hundred or so groups of from 20 to 150 people armed only with light weapons, we have created an army of 150,000 men, who have put out of action several tens of thousands of hostile troops and destroyed more than 1,000 of their tanks and armoured vehicles.

The stronger our defence became, the less was your readiness to help us. Why? Is there an answer?

Mr. Chairman, what is happening in Bosnia was and is, in truth, a clash between democracy and the vilest forms of nationalism and racism. Our opponents recognise only one nation, their

own, only one religion, their own, and only one political party, also their own. Everything that is not theirs is condemned to extinction. Even graveyards have been ploughed up. Read the latest report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Mr. Mazowiecki, on what is going on in the areas under the control of the enemy forces.

I should like to ask some of the gentlemen who are working dedicatedly to create a state from the monstrosity that styles itself 'Republika Srpska', the Serb Republic – and some of those gentlemen are sitting in this very hall – will they soon be seeking to have that 'republic' recognised and its creators sit here with us next time? I would ask those gentlemen whether they are making preparations for that creation, founded on violence and genocide, to be invited to join the family of civilised countries.

Tomorrow I am going to Geneva to a meeting of the ministers of Islamic countries. As I have to you here today, I shall tell them the truth about what is really happening in Bosnia and why. I shall tell it to the leaders and send a message to the peoples of Muslim countries.

In wars of liberation there are some intangible quantities that elude analysis. This is why some military and political analysts in the West continually get their predictions wrong. Our people are fighting for their freedom, and for more than that, for their very survival. Such struggles are usually hard-fought, but seldom lost. Not a single war of liberation in the past 50 years has been lost. I don't know why ours should be any different. No one can force our 150,000 soldiers, by any means whatsoever, to lay down their arms. I would recommend that each of you takes this factor into account, both for our sake and for your own.

I hope that the friends of Bosnia will not reproach me for these words, and as for the others, after all, it's no concern of mine. Thank you."