

4 Mostar and the War (1992-1994)

As in the previous chapter, I will first give a brief description of the city of Mostar and its history. Mostar lies some 60 km from the Adriatic seacoast in Bosnia and Herzegovina in a karstic mountain range. It is the capital of the Herzegovina, the south-western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first reference to the city dates from 1452. In the 16th century, following the Ottoman occupation Bosnia, Mostar was a Turkish garrison town. In 1566 a stone bridge was erected over the Neretva river that divides the city into a western and an eastern part. This bridge, the famous *Stari most* (Old Bridge), became the symbol of Mostar and a famous tourist attraction, which was destroyed in the war between Muslims and Croats in 1993. During the brief period of Austro-Hungarian rule the town maintained its position as an administrative center and experienced rapid development and modernization. During the Second World War some of the Mostar urban districts were considered to be “red” (communist) while a lot of the rural Croat, but partly also Muslim surroundings were staunch supporters of the *ustaša*. Further to the east in Serb majority towns, such as Nevesinje and Trebinje, the *četniks* dominated. One of the major battles of the partisans, later made into a motion picture with Yul Brunner as Tito, took place just north of Mostar in Jablanica. *Ustaša* and *četnik* atrocities were followed by partisan retaliation, the stories of which provided potent propaganda material when mobilizing against communist and Serb dominated JNA in 1991 and 1992.

Because of the ethno-nationalistic character of the Bosnian war a few words are necessary concerning the ethnic composition of Mostar and its fluctuations over time. All three constitutive nations of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs, were present in Mostar at the beginning of the war. The numerical relation of these groups, however, underwent significant changes from the 19th century until the beginning of the 1990s, and was further changed radically during the war. The first population censuses from the 19th century in Mostar suggest a clear dominance of Muslims (54%), followed by Serbs (27%) and Croats (19%). The rural surroundings of Mostar were by contrast mostly Catholic Croat (64%). Due to the accelerating migration from the rural surroundings to Mostar, the population of the city rose from

12,665 in 1885, to 20,295 by 1931 and to 126,628 in 1991. In the course of this development the ethnic composition of Mostar has also changed. According to the 1991 census Muslims accounted for 34.6% of the population, Croats for 34.0% and Serbs 18.8% and 10.1% identified themselves as Yugoslavs.²⁹ Noteworthy is the fact that Mostar had a very high rate of ethnically mixed marriages.

The site of the city in a valley surrounded by steep mountains limited the possibilities for urban development. The massive rural migration to Mostar in the 1970s was thus mostly accommodated on the gentler slopes of the western riverbank. Mostar, as the only major town in Herzegovina, was developed into an industrial center dominated by aluminum production (*Aluminija*), the military industry (SOKO) and a large agricultural plant (HEPOK) producing and processing the early vegetables, fruits and wine for which the Herzegovina-Mostar region is famous. Mostar was also a major JNA stronghold. As a last significant input to Mostar's economy the Turkish-style old town of Mostar attracted large numbers of tourists from the Dalmatian coast.

The War Reaches Mostar

As around 1991 the political situation escalated all over former Yugoslavia, Mostar was, like all other towns and cities of the region, drawn into the course of these escalating events. The tensions on the political level soon began to poison everyday life. Distrust crept into the day-to-day interactions of ordinary people. A former Croat member of the JNA, who left the army as nationalist tensions began to escalate, expresses this as follows in an interview (personal interview, Hrvoje, 13 March 1998):

“Well yes... they [interethnic friendships] were destroyed. As I left [the army] on 14 July 1991 I had a good friend, a Serb. I spent a lot of time with him. His name was D. B. However, when I wrote my letter of resignation, he [started to behave] towards me, as if he hadn't known me. He didn't even greet me and nothing. What was my fault, I don't know. He didn't speak to me anymore. While I was trying to be on good terms with everybody... But this was the end when he saw that I am leaving the army. That means, that was it, and the war didn't even begin in Croatia, only seven days previously in Slovenia.”

²⁹ It has to be mentioned that the demographic data is not completely comparable as the 19th century refers only to the town of Mostar, whereas the later 1991 census uses the municipality (*općina* in Croat or *opština* in Serb) as the basis of its calculation. The borders of the municipality, however, reach further than the boundaries of the urban area.

Still in the summer of 1991, as fighting in Croatia was already going on, the JNA brought in thousands of "reservists" from Montenegro to Mostar. Other parts of the country had experienced similar reinforcements. Contrary to JNA regulations these reservists had beards and moved around in town intimidating the population, thus in fact most people claimed they were nothing but *četniks* - nationalist Serb irregulars.

Fear and distrust between the communities was increasing. An interview (personal interview Mario, 24 May 1998) from Stolac, a small town some 40kms from Mostar and before the war inhabited by Croats, Bosniacs and Serbs to almost equal proportions, describes this situation.

"Yes, people were afraid. But for example in our town, in Stolac, it was mostly the Serbs [who were afraid]. They were the first to begin to flee and during the weekends to go to their relatives somewhere towards Berkovici and Ljubinje [Serb majority areas to the East of Stolac]. They slept with them and returned then for the working days to Stolac and then returned again during the weekend. Because I even know of one of my friend's [kum] neighbor he said: 'I, Ivo, I am going during the weekend and I ask you to switch on the lights in my house so that people should think I am at home'. This [the friend] was a Croat, that [the man leaving for the weekend] a Serb."

These tensions kept escalating in the course of the autumn of 1991 and the JNA units in and around Mostar were increasingly seen, and in fact were acting, as occupying forces. The local Croat population was further alienated by the fact that the strong JNA military bases located in Mostar and other areas of West Herzegovina served as logistic bases for JNA fighting units engaged in the war in Croatia - mostly in the Dalmatian war theatre. For such strategic reasons, but also as part of Tuđman's Greater Croatia plans, the building up of Croat sponsored and dominated paramilitary units began in the area already in the course of 1992. These units were the HOS, the military wing of neo-*ustaša* Croat Party of Right (HSP - *Hrvatska stranka prava*), military units sponsored by the HDZ, which later came to be known as the HVO. The Bosnian Territorial Defense, TO (*Teritorialna obrana*), the predecessor of the later Bosnian Army, the ABiH, was not important at this stage of the conflict due to a lack of sufficient military equipment.

Thus, even before the outbreak of fighting in the rest of Bosnia (which is usually put around the end of March or beginning of April 1992) the Croatian War spilled over to Croat-dominated West Herzegovina and partly to Mostar, too. First clashes were located in Ravno, in the direct hinterland of Dubrovnik, then in the beginning of February also in and around Mostar, when local residents put up barricades to block JNA movements (Press Release of the Ministry of Interior, precise date not given, June 1993). The Mayor of Mostar managed to negotiate a temporary, local ceasefire, but the incidents continued.

Until March the situation deteriorated to an outright guerilla war in West-Herzegovina, with the JNA and Serb irregulars on the one side and the HOS, the fledgling HVO and occasionally units of the police, called MUP (*Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova* - Ministry of Interior Affairs) on the other side. Fearing a crippling blockade of its barracks, as happened on several occasions in Slovenia and Croatia the previous year, the JNA withdrew from Croat-dominated areas to the west of Mostar. In the meantime the town itself continued to slide into chaos and anarchy with clashes between Serb irregulars. Roadblocks were put up in front of JNA barracks, occasionally sniper fire was heard and car bombs exploded at night.

In early April, a coordinating body for all militias opposing Serb / Yugoslav aggression was founded in Mostar, the Crisis Staff or *Krizni štab*, which entrusted the HVO and the MUP with organizing the defense of the city. Still, coordination remained poor and command structures were fuzzy and confused. The HVO followed orders coming from Zagreb, while the HOS, in the ranks of which many Bosniacs were fighting, had its own HSP-dominated command structures physically located in Ljubuški. The MUP and the TO both seemed to have followed orders from Sarajevo. Additionally, at this stage of the war, local commanders were not yet well integrated in overall lines of command and thus had a huge influence on local developments.

Then on 10 April 1992, the JNA launched a concerted attack on the town of Mostar engaging the various militias and the MUP in house-to-house fighting. By 13 May the JNA had managed to almost completely take over Mostar. Units fighting against Serb aggression had to withdraw to the western side of the Neretva. This is the time, by

the way, of the already reported talks between Boban and Karadžić and subsequent Bosnian-Croat - Bosnian-Serb pact. Just one month later, on 14 June an offensive by the joint defense forces of Mostar launched an attack retaking the east bank of the city from the JNA. The Serb troops withdrew to the mountains overlooking the city to the east. With the Serb troops also most of Mostar's Serb population fled to the east. The majority settled in the eastern Hercegovinian towns of Trebinje, Gacko, Nevesinje and Bileća. Others went on to Serbia and Montenegro.

It is almost definite, and most former Croat and Bosniac fighters admit it, that the Serb pullout from the town was a deliberate withdrawal and not a military defeat brought about by the Croat-Bosniac attack. One possible explanation is that it was part of a tactical withdrawal as, being under a UN embargo, Milošević decided to pull out the JNA from Bosnia. It is true that the JNA did hand over some 80% of its military hardware and manpower to the newly founded Bosnian Serb army, the VRS (*Vojska republike srpske*). The withdrawal nevertheless weakened the VRS and its lines were, no doubt, overextended.

Another explanation is, and most former Bosniac fighters believe this, that the Serb withdrawal from Mostar was part of a deal between Tuđman and Milošević, later confirmed by Boban and Karadžić in Graz.

The situation in the liberated town remained tense. While in the course of June and July 1992 the campaign to push back Serbs from areas to the south-east of Mostar continued, the HDZ BiH was already plotting to turn on its Bosniac allies. As already mentioned, the HOS leader, Blaž Kraljević, an adamant supporter of the alliance between Bosniacs and Croats, was murdered on 9 August 1992 just outside Mostar, only a few days after his troops took Trebinje, a Serb stronghold in eastern Herzegovina. After his death his troops withdrew and the HOS fell apart with most of its Croat members joining the HVO and its Bosniac members the TO that later transformed itself into the ABiH. Needless to say the HOS withdrawal from Trebinje is interpreted as part of Tuđman's deal with the Serbs - Eastern Herzegovina was to remain Serb, Western Herzegovina Croat.

The situation in Mostar grew increasingly tense as the suspicions on both sides rose. A number of facts contributed to such a worsening of the situation, which made it clear that the HDZ BiH was preparing for secession. On 3 July 1992 the Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna (HZ Herceg-Bosna) was proclaimed. Already in this founding document Mostar was listed as the capital of the community. With this the town, the population of which was only to some one third Croat, attained a paramount importance in the thinking of Bosnian Croat separatists. They claimed that both Serbs and Bosniacs had their own towns. Mostar was to be theirs. For historical reasons Bosnia-Herzegovina's catholic, i.e. Croat, population was traditionally predominantly rural. A discussion with a leading military-political figure, Jadran Topić, recounted by a Feral Tribune journalist sheds further interesting light on thinking of the Herceg-Bosna leadership regarding Mostar:

"The war in Mostar was still going on. Along with the coffee and cigarettes, [Topić] offered his overall view of the problem: 'I do not deny that the Muslims have as much right to Mostar as the Serbs or us. The only question is who is stronger in asserting that right.' Behind this simple explanation, devoid of sarcasm, his gaze was that of a man at peace with himself. A few months earlier, dressed in his HVO uniform, he had walked with a loudspeaker through the Old City inviting the Bosniacs to surrender by hanging white sheets on their houses. Then the HVO artillery barrage launched what was to be one of the bloodiest of the local wars within the Bosnian conflict" (Malić, 29 April 1996, <http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/bosnia/stolac.html>).

In the wake of HDZ secessionist preparations first clashes between the allies occurred already during the summer and autumn of 1992. The clashes mostly erupted for the possession of JNA weapon depots or arms shipments. Furthermore, the HVO refused to be brought under a joint command with the Sarajevo controlled TO. Mostar and most of West-Herzegovina was now practically under HVO control. Streets were renamed in Croat and instead of symbols of the internationally recognized state of Bosnia-Herzegovina only Croat national symbols were displayed. In this atmosphere of mutual distrust the expectation of an impending conflict became tangible. A Bosniac fighter (personal interview, Senad, 15 July 1996) recounted how, sometime in the late autumn of 1992, on a drinking spree the brother of a high-ranking Croat politician/ military commander warned him "[people] in Mostar will still be wading knee-deep in blood".

Still, until May 1993, in Mostar relations between the Bosniac-dominated and Sarajevo-controlled ABiH and the Croat-dominated and Zagreb-controlled HVO remained tense but calm, even as regular fighting had already broken out in Central Bosnia between these armies. This changed on 2 May 1993, when the HVO imposed a blockade on the mostly Bosniac majority part of the town. Snipers shot at people crossing from the right side of the Neretva to the mostly Bosniac left.

Finally, in the early morning of 9 May, the HVO launched a full-scale attack on ABiH-held and Bosniac-majority parts of Mostar. There was no organized ABiH defense. A Bosniac fighter recounted to me (personal interview, Dado, 16 March 1996) how, made suspicious by the HVO blockade, he and a couple of his friends took up positions in the Šantića Street of Mostar. The first wave of attackers was, so he believes, fighters from Croatia and were so drugged that they did not even react, when somebody was shot down next to them. Other witnesses confirm that the attacking Croat soldiers were not local as they got quickly lost in the labyrinth of small streets of the old Bosniac town on the west bank of the Neretva and were driven out or killed (e.g. personal Interview, Senada, 3 July 1996).

Thus by the morning the attack got stuck leaving most of the urban area of the town on the left bank of the Neretva and a narrow strip of traditionally Muslim majority area on the right bank (west side) in the hands of the ABiH. It is a frightening characteristic of the war in Bosnia that the attacking or defending armies were mostly only able to occupy or defend those areas in which their ethnic group formed a majority. It shows that defense was local and frequently neighbors were fighting against neighbors. In the case of Mostar the HVO quickly managed to control the Croat majority west of the town, but could advance only a few blocks into neighborhoods with a Bosniac majority.

There is also a Croat version of the attack on Mostar and other towns in West-Herzegovina. According to this version the ABiH launched an offensive on HVO-held positions at 3 AM, which was then answered by an all-out Croat counteroffensive. Around 9 May the town was full of all kinds of military observers and journalists, yet

there is no evidence of an ABiH attack. Also the testimony of the citizens of the town contradicts such claims. The interesting thing is, however, that even HVO soldiers involved from the first moment in the Mostar fighting maintain that it is true and blame the Bosniacs of betrayal, when in fact it was the HVO that betrayed its ally. What makes the Croat claim even more unlikely is that at the time of the attack the Mostar headquarter of the ABiH was in the HVO controlled western part of town. No army with its right sense would leave its HQ in enemy territory when launching an attack on it.

A similar "myth" is recounted in Stolac, just to the south of Mostar, where a simultaneous and comparable HVO takeover took place as in Mostar. There people claim that a "preventive" HVO assault took place just a few hours before the ABiH was to launch an attack on the town. In the case of Stolac I have no evidence disqualifying the claim of the "preventive" HVO attack, but the logic of the general developments makes such a planned ABiH attack very unlikely.

Simultaneously with the HVO assault, the ethnic cleansing of Bosniacs on HVO-controlled areas began. Bosniac nationality members of the HVO and Bosniac civilians were arrested and rounded up in detention camps in the football stadium and the Heliodrom in the west part of the town. An article in the Croatian Magazine, *Globus*, describes the cleansing as follows:

"Witnesses to some expulsions which took place in June 1993 testify that HVO soldiers surrounded residential buildings, using firearms, and then went from apartment to apartment, shouting that they were looking for 'balijs' [pejorative for Moslems]. The residents of the building, Moslems, were gathered up and their personal documents, including certificates of ownership of the apartments, were burned in the street. The HVO soldiers are said to have burned all the medicines they found, including insulin for diabetics. After this forcible expulsion, the soldiers removed the names on the doors of the empty apartments and replaced them with their own names" (Grkalić and Ivanković, 17 November 1995:5).

In the initial days of the fighting there seems to have existed a grassroots disapproval among the Croat population with the HVO attack on the Bosniac side. Many of the detained were released through the connections of their Croat friends and People

were, in general, supportive of their Bosniac friends. In an interview with the *taz* journalist Fischer, a former Bosniac detainee of the notorious HVO-run Dretelj prison camp recounts how his Croat comrades were crying when they went to arrest him (16 December 1993:8).

This changed later as the ABiH was able to withstand the attack and even began to threaten Croat areas. Suddenly Croats came fleeing to the HVO-held areas of the town and a sure victory turned into looming danger. It seems that the feeling of being personally threatened transformed sympathy and resistance against the assault on their former Bosniac friends into fear and subsequently to hatred against that side. Once again extremists succeeded in creating ethnic hatred and divide where this previously did not exist.

While in the urban areas of Mostar the HVO attack got stuck, it still managed to completely encircle the Bosniac held part of Mostar. The situation of the defenders was desperate. The HVO, with its initial attack having failed, began a Sarajevo style siege and relentless shelling of the ABiH controlled town. Roy Gutman, a Pulitzer Price winning journalist, describes the situation:

“Mostar is the biggest prize. The Old City is the target of aimless shelling, reminiscent of Vukovar [...]. In comparison with east Mostar, even Sarajevo appears intact. Each day at least two or three people die from hunger or sickness. Hundreds of gun shells fired from west Mostar hit day and night the predominantly Muslim Old City, killing daily about eight people and wounding another thirty” (quoted in Malić, 29 April 1996, <http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/bosnia/stolac.html>).

Otherwise the frontlines within the town of Mostar remained almost completely static all through the nine months of the fighting. The adversaries were lined up along the central, north-south road of the town, called the Bulevar, on the right or western side of the Neretva. The western side was held by the HVO, the eastern by the ABiH. From the point where the Bulevar reached the central square of modern Mostar, the HIT Square named after a department store of the same name, the frontline ran for 300-400 meters in a diagonal line between and within houses until it reached the Neretva. This was the Šantića Street, the scene of the most horrible fighting in

Mostar, as both, Bosniac and Croat fighters, later emphasized. Frequently the fighters were no more than a few meters from each other on constant, nerve-racking alert.

On the Croat side, among the young of the town's elite and among some special troopers, like among Tuta's "boys" a decadent wartime culture of "sex and drugs and rock'n'roll" unfolded itself. Allegedly members of Tuta's *Kaznjenicka bojna* had the right to go to hospitals and demand the injection of a dose of heroin. Otherwise the fighting youth drove good cars, behaved crazily and reveled in the culture of death, crime and money. After the war Mostar's Croat side definitely experienced a serious heroin problem with many kids of good families going from one treatment to another. ABiH soldiers recounted how, many times, drugged HVO soldiers simply exposed themselves and were killed.

After a number of international attempts to broker a ceasefire between the ABiH and the HVO had failed, the ABiH gathered strength for a counterattack first in Central Bosnia, then in the South along the Neretva River and in Mostar. An ABiH offensive on 29-30 June managed to capture the settlement of Bijelo Polje, located at the northern entrance of East Mostar. The success was possible because Bosniac members of the HVO unit that was holding Bijelo Polje deserted and took the side of the ABiH attackers. It seems that due the exposed position of the settlement it was not possible for the HVO to arrest all Bosniacs within its ranks there (1998:153).

With the fall of Bijelo Polje the encirclement of Mostar by the HVO was broken and the defenders of east Mostar could link up with the government held areas around Jablanica and Konjic, where the ABiH was also making steady progress pushing HVO troops back towards Prozor and West Mostar. The fall of Bijelo Polje and the opening up of a corridor to Jablanica and Konjic sent a shock wave through the Croatian communities of the West-Herzegovina. In spite of this success, communications to the north were still not easy, as the main M17 road leading to Jablanica, Konjic and further to Central Bosnia and Sarajevo could easily be controlled from HVO positions on the west side of the Neretva. Therefore, supplies

could only be brought in by mule caravans over narrow mountain paths between HVO and VRS lines.

The military setbacks suffered to the north of Mostar triggered severe reactions. The HVO imposed a total humanitarian blockade on East Mostar and launched a new wave of ethnic cleansing, intensifying also the already ongoing detention of Bosniac men of fighting age (men between 15 and 60 years). UN sources reported that “Croat forces had gone ‘hog wild’ in Mostar [...] evicting all Muslims from the predominantly Croat western side of the city (*Washington Post*, 15 July 1993, reproduced at: <http://www.bosnet.org/archive/bosnet.w3archive/9307/msg00033.html>); and that “almost every night has been a kind of *Kristallnacht* in downtown Mostar” (Schimdt, 19 July 1993, <http://www.friends-partners.org/friends/news/omri/1993/07/930719.html>).

In the months of July, August and September spread to areas to the South of Mostar. HVO special units evicted Bosniacs Mostar and Stolac, around Čapljina and in Ljubuški. There was a tactical logic in the way the cleansing was conducted.

“[The first step was a] sudden mass arrest of Muslim soldiers serving in the HVO, in the municipality of Stolac. The commander of the HVO's Bosniac unit 'Bregava' was imprisoned in the Čapljina barracks, where he was soon joined by the members of the SDA executive committee for Stolac, the officers of the humanitarian society 'Merhamet', and the most prominent members of the local Islamic Community. 'Ethnic cleansing' had begun. It was completed during the first five days of August. Out of more than 8,000 Stolac Bosniacs (forming over 80% of the urban population), only a few families were left, saved mainly thanks to mixed marriages, business connections or other kinds of obligations” (Malić, 29 April 1996, <http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/bosnia/stolac.html>).

Men of fighting age, arrested still in June and July, were gathered in notorious prison camps like the Heliodrom, Dretelj, Ljubuški, Otok and others. The non-combatants were chased over to AbiH-held East Mostar or detained in the Rodoč Heliodrom. The conditions in the camps were appalling. The testimony of an HVO guard from the prison camp in Gabela, quoted in the above Feral Tribune article describes the situation graphically.

“The camp was visited frequently at night by members of elite HVO units from western Herzegovina, who were said to be under the direct command of Mate Boban and Tuta Naletilić. This witness stated also: “They would make me open the shed door and then they would turn fire-hoses on the prisoners. They would bring some of them out and beat them. Sometimes they fired at the crowd, killing some of them. Every day we would force the Muslims to sing Croat marching and Ustasha songs, or lecture them on the dangers of ‘Alija’s Fundamentalism’.” The prisoners had to relieve themselves inside the sheds, and the thirst forced many to drink their own urine. It seems quite unbelievable that most Croatian politicians learnt of the existence of these camps and torture chambers from the foreign press” (Malić, 29 April 1996, <http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/bosnia/stolac.html>).

There were also prison camps on ABiH held territory and also there minorities were mistreated. Croats from the village of Zakrižje, a hamlet belonging to Bijelo Polje complained that after the fall of Bijelo Polje they were deported and held at several different, frequently changing locations. They claimed this happened in order to mislead ICRC. During their six-month-long detainment they were seriously mistreated and badly fed. Allegedly one man of the village was also killed by a wartime Bosniac policeman (personal interview, 27 July 1998). However, even though expulsions, mistreatment, killings and harassment of minorities also happened on ABiH held territory, this did not reach the level of systematic policy as was the case among Bosnian Serbs and Croats. The final report of the United Nations Commission of Experts stated in this regard (28 December 1994):

“Bosnian Government forces have also committed the same type of grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions against Serbs and Croats, but not as part of a policy of “ethnic cleansing”. The number of these violations, as reported, is significantly less than the reported violations allegedly committed by the other warring factions. The Commission is unable to determine the amount of harm and the exact number of violations committed by each of the warring factions. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is no factual basis for arguing that there is a “moral equivalence” between the warring factions. It should be noted in unequivocal terms, however, that reprisals, retribution and revenge do not constitute a valid legal justification or excuse for committing grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other violations of international humanitarian law” (United Nations Commission of Experts, 28 December 1994, <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/IV.htm>).

In July and August 1993 the Bosniac side remained in the offensive – both politically and militarily. An ABiH offensive in the middle of July made some gains to the south

of Mostar and managed to disrupt the main road leading from Mostar to Čapljina. In retaliation Bosniac detainees in Gabela did not receive water for three days.

The Bosniac leadership managed to achieve a political and media victory drawing attention to the plight of the town, when, after 7 weeks of total HVO blockade, the first UNHCR relief convoy entered the besieged Bosniac “ghetto” on 23 August (for a detailed description of the event see p.185). Upon its arrival in the ABiH-controlled part of town, the UNHCR convoy was surrounded by civilians, who effectively took the UN personnel hostage. For several days Mostar was in the headlines of the international media.

Towards the beginning of September the ABiH gathered for a new offensive in the South. The aim of the operation, called “Neretva 93”, was to liberate Mostar and, if successful to enable a further thrust to the town of Neum in the South (Hodžić 9 February 1999). An outlet to the Adriatic at Neum was one of the most prominent demands of the BiH government during the then ongoing Owen-Stoltenberg peace negotiations. “Neretva 93” was thought up and directed by the second-in-command of the ABiH, Sefer Halilović. Halilović, originally the supreme commander of the government forces came into opposition to Izetbegović over issues of future BiH strategy. Halilović was a proponent of a predominantly military solution and, as he claims, of strictly maintaining the multicultural character of the country. Izetbegović on the other hand, was willing at that time to give in to the pressure of the Croats, Serbs and of Western mediators and to accept a de facto ethnic division of the country.

In a number of offensive operations ABiH troops starting from Jablanica and Konjic managed to push back HVO positions in southern and southwestern direction. Simultaneous operations were launched from Mostar by the ABiH 4th Corps. While fighting was going on, peace talks were also reaching a critical stage. In its desperate situation the Croat side signaled a certain willingness to compromise regarding Bosniac access to the sea and putting Mostar for two years under EU administration. The Sarajevo political leadership, wanting to send positive signals at the negotiating table, accepted a ceasefire at the end of September. Independently of each other

Halilović, as well as Arif Pašalić, the commander of the ABiH 4th corps, refused to obey.

“On 21 September Bosnian radio reported that Arif Pašalić, a leader of Bosnian forces in the city of Mostar, vowed to continue to fight Croatian forces irrespective of what political solutions were agreed to. Pašalić has dedicated himself to “liberating Mostar” and regions surrounding the city” (Markotich, 22 September 1993, <http://www.friends-partners.org/friends/news/omri/1993/09/930922.htm>).

The Pašalić’s offensive was initially successful: further gains were made to the north of Mostar around the Raštani hydroelectric dam in Bijelo Polje and also the strategic Hum mountain overlooking the whole of Mostar was briefly taken. These gains were, however, later reversed. In the counterattack on 23 September 1993 that dislodged ABiH fighters from the newly gained territory in the north, Tuta’s *Kaznjenička bojna* had allegedly used Bosniac POWs as human shields. The case is currently being tried at the Hague War Crimes Tribunal. The HVO also counterattacked against ABiH positions on Hum allegedly using the *Tigrovi* special troops from Croatia proper.

Halilović, who by the way disliked Pašalić, was somewhat more subtle in disregarding Sarajevo’s orders, claiming instead that HVO troops broke the ceasefire and then going on with his offensive (Hodžić 10 February 1999). His attacks also made some significant gains in a southern and southwestern direction. Most importantly the offensive reached a small ABiH pocket in Drežnica, located between Mostar and Jablanica, that was holding out for months and continued to push further to the south towards Mostar. By 9 October 1993 ABiH troops were already fighting for the village of Vrđi, on the mountain plateau overlooking Mostar from the north, when orders came from Sarajevo to stop offensive activities. ABiH fighters were extremely bitter about the order.³⁰ Vrđi is located on the edge of a plateau facing a steep mountainside towards the north, from where the ABiH attacked. After having reached the plateau, the terrain until Mostar would have been relatively easy for advancing ABiH troops to capture. HVO-held Mostar was in grave danger.

³⁰ E.g. personal Interview, Neđad, 3 February 2000.

Bosniac soldiers claim a political deal between president Izetbegović and Tuđman was the reason for the withdrawal. In an interview a former ABiH brigadier, who was, however, not directly involved in the fighting around Mostar, stated, "it was clear [to the ABiH] that Western Herzegovina was considered by Croatia as its security zone" (personal interview, 7 January 1998). Any further advances would have caused an unpredictable escalation of fighting as Croatia might have decided to openly enter the war in Bosnia. And indeed until the end of the war the ABiH did not conduct any significant offensive operations towards Mostar or the western Herzegovina. Instead they focused on the relatively easier prey – the HVO-held enclaves in Central Bosnia.

In the aftermath of the "Neretva 93" operation the insubordination of Halilović and Pašalić was not forgotten. In November 1993 both commanders were released from their posts. Needless to say that for the Croats the withdrawal of the ABiH represented a success for the HVO. After the successes of the ABiH in June, July and August "everybody was hoping that now things would change for a better for us", recalled one Croat woman (personal interview, Anita, 12 July 1999). Nevertheless, the morale of Croat troops remained low. On several occasions in HVO controlled areas in Bosnia, but also in Croatia attempts were made to round up men who were avoiding conscription. Soon, however, Croatia found itself compelled to send in Croat HV troops to reinforce the HVO to be able to hold on at least to the Herzegovina.

The lack of morale was thus compensated by HV reinforcements and by an intense hate campaign. By the end of the year estimates put the number of Croatian Army soldiers involved in fighting in Herzegovina between 5,000 and 10,000. Zagreb also tried to boost the performance of the HVO by appointing first HV general Slobodan Praljak and later HV General Ante Roso as its heads. To no avail, the general trend of the ABiH keeping the initiative and threatening the HVO even within Herzegovina did not significantly change.

In the town of Mostar the HVO did make some advances: On 26 October 1993 it took Malo Polje to the South of Mostar pushing the ABiH ca. 4 km back, but to the south, south-east of Mostar, in the area called the Dubrava Plateau ABiH commandos kept

infiltrating and harassing the HVO. Former ABiH fighters estimated that sooner or later they would have captured the area.

In a desperate attempt to sever communication links between the ABiH enclave on the west bank of the Neretva and the solidly AbiH-held west side of the river, the HVO under the commander of Slobodan Praljak, destroyed the famous 15th-century "Old Bridge" (*Stari most*) of Mostar. The destruction of the Old Bridge shocked the Bosniac citizens of Mostar. "This was the saddest day of my life", claimed a Bosniac wartime military policeman. "They [the Croats] tried to break our resistance, but it only hardened our resolve". An HVO fighter (personal interview, Dragan, 8 January 1999) admitted to me the regret he now felt at the loss of such a beautiful monument, but added, that

"at that time I didn't feel anything [about the bridge]. Those were the darkest, bloodiest days. I didn't feel anything. A friend of mine was just killed in those days. We were standing together... like we are now standing... and a grenade just tore half of the man's head off. His brain was all over me."

As the HVO continued suffering losses in Central Bosnia and in Herzegovina and international pressure on Croatia to stop its war against the Bosniacs was mounting, negotiations on a separate peace between Bosniacs and Bosnian Croats became more serious towards December. Beside the relentless shelling there were no major offensive in and around Mostar. The food supply of the besieged population was now organized through international aid convoys and through airdrops. Additionally, the town was also receiving increased international media attention following the Croat own goal with the destruction of the *Stari most* and the death of three Italian TV journalists in East Mostar from HVO shelling.

All these, for the Croats negative, developments brought about the resignation of Mate Boban on 8 February 1994 - Zagreb's war against the Bosniacs was becoming untenable. Just one day after Boban's resignation, on 9 February 1994, HVO commanders decided to reduce sharply the shelling of Mostar. On the same day Bosnian Serbs received a first serious NATO threat of air strikes to withdraw artillery from around Sarajevo. The connection was obvious: the threat could be extended.

On 17 February the HVO offered a unilateral ceasefire to the ABiH. General Ramiz Dreković, the new commander of the Bosnian army's 4th Corps, analyzed the situation as follows:

"I certainly believe Mostar is second on the list after Sarajevo [i.e. for a NATO threat], he said. 'I strongly believe it (a military disengagement) might be more successful here than in Sarajevo.' Drekovic, a Serbian-born former Yugoslav army tank commander, said he felt that way because the Bosnian Croats have much less military strength than do the Bosnian Serbs and because Croatia is more open to influence by the international community than is Serbia" (Ottaway 21 February 1994, <http://www.bosnet.org/bosnet.shtml>).

This view was also supported by Western military officers:

"I think the difference was the NATO ultimatum," said Lt. Col. Antonio Castro, a Spanish officer with the U.N. peacekeeping force in Bosnia. It is simple, he said: the Croats calculated they might be next on the list after the Serbs" (Schmidt 24 February 1994, <http://www.bosnet.org/bosnet.shtml>).

Finally, on 23 February 1994, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the HVO and the ABiH.

"The truce agreement was reached after five hours of talks in Zagreb between U.N. generals and Bosnian Croat and Muslim commanders. Ceasefires have been signed, and broken, many times before in an effort to get Muslims and Croats to give up their fight in Bosnia. But for the first time, the agreement provides that all heavy weapons along confrontation lines must be withdrawn or turned over to U.N. control, just as was done in Sarajevo. A deadline of March 7 was set for the withdrawal, which requires that mortars be pulled back 10 kilometers, or about 6.2 miles, from the front line, and tanks and artillery 20 kilometers" (Schmidt 24 February 1994, <http://www.bosnet.org/bosnet.shtml>).

The agreement already included a hint on a full-scale peace agreement between Bosnian Croats and Bosniacs, which came to be known as the Washington Agreement. The already quoted journalist William E. Schmidt describes the first moments of the ceasefire after the nine-month long siege as follows:

"Behind the curtains of sandbags and overturned buses that screen them from snipers across the Neretva River, hundreds of people emerged from their underground shelters Thursday morning, and for the first time in months

crowds spilled along Marshal Tito Avenue, despite occasional bursts of small arms fire from Muslim and Croatian soldiers facing one another across the front lines. [...]

The situation is much better on the Croatian side of the river, where the battles have claimed an estimated 600 civilians and soldiers, less than half the toll in east Mostar. [...] Hundreds of buildings have also been scarred by shells and fires, and plastic covers the windows of most apartments. But there is electricity and water, and along the main road south, there were people sitting in the sun Tuesday in streetfront cafes” (24 February 1994, <http://www.bosnet.org/bosnet.shtml>).

Finally, on 3 March 1994, the former adversaries signed a peace-agreement, usually referred to as the Washington Agreement, about the cessation of hostilities and the building of a joint, Bosniac-Croat Federation of BiH. Mostar was to receive a unique status; a special conflict resolution mission of the European Union was to be established in the town with the aim of reconstructing and politically reuniting it. Before that, however, the international presence in Mostar will be described.

4.1 Mostar and the International Community

In the present sub-chapter I intend to show, using the example of the city of Mostar, how, even with relatively limited means, an international organization with committed staff can very well make a difference. I thus also intend to demonstrate that international humanitarian interventions without the ability to punish (sanction) remain fruitless against a warring party committed to the execution of certain abuses of human rights or the laws of war in order to achieve what it perceives as being in its “national interest”.

The organization serving as a positive example in the Mostar context is UNHCR. The achievements of UNHCR during the Croat-Bosniac in 1993-94 in Mostar are even more obvious when compared to ICRC. A comparison becomes possible because, in the case of the Bosnian conflict, there was a significant overlap between the field of activity of the two organizations.

For a long time ICRC viewed direct war situations as its innate field of activity. With UNHCR being mandated by the Security Council to act on behalf of IDPs in the Bosnian conflict, a conflict between the two organizations was bound to occur. Similar tensions have existed between the two organizations on several other missions, where UNHCR has become active in IDP situations. It must be pointed out that IDPs are by no means the only field of activity of ICRC. Their mandate is much wider, also including the conduct of combatants, treatment of POW and other issues covered by the Geneva Conventions.

However, the approach of the two organizations regarding how to tackle a human rights issue differs fundamentally. While both organizations claim to be neutral and impartial, in ICRC's interpretation, a UN organization cannot be neutral and impartial as it represents governments.³¹ ICRC's typical intervention derived from the above mentioned commitment to impartiality is thus a low-key approach, aimed at convincing and persuading warring parties to respect human rights and the laws of war. A sanctioning of a fighting group, for example through public exposure, for not respecting the above mentioned norms, is thus excluded by ICRC's mandate. Most UN organizations, on the other hand, are usually not "trigger-happy" concerning the use of sanctions, public condemnations and the media, but the basic rules of the organization allow for such an approach. Active and serious UN officials can thus make use of these very effective tools.

Before recounting the involvement of international organizations in the Mostar events, the main actors, UNHCR, UNPROFOR and ICRC will have to be briefly discussed.

4.1.1 UNHCR and its Work in Bosnia-Herzegovina

UNHCR, as one of the main international actors on the Mostar level, deserves a brief description of its general mandate and activities during the Bosnian War. Already as

³¹ This is not necessarily the official position of ICRC, but the view ICRC officials argue for in personal discussions.

war broke out in Croatia, fighting and ethnic cleansing prompted large flows of refugees and internally displaced persons. In the jargon of international agencies the term “internally displaced person”, or IDP for short, denotes a group of persons fleeing from a conflict, but not crossing an international border, since crossing an international border changes the international legal status of the fleeing person – they are protected by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.³²

UNHCR’s original mandate refers to refugees. Occasionally, however, it can be tasked by the Secretary General of the United Nations or by the Security Council to become active also regarding the IDP aspect of a conflict. This was the case in the former Yugoslavia. United Nations Security Council resolution 716 of 1991 gave UNHCR a “lead agency” role in coordinating the humanitarian relief agencies of the United Nations and its many partners. UNHCR’s activities initially concentrated on Croatia, but as the situation escalated, the organization soon also became active in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A Refugee Conference held on 29 June 1992 in Geneva further clarified the main focus of UNHCR’s work in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since, despite the appeals of UNHCR, most European countries were reluctant to accept larger numbers of refugees, a strategic decision was taken at the meeting to give priority to the relocation of the fleeing population within the country. With this decision UNHCR’s main tasks were laid down as preventing displacement, where possible, and to assist IDPs. In the course of the war, the increasing humanitarian crisis and growing numbers of people who had to flee their homes forced Western states to modify their position from refusal to a grudging acceptance of refugees to their countries. In this respect UNHCR continued appealing and lobbying countries to accept refugees and thus to fulfil their obligations outlined by international refugee law.

³² The Convention a refugee as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." On the other hand, UN guidelines laid down in the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement” (Deng 1998) IDPs are defined as “persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border (ibid. p.1).

In line with its mandate UNHCR's work within Bosnia-Herzegovina thus concentrated on the delivery of aid to the endangered population, monitoring the situation and, based on its findings, to advocate respect for human rights.

Already in April 1992 UNHCR was transporting aid to Bosnia and on 15 April 1992 the agency announced its first incident: Serbs stopped and confiscated 6 agency trucks carrying food and medicine for refugees in BH. Such incidents kept increasing in frequency until on 24 May UNHCR announced the temporary suspension of its activities in the country and its intention to withdraw its staff stationed outside Sarajevo. Up to that point the organization had lost 13 trucks with shipments of food and medicine to such raids.

There could be no doubt that under the prevailing conditions of chaos and anarchy UNHCR's task to deliver aid to the population was impossible to achieve. With this the discussion on the international level on how to deliver aid and how to assist UNHCR in its task became more urgent. Three options emerged thereby: (a) an air bridge to Sarajevo, (b) providing military escort to UNHCR convoys and (c) opening up a land corridor to Sarajevo. In the end all three options were to some degree realized.

With UN Resolution 758, approved on 10 June 1992, UNPROFOR's mandate was extended to Sarajevo Airport, which was then still controlled by Serb troops. After the first moderately tough round of UN negotiations, on 30 June 1992 Serb troops withdrew from Sarajevo airport, though without removing their heavy weapons from a radius of 30km around the area, as the UN also demanded.

This act of non-compliance with the UN resolution was kindly overlooked and the air bridge to Sarajevo could begin. Throughout the war the air bridge remained an important lifeline for the besieged city, even though, due to attacks, on several occasions it had to be suspended and also despite the fact that it could never actually reach the 200 tons delivery per day estimated necessary to cover the needs of the Sarajevo population.

Since the air bridge was not sufficient to cover the needs of the city and also because other areas of the country were left completely without aid, the international community could not avoid a discussion of the opening up of land routes for aid convoys. In spite of the normally hesitant discussions, by August 1992 a UN resolution on military support for aid convoys seemed imminent. A first UN resolution on this issue, Resolution 769 (7 August 1992), extending the mandate of UNPROFOR and calling for an increase in its troop numbers prompted some pre-emptive action by the Bosnian Serb parliament.

In an attempt to prevent an increased international military presence, on 12 August 1992 the Bosnian Serbs pledged to open up roads to besieged pockets under Bosnian Government or Croat (HVO) control.³³ Just one day later the first UNHCR convoy consisting of three trucks reached Bihač.

Nonetheless, on 13 August 1992, with UN Resolution 770 the Security Council called

“upon States to take nationally or through regional agencies or arrangements all measures necessary to facilitate in coordination with the United Nations the delivery by relevant United Nations humanitarian organizations and others of humanitarian assistance to Sarajevo and wherever needed in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

The Serbs budged to the degree they considered necessary to avoid sanctions. On 18 August a first convoy of eight trucks, already escorted by eight UNPROFOR armoured vehicles, reached Goražde, however, not without being engaged in a fire fight and not without having to remove mines blocking their way. Goražde was under a siege for the past several weeks and conditions among the civilian population were appalling.

UNHCR convoys escorted by UNPROFOR were now usually let through to their destinations, but their harassment became a constant feature. Increasingly also civilian blockades (Serb women blocking the convoys) were organized by Bosnian Serb authorities to prevent convoys reaching their destinations. Attacks on the

³³ In fact, the Bosnian Serb parliament explicitly stated that allowing humanitarian transports to reach the pockets was meant to prevent international intervention.

aircraft supplying Sarajevo also occurred on a regular basis. It must be noted that in this initial phase of the conflict all three sides or militias are known to have attacked UN forces delivering aid. On 3 September 1992 an Italian aircraft was shot down approaching Sarajevo, whereupon the air bridge was suspended for several weeks.

Thus by the fall of 1992 the UNHCR relief effort had reached a mode that would remain characteristic of the effort until the end of the war. The relief effort was a joint endeavour by UNHCR and the WFP (World Food Program), which would deliver the goods to so called EDPs (External Delivery Points). These were in all cases located outside Bosnia (initially in Croatia and Yugoslavia, followed by EDPs in Italy and Germany to service air deliveries). Food distribution within Bosnia remained the duty of UNHCR.

By autumn 1992 also the logistic side of the endeavour was already up and running. From Zagreb and Split shipments left for Herzegovina and Central and Western Bosnia. Eastern Bosnia, including the Bosniac enclaves around Goražde, Žepa and Srebrenica, were accessed from Belgrade. The effort was upheld by large-scale UNHCR fund-raising among mostly Western states.

The monitoring and subsequent advocacy activities of UNHCR – advocacy meaning political interventions on behalf of the mandated population – were also increasing. There were, however, some initial problems. UNHCR and the UN system were strongly criticized for, in spite of previous knowledge of the situation in Serb concentration camps, having remained silent until the issue was brought in the media on 8 August 1992.

The discovery of the Serb concentration camps confronted UNHCR, and the IC in general, with a serious dilemma, which it had to face repeatedly during the course of the war. Lord Owen, the chief UN negotiator, remembers an emergency meeting from the first week of September 1992.

“On Saturday and Sunday [5 and 6 September 1992] we as Co-Chairmen were locked in meetings with Sadako Ogata, the High Commissioner for Refugees, who had accepted our invitation to be the Chairman of the ICFY

Working Group on Humanitarian Issues, and Thierry Germond of the International Red Cross. Both asked us to agree that UNPROFOR troops should go from Croatia to Bosnia and escort prisoners to safety from the Manjača camp. The Bosnian Serb guards were being withdrawn, which meant that the camp was open and defenceless in a locality where the Serb civilians were more hostile to the inmates than their captors. There were 3,700 detainees at risk, some of them ill and requiring to be moved out fast. The ICRC also said that the Croats and Muslims must be persuaded to release Serb prisoners. The issue of principle facing us was the question whether the UN should escort people out of Bosnia-Herzegovina, thereby making itself party to ethnic cleansing. The case for doing so was that we faced a higher humanitarian need, namely to save lives. This was the first of many times that we as Co-Chairmen had to confront this horrific dilemma. We decided that the humanitarian principle of saving lives had to take priority and asked UNPROFOR to help" (Owen 1995:65).

While initially, so it seems, UNHCR and UN were slow to react to the reports of concentration camps, in the later course of the Bosnian war UNHCR's advocacy of human rights abuses was positive. An extensive monitoring system on the ground and an open and pro-active media policy became the main pillars of UNHCR's advocacy campaign. In this respect, credit has to be given to José-Maria Mendiluce, the Special Envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to the former Yugoslavia. The weekly UNHCR press briefings in Zagreb became a major source of information for journalists about ongoing expulsions, torture, ethnic cleanings and other atrocities committed in former Yugoslavia and thus contributed to the public pressure that finally forced Western politicians to step up pressure to end the war.

Concerning the level of UNHCR's involvement in the Bosnian crisis, the organization soon changed its internal mode of operation by widening its definition of its beneficiary population.

"Beneficiaries were initially described according to four categories: refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and the 'war affected'. But it soon became evident that there were strong operational as well as conceptual grounds for a maintaining a single category: casualties of war. And as one observer noted, 'it (UNHCR) moved away from its usual statistical preoccupation with categorizing refugees and simply helped anyone who needed help'" (Joint UNHCR/WFP Evaluation Mission, 1 November 1997, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+swwBmCe8EudwwwowwwwwwwmFqo20I0E2glhFqo20I>

Such a change might be perceived as trivial, in reality however, it supported an institutional mentality of getting involved wherever needed when protecting the civilian population.

With the introduction of airdrops to otherwise inaccessible pockets such as Srebrenica, Žepa, Goražde, Bihać and briefly even Mostar, UNHCR introduced a further innovation to its relief effort. With the aid of military planes provided by the US, Great Britain and Germany, UNHCR organized and directed this crucial effort.

An evaluation of UNHCR’s engagement during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is positive. Logistically it was a major endeavour with more than 945,066 metric tons of food delivered and at times almost 3 million people supported (see TABLE 2 below).

A number of UNHCR staff, both international and national, were killed or injured. The Sarajevo air bridge was the longest such effort in history, supplying some 160,000 metric tons of food and medicine to the city in the 3 and half years of its existence.

TABLE 2 UNHCR distribution of food (1992-1995)

Period	Budget – Food & Logistic Requirements (US\$)	Food (Metric Tons)	Average number of beneficiaries*
Sept 92-Mar 93	87,277,90	123,525	1,620,000
Oct 93-June 94	173,285,569	288,873	2,740,019
July 94-Dec 94	135,440,963	212,471	2,775,263
Jan-June 95	35,482,963	159,009	1,427,672
July-Dec 95	78,837,117	161,188	1,427,672
Total		945,066	

(Source: *ibid*)

* The average number of beneficiaries results from the amount of food supplied divided by the basic food ration. If, on average, beneficiaries received more or less than the basic ration, the number of beneficiaries covered would be fewer or greater.

Regarding the impact of the aid delivered I would like once again to quote the UNHCR/ WFP internal report:

It must be stressed that despite the lack of reliable data on differential food needs in different areas of Bosnia, the operation succeeded in getting food to the most needy areas, with only some inevitable over-supply in the initial stages. The operation ensured that there was no widespread hunger or malnutrition, although in the case of the isolated populations of the besieged cities, security-related difficulties of access made distribution problematic (Joint UNHCR/WFP Evaluation Mission, 1 November 1997, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+swwBmCe8EudwwwowwwwwwwmFqo20I0E2glhFqo20I0E2glFqoGn5nwGqrAFqo20I0E2glcFqtFd5DowDzmxwwwwww/.opendoc.htm>).

Throughout the war, UNHCR and in fact the entire international humanitarian effort was exposed to three different types of criticism and accusation. One concentrates on the prolongation of the war through humanitarian assistance. This accusation is partially absurd. While it is no doubt true that by delivering aid, resources were freed up, which could then be directed towards the war effort, experience in several wars show that combating parties that are already taking severe losses, both in men and material, are not easily impressed by additional civilian casualties and suffering (e.g. Pape 1996). In other words their determination to fight is such, that civilian suffering would not significantly compel them to redirect resources. Humanitarian aid thus alleviates suffering in situations in which effort spent on the military effort is basically inelastic in this regard.

One aspect of the “war prolongation” accusation is definitely bizarre, however. The brunt of the international aid was received by the Bosniac side, which was, without any doubt, in the most desperate humanitarian need. At the same time it was the Bosniac side whose war aims were compatible with international norms. Several UN resolutions and statements of Western politicians bear witness of this fact. This criticism of the relief effort thus also favoured a solution to the war which would have been in complete contradiction to international law. It would have rewarded the stronger sides to the conflict.

On the other hand, another aspect of the criticism is more acceptable: that UNHCR, and other aid organizations, had entered a number of dubious agreements by paying road levies to hostile militias, such as petrol for the VRS, in exchange for accessing target populations. The internal report is, I believe, too positive in its treatment of the subject:

"In some cases food levies are carried out by the military authorities to allow convoys to pass. In Former Yugoslavia, attempts to levy food taxes were systematically resisted by UNHCR field-staff who were given repeated and specific instructions to that effect. However, field-staff did occasionally undergo pressures to relinquish aid, and on exceptional occasions, food was seized, sometimes at gun-point. This was part of the reality of a war-time operation and illustrates the tense context in which staff operated and the difficult duties they had to perform" (Joint UNHCR/WFP Evaluation Mission, 1 November 1997, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+swwBmCe8EudwwwowwwwwwwmFqo20I0E2glhFqo20I0E2gltFqoGn5nwGqrAFqo20I0E2glcFqtFd5DowDzmxwwwwww/.opendoc.htm>).

The payments of direct levies for the passage of food convoys did occur – there are too many credible journalistic reports on the subject to be able to deny it.³⁴ Lacking precise data, however, it is difficult to speculate on the impact of such misdirected aid on the course of the war. Most probably it could not have been significant, only making the life of Serbs and Croats, who anyhow had received aid from their "home countries", more comfortable. More problematic are the petrol levies imposed on UNPROFOR petrol shipments to its blue helmets stationed in the enclaves. In September 1994 the indicted war criminal Mladić declared that the VRS would impose one-third petrol toll on all international deliveries of petrol crossing areas its control. It seems that on occasion this tax was indeed paid. It has to be pointed out that UNHCR had nothing to do with this issue.

³⁴ The *Taz* journalist Rathfelder on the subject:

"Es gibt viel Korruption in diesem Krieg", meint William T., ein kanadischer UNHCR-Mitarbeiter, der ein Bier nach dem anderen trinkt. Er ist da abgebrüht, war er doch schon in Kambodscha und kurz auch in Somalia eingesetzt. Eigentlich dürfe er ja gar nicht darüber reden. Doch selbst die UNHCR müsse Wegzölle entrichten. "Nicht auf der kroatisch-bosnischen Seite, wohl aber bei den Serben." Wie das im einzelnen geschieht, will er nicht verraten. "Nur so viel: Auch die serbische Bevölkerung wird mit Hilfsgütern versorgt. Die Quantität hängt von den Verhandlungen ab und vom Umfang der Hilfe, die nach Sarajevo geht. Die privaten Hilfsorganisationen werden jedoch ziemlich geschröpft" (Rathfelder, 1 March 1993).

A final line of accusation was brought forward by the Bosnian government and activists calling for a strong Western response. They accused the humanitarian effort to be a “fig leaf”,

“that by giving generous support to food aid, the donors were able to defend themselves against the charge of inaction in Bosnia, and by so doing they postponed the military intervention needed to end the conflict. [...] There is no evidence that the provision of aid, including food aid, deflected public opinion from support for military intervention, and as the implementation of the humanitarian assistance brought with it additional international media coverage, a precursor of the eventual decisive intervention, that hypothesis has little credibility” (Joint UNHCR/WFP Evaluation Mission, 1 November 1997, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/home/+swwBmCe8EudwwwowwwwwwwmFqo20I0E2glhFqo20I0E2glFqoGn5nwGqrAFqo20I0E2glcFqtFd5DowDzmxwwwwww/opendoc.htm>).

Western public awareness thanks to additional international media coverage will be a major theme when discussing the activities of international organizations in the Mostar area. For now, however, another major UN organization, UNPROFOR, will be briefly discussed.

4.1.2 UNPROFOR

Through UNPROFOR’s presence in the vicinity of Mostar and because UNHCR’s and UNPROFOR’s mandate were so closely interlinked, a brief note on the ill-fated blue helmet mission is also necessary. In principle the mandate of the United Nations Protection Force extended all over the former Yugoslavia. Its initial task was to function as a classic peacekeeping force between the rebel Krajina Serbs and the Croatian government forces in the Republic of Croatia. Already then, however, the mission caused some controversy as the Croatian government wished the blue helmets to be stationed along the international borders to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (then both still Yugoslavia).

In March and April 1992, at the time the war broke out in Bosnia, only some 300 UN troops were stationed in Sarajevo, the then headquarters of the UNPROFOR

mission. Its first active role in the Bosnian conflict was to take over the Serb-held Sarajevo airport (Security Council Resolution 749) and to reopen it for aid flights. After lengthy negotiations and several broken promises, on 1 July 1992, the Serbs withdrew. Some 1,200 blue helmets took over their place and reopened the airport. Attacks by all three sides on the UN personnel manning the airport were frequent and several casualties were taken.

The inadequate volume of the airlift to supply Sarajevo and the difficulties encountered by the convoys of UNHCR and other aid agencies led to the already mentioned resolution 770 requesting UN member states to undertake all necessary measures to facilitate, “in coordination with the United Nations, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Sarajevo and wherever needed in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. While not specified in the resolution, the task was taken over by UNPROFOR. The later resolution 776 of September 1992 already clearly defined UNPROFOR as the carrier of the mandate.

In the autumn of 1992 UNPROFOR’s mandate was further expanded to escort ICRC convoys of detainees released from Serb concentration camps and to monitor compliance with the UN ban on military flights over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Then, with the declaration of the UN safe areas around Srebrenica, Žepa, Goražde, Bihač and Tuzla the Security Council once expanded the UNPROFOR-mandate (Resolution 836). The mandate was, in principle, rather robust calling for the troops to be able

to deter attacks against the safe areas, to monitor the ceasefire, to promote the withdrawal of military or paramilitary units other than those of the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to occupy some key points on the ground, in addition to participating in the delivery of humanitarian relief to the population as provided for in resolution 776 (1992) of 14 September 1992 (Resolution 836, para. 5).

Unfortunately, the safe areas were never provided with the necessary number of troops to be able to deter an attack.

Developments on the ground in February 1994 – the NATO ultimatum to withdraw heavy weapons around Sarajevo and the ceasefire and the subsequent Washington peace agreement between Bosnian Government and Bosnian Croat forces – led to UNPROFOR being entrusted with two new tasks. At meetings in Sarajevo and Zagreb (18 February 1994) between the Commander-in-Chief of NATO Southern Command, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Yasushi Akashi, President Izetbegović and Radovan Karadžić, UNPROFOR was tasked with monitoring the withdrawal of heavy weapons around Sarajevo. Weapons not withdrawn but within the heavy weapon exclusion zone of the agreement were to be grouped at specific locations and put under the control of UNPROFOR.

Regarding the ceasefire between HVO and ABiH forces (23 February 1994) UNPROFOR received a relatively classic peacekeeping duty. Blue helmets were to be placed at key military positions and were to oversee the withdrawal of heavy weapons. A joint HVO/ ABiH commission chaired by UNPROFOR was also set up. Additionally, UNPROFOR was also asked to reopen Tuzla airport for humanitarian relief flights.

All these additional tasks were authorized by subsequent UN Security Council resolutions (resolutions 900, 908 and 914). These additional duties seriously stretched the already strained resources of UNPROFOR. Resolutions 908 and 914 thus approved the stationing of some 10,000 more blue helmets, 150 military observers and 275 civilian police monitors in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

UNPROFOR now became more and more involved in negotiating and monitoring ceasefires between the warring parties, as in April 1994 in Goražde or the monitoring of the of the Bosnia-wide ceasefire brokered by Jimmy Carter and lasting from the end of December 1994 until the spring of 1995.

With the expiry of the Jimmy Carter ceasefire the renewed military escalation in Bosnia brought about the gravest humiliation of UNPROFOR during its mandate. During this renewed round of escalation Serbs once again completely ignored previous UN resolutions. They shelled Sarajevo and other UN safe areas and finally

retook four heavy weapons from UNPROFOR collection sites. A first request by General Rupert Smith for retaliatory NATO air support was rejected by Akashi, arguing for the security of UNPROFOR troops.

A second request, strongly supported by the US, was, however, granted and on 25 and 26 May 1995 NATO flew air raids at Serb positions in Bosnia. As feared by many the Serbs thereupon took several UNPROFOR troops stationed in territory under their control hostage. As already described, after intense political pressure and through the mediation of Milosević the hostages were finally released. The media images of UNPROFOR soldiers being chained to lampposts at potential targets of NATO air strikes shocked Western audiences. Questions arose about the entire UNPROFOR.

In the following UNPROFOR troops were regrouped and withdrawn from VRS-held areas in order to make them less vulnerable to similar retaliatory attacks. At the same time a new, heavily armed force, the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF), consisting of French, British and Dutch troops was dispatched. UN Resolution 898 of 16 June 1995 located the force within the general structure of the overall UN peacekeeping force.

Initially the mission of the force was not clear – it could either be used to support a withdrawal of UNPROFOR from Bosnia or even to implement certain enforcement activities. While the RRF was still in the process of its deployment and UNPROFOR still regrouping, on 7 July 1995 the VRS launched an attack on the UN safe areas around Srebrenica and later Žepa. Calls by the Dutch UNPROFOR contingent for supportive air strikes were declined by the commander of the Bosnian UNPROFOR troops General Rupert Smith and on 11 July the enclave fell. Subsequently some 8,000 Bosniac boys and men are estimated to have been murdered by Mladić's troops and the rest of the population of some 40,000 cleansed. The evacuation of the civilian population and the small number of Ukrainian UNPROFOR troops from Žepa was somewhat less bloody.

After this series of UNPROFOR debacles, but with the blue helmets finally regrouped by August 1995 tougher retaliatory action now became possible. The new strategic situation is described by Lord Owen as follows:

“For the first time since the autumn of 1992 UNPROFOR was no longer spread out across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina and vulnerable to Bosnian Serb retaliation and hostage-taking. UNPROFOR was out of Žepa, Srebrenica and Goražde. Bihać was now safe. There were no significant UN forces in Serb controlled areas anywhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina. UNPROFOR was no longer manning heavy weapons collection points in Sarajevo” (Owen 1995:535).

Thus when on 28 August 1995 a shell struck the Sarajevo market killing several civilians a tough NATO response followed. The RRF participated in these attacks on the VRS, thus restoring some credibility to the UN military mission in Bosnia.

Then with the Dayton Peace Accord in place and the first NATO troops being stationed, UNPROFOR's mandate expired on 20 December 1995. Some of its troops were taken over by IFOR, the NATO mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina, others left.

An evaluation of the UNPROFOR mission is difficult. A lot of the criticism (see p. 152) of the relief effort already discussed is equally valid for the UNPROFOR mission, such as postponing a serious Western intervention or unnecessarily prolonging the war by participating in the relief effort. Thus, instead of repeating the above criticism, at this point I would like to discuss the difficulties of the UNPROFOR mandate and the operational aspects of its implementation.

At the height of the mission (November 1994) more than 38,810 soldiers, including 680 United Nations military observers, were stationed in the three countries of the UN mission, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. The majority of these UNPROFOR blue helmets, some 24,400 soldiers, were deployed in Bosnia. The RRF, not part of UNPROFOR, but belonging to the UN mission added another 10,000 soldiers to this number. UNPROFOR was the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping operation so far. During the 4-year length of the UNPROFOR mission

211 soldiers died – almost all of them in Bosnia and Croatia. UN statistics list 100 as casualties to accidents, 74 to hostile acts and the rest to illness and other causes.

UNPROFOR had, without doubt an extremely difficult mandate. The lightly equipped troops were not prepared and not mandated to protect the population actively against the atrocities of the war. Regarding UNPROFOR's use of force, resolution 776 (14 September 1992) authorized the blue helmets to use force in self-defence including when prevented from carrying out their mandate by armed groups. With the establishment of the UN safe areas, UNPROFOR troops protecting the safe areas were also authorized to call on air support if they or the safe areas were threatened. The final decision about air strikes rested with the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali. In spite of these possibilities UNPROFOR was usually reluctant to use force. Most of the requests for air support were turned down by the UNPROFOR leadership, others only by the UN civilian structures, the Secretary General or his Special Envoy, Akashi.

Despite the generally restrictive interpretation of the UNPROFOR mandate, some troops were more willing to take recourse to force than others. They could do so, since, in peacekeeping missions, troops operate according to Rules of Engagement³⁵ dictated to by their home countries. For example, the British were known to be more willing to shoot back if attacked than the Spanish UNPROFOR soldiers, who drove into dangerous areas with the guns of their armoured vehicles turned away from hostile militias. "One felt a lot safer with British escorts", confessed a UNHCR aid worker who frequently participated in convoys (personal interview, G., a UNHCR Officer, 14 August 2000).

The topic would merit a whole separate research, examining the various incidents that took place, all the casualties, exchanges of fire etc. Although this is beyond the scope of the current work, I would nevertheless like to put forward some observations.

³⁵ Rules of Engagement are military instructions defining the conditions under which and how troops can and should engage an enemy.

One can assume that a “meek” approach by troops towards the mission was ordered by the sending states in order to avoid casualties. To be fair, the inexperience of officers with crisis situations other than outright war may have contributed to the non-conflictive approach of several UNPROFOR officers to the tasks facing them in Bosnia. While on the one hand, through their Northern Ireland experience, UK troops were familiar with differentiated responses ranging from engaging in negotiations over low-level violence to full battle situations, several armies do not have such know-how. Nevertheless, observers usually agree that it was politicians that determined the level of engagement of most troops.

A comparison of the casualty rates of countries contributing more than 1,000 soldiers to the UNPROFOR mission (stand 30 April 1994) shows some interesting results (see TABLE 3 below). The highest casualty rates are those of the Ukrainians (1.22% of their troop numbers), the Spanish (1.10%) and the French (1.09). Two of these troops, the French and Spanish, were notorious for their “soft” approach,³⁶ though political pressures twice forced the French to deviate from their usual attitude and initiate tough campaigns. I have no information on the usual conduct of the Ukrainian troops. Some of their casualties, however, can probably be explained by the critical situation they came upon in Goražde in July 1995. After the fall Srebrenica and Žepa the Bosniac defenders of the Goražde enclave turned upon the UN troops.

A second group is formed by casualty rates ranging from 0.3% to 0.8%. The corresponding countries are most Western European states and Canada plus the Russian Federation with 0.82% casualty on the upper limit of this group. Many of these troops usually had a reputation for a more robust interpretation of their mandate than the previously mentioned French and Spanish. Most notably, British troops were well known for a frequently tough and pro-active approach and most observers gave also good marks to Canadians and the Nordic troops.

³⁶ The absolute peak of French compliance occurred in January 1993 when French UNPROFOR troops were escorting the Bosnian Deputy Prime Minister, Hakiya Turajlić, from the airport back to Sarajevo. Turajlić was returning from internationally sponsored peace negotiations when some 50 Serb soldiers demanding to search the vehicles stopped the UN convoy. During this search Turajlić was shot and killed while French blue helmets were standing by.

On the lower end of the casualty rates spectrum (below 0.2%) one finds all third world troops (Bangladesh, Jordan, Malaysia, Pakistan) and Turkey, but none of the western or CIS troops. These troops were mostly, though not always, stationed in somewhat less problematic areas, areas fully under the control of ABiH. One reason for stationing these troops in the less problematic AbiH-controlled sectors was probably that the Bosnian conflict was a strongly Western and European issue with European states taking greater responsibilities. Another reason for being stationed in fully Bosniac held and less difficult sectors was that all these troops were from Muslim countries. Given the racist attitudes of the VRS and HVO, troops from Muslim countries could not be stationed in their areas. Troops from a “Christian” background could, however, operate in AbiH-held areas. It must be added that concerning robustness of approach, these troops could also probably be categorized as “soft”.

TABLE 3 Casualties of UNPROFOR contingents of over 1,000 soldiers

Country	Troops	Casualties³⁷	Casualties per Troops (%)
Bangladesh	1,235	2	0.16
Belgium	1,038	3	0.29
Canada	2,091	11	0.53
Denmark	1,230	6	0.49
France	4,493	49	1.09
Jordan	3,367	5	0.15
Malaysia	1,550	3	0.19
Netherlands	1,803	7	0.39
Pakistan	3,017	7	0.23
Russian Federation	1,464	12	0.82
Spain	1,267	14	1.10
Sweden	1,212	4	0.33
Turkey	1,464	3	0.20
Ukraine	1,147	14	1.22
United Kingdom	3,405	25	0.73
Total	29,783	165	0.53

³⁷ Official website of the United Nations (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/fatalities/>)

Thus while the similarly “soft” and “non-proactive” French and Spanish were stationed in difficult environments – the French around the Sarajevo airport and the Spanish in and around Mostar – the other “soft” troops had relatively non-conflictual postings. In addition, political pressures urging troops to take up tough tasks probably effected the “third world” country bloc less than European countries.

However counter logical it might sound, a preliminary conclusion could be that, should troops be sent into difficult peacekeeping situations, a compromising and appeasing approach would only expose soldiers to risks without bringing them nearer to the achievement of their peacekeeping task. Once the attainment of a difficult peacekeeping task has political approval, a tough but measured military approach appears to be the best. It is more efficient in achieving the policy or peacekeeping goals and might also help to keep casualties relatively lower.

A consciously non-confrontational army, which nevertheless is tasked to perform contentious tasks, might become an easy target for the simple reason that no retaliation need be feared. Thus despite occasional heroic acts by its individual members, in summary the evaluation of the UNPROFOR mission cannot be a positive one. Even the relatively non-confrontational Lord Owen judged the UNPROFOR mission in his book “Balkan Odyssey” as falling short of what it might have achieved.

“The UN, as opposed to the member states, cannot however be immune from criticism for not enforcing its mandate where it has been given the resources by the Security Council to do so. I believe that the UN could have done more in the spring of 1992 [...] in Croatia. They needed better-quality troops, but there was a certain lack of resolve from the outset [...]. The erosion of the UN's authority in Bosnia-Herzegovina was largely a reflection on the mandates and the resources they were given by the Security Council. But there were incidents when UNPROFOR looked unnecessarily powerless [...]. The authority of the UN is not always a question of the number of troops, or even of the standard of their equipment, but of the determination and quality of the commanders and their men. It is this combination of factors which marks the difference between a failed and a successful peacekeeping mission” (Owen 1995:579).

4.1.3 The ICRC

Like UNHCR, ICRC performed a dual band of tasks: it delivered relief and humanitarian aid to the vulnerable and performed human rights advocacy in favour of core mandate groups: the civilian population, detainees, POWs (prisoners of war), etc.

Among the material relief type of activities it delivered food to vulnerable sections of society – the term later included almost the entire population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition it delivered food, aid, clothing and medicine to detainees and POWs, whenever access to such camps was granted.

On the political protection and advocacy side, ICRC's regular mandate included the advocating towards local counterparts the conduct of warfare in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. In particular, the main topics ICRC raised during its regular meetings with the warring parties in the Mostar region were access to detention camps, the treatment of detainees and POWs, preventing the forced (frontline) labour of detained individuals and POWs. Like UNHCR, ICRC organized a few family reunions, though the conditions under which the organization would get involved were very restrictive, such as children being separated from their parents (personal interview with a former ICRC employee, 19 April 2002).

In its approach to achieve the above outlined relief and protection goals, ICRC followed the general rules set out by the organization for work in conflict zones. These Fundamental Principles were defined in the Vienna Declaration in 1965 and include humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. Especially one core value, that of neutrality, is crucial in determining ICRC's approach to its protection activities and set the organization aside from UN-organizations such as UNHCR. Cornelio Sommaruga, the President of the ICRC defined in a keynote address the term as follows:

“Neutrality implies not taking sides in hostilities, or engaging at any time in controversies of a political, religious or ideological nature. For the ICRC neutrality is by no means tantamount to indifference or passivity. Indeed, the ICRC is never neutral when it comes to human suffering.

Neutrality is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Its basic purpose is to secure the confidence of all parties to a conflict, and thus to ensure unimpeded access to all victims. Neutrality therefore implies not being in any way connected with the dispute giving rise to the conflict, or with any elements that may be construed as being associated with it. Neutrality also means abstaining from any interference, whether direct or indirect, in ongoing military operations.

By its very nature, the UN Security Council cannot be neutral. Its principal task is to maintain or restore international peace and security, and that task is in essence a political one. Whereas humanitarian protection and assistance have to be provided without any adverse distinction based on the nature or origin of the armed conflict or on the causes espoused by or attributed to the warring parties, the decision to engage in peace-keeping operations is primarily aimed at maintaining and/or restoring international peace and security, as perceived by the Security Council” (Somaruga 1997:181).

How this strategic approach to protection translated into activities in the field was expressed by a former ICRC employee working in the organization’s Mostar office (personal interview, 19 April 2002):

“they would never go public. They were afraid of the side effects and thought that it might be counterproductive if they were not neutral. For example that a government would then deny them access to vulnerable people. Or maybe that local authorities, which are not under the control of higher authorities [of the warring parties], will simply close their doors to ICRC. [...] They [the ICRC] would not even give testimony at the ICTY (the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia) and this bothers me very much, because I have to live with these people [i.e. those who committed war crimes].”

Protection interventions thus remained low-profile though nevertheless dedicated. If ICRC could not achieve success on a lower level of the hierarchy of the warring parties, it would try to raise the issue at a higher level. International media were only utilized to document ICRC’s work, e.g. distribution of food items, water-sanitary activities, convoys, etc., but not in order to sanction or reveal non-compliance of the warring parties with humanitarian law. This approach is expressed in ICRC’s understanding of the importance of dissemination activities:

“The importance of promoting knowledge of international humanitarian law has been recognized since its beginnings. [...] This [...] stemmed initially from

something quite self-evident: there is little likelihood of a body of law being observed unless those whose duty it is to respect and apply it are familiar with it. The aim was twofold: first the practical aspect - to respect and ensure respect for the law, and thereby prevent violations of its provisions; and secondly the moral aspect - to contribute to the propagation of humanitarian ideals and a spirit of peace among peoples. [...] While the fundamental objective of dissemination remains constant - to limit the suffering of victims and prevent violations of the law - there is an aim specific to each situation as it arises: [...] during the conflict, action to limit the spread of violence" (ICRC 1995:239, 241);

This points to a very strongly persuasive understanding of how to fulfil the organization's core mandate: Information about principles of humanitarian law should eventually contribute to "limit the spread of violence" and to a lawful conduct of war. Any type of sanctions, e.g. through utilizing international media pressure, are thus discarded (a) out of a fear that further ICRC activity in conflict zones could be jeopardized and (b) based on a belief about the potential success of persuasive dissemination. The mentioned former ICRC staff confirmed that these principles of action were strongly internalised by ICRC international and local staff.

Nevertheless, it appears that there must have been at least some conscious or less conscious realization that on occasion sanctions might prove useful and important and in support of humanitarian law. It was confirmed to me at least for the Mostar region (personal interview, 19 April 2002) that ICRC officials occasionally did discretely pass on information to various representatives of western governments that passed through the town about the humanitarian situation there. Such action, however, seems to contradict the neutrality principal as defined above. Finally, a word is necessary with regard to the quality of the staff. Without doubt, the ICRC personnel were highly motivated and professional. The already quoted former local ICRC employee recounts:

"[It was a] very, very positive experience. When I think back it's really the most honest organization I've ever worked for. It is an interesting thing that mainly educated, quite young or middle aged people, mostly quite intelligent were working for ICRC. They understood the situation. Some people got [too] emotionally attached, but the organization was professional enough to deal with it. And no scandal related to the organization such as smuggle or selling of humanitarian relief. They were professional! It is important to have such people" (personal interview, 19 April 2002).

4.2 International Organizations in Mostar

Returning to the actual topic of this section, the situation in Mostar, around the outbreak of the war in Bosnia in April 1992 a small ICRC office was already present in the town.³⁸ In view of the rapidly deteriorating situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina EC and UN military observers also were stationed in Mostar towards the end of April.

The organizations present in Mostar could, however, do little against the atrocities committed by Serb forces in the initial days of the fighting as in the beginning of April 1992 the JNA, assisted by Serb irregulars, attempted to dislodge HVO-led resistance groups from Mostar. The testimony of a 43-year-old Bosnian woman from Mostar bears witness of the powerlessness of international interventions:

“At 6 PM on May 1 [1992], a JNA unit approached two apartment houses belonging to the cigarette factory and located on its grounds. They opened fire with machine guns. A resident called the UN and Red Cross offices located in the "HIT" department store; shortly after, one JNA special Forces Soldier wearing a camouflage uniform with a black scarf tied around his head and two Airborne Military policemen arrived. The witness judged by their accent that they were from Montenegro. The Special Forces soldier kicked in an apartment door and, threatening the occupants, asked about the phone call to the UN representative. A short time later, a group of JNA soldiers arrived and began to tear apart the apartments searching for weapons.

The following evening, a group of Serbian civilians wearing paramilitary uniforms came to the apartment buildings and took away 10 men. A senior paramilitary officer told his men they could choose any woman they wanted for their entertainment. Many apartments in both buildings were set on fire by tracer rounds fired by tanks of the unit” (United States Government, 1 March 1993³⁹).

³⁸ The office was initially manned by only one international and one local staff. After a brief suspension by ICRC of its activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina as one of its staff got killed, the office was re-established and significantly strengthened. From autumn 1992 until the formal end of the war in December 1995 an international staff of around 3-4 and some 10 local staff were constantly working for ICRC in the Mostar region.

³⁹ The Government of the United States report was submitted to the UN Security Council in accordance with Paragraph 5 of Resolution 771 (1992) and Paragraph 1 of Resolution 780 (1992).

Soon afterwards, on 4 May 1992, the first international casualty of the war occurred: a Belgian EC monitor was killed near Mostar, which led to the temporary suspension of EC monitoring activities.

In the following days fighting escalated, including the heavy shelling of pockets of resistance in the old quarters and the west side of the town. On 13 May 1992 the JNA virtually took over the whole town with only small pockets of resistance remaining on the west side of the town. The UN and ICRC offices had to be temporarily withdrawn from Mostar.

With the subsequent mid-June liberation of Mostar by Croat and Bosniac forces evidence of Serb atrocities became evident: on several occasions, such as also the above quote describes, men of fighting age were separated by Serb forces and executed.

With some sort of stability having returned to Mostar, international organizations moved back to the town establishing offices there. Mostar had a strategic location for all aid shipments heading from the Adriatic port of Split to Sarajevo and Central Bosnia and was at the same time an area to be supported in its own right. Bosniacs, and in smaller numbers Croats,⁴⁰ fleeing from ethnic cleansing in Serb-held Eastern Herzegovina, from the towns of Trebinje, Gacko, Nevesinje Podveležje, Bileća etc. were pouring into Mostar.

Moreover, Mostar became the headquarters of the Bosnian Croat militia, HVO, as well as of the Bosnian Croat political structures (the Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna). Thus for many international organizations maintaining offices in Mostar was essential for liaising with these structures.

Additionally to the UN and EC monitors, the international organizations and NGOs now permanently present in the town included UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Relief Committee (IRC), an American NGO, the German Technisches Hilfswerk (THW). Later also the Spanish medical

⁴⁰ The numbers of Croats in Eastern Herzegovina were traditionally rather low.

NGO, Medicos Medicos del Mundo, appeared in the town. Two more NGOs were also active in the surroundings of Mostar, Cap Anamur, a German NGO was running a refugee camp in Čapljina, and another refugee camp in Posušje was run by a Spanish NGO called Movimiento para la Paz i la Libertad (MPDL).

In late October 1992, as part of the first UNPROFOR troop enlargement, Spanish blue helmets, the Spanish Battalion (SPABAT) were stationed in Mostar and Međugorje, some 30km from Mostar. The stationing of the UNPROFOR soldiers gave some additional clout and security to international organizations working in the Mostar war zone, even though the Spanish were notorious for taking an especially timid stance on interpreting their mandate.

Driving aid convoys was no easy task, even though no frontlines had to be crossed in the Western Herzegovina and Mostar area. Convoys were several times attacked, mostly by artillery from Serb positions to the east of the main M17 road connecting the Adriatic coast with Sarajevo. E.g. on 2 February 1993 unidentified forces shelled a relief convoy of the Danish Refugee Council near Mostar, which was returning from Central Bosnia to Split. A Danish official was seriously injured and his Croat interpreter killed.

From January/ February 1993 onwards, as tensions between Croats and Bosniacs seriously began to escalate, the HVO frequently tried to prevent aid convoys from reaching Bosniac majority areas to the north of Mostar around Jablanica and Konjic. Reportedly pressure was also exerted on aid organizations to favour Croats in their distributions.

While basically all international organizations were involved in supplying various forms of aid, the only organizations with a clear-cut, activist human rights mandate were UNHCR and ICRC. Besides organizing the delivery of aid for the Mostar region, the main so-called protection issue that had to be taken up by the two organizations after the Croat-Bosniac takeover of Mostar was the treatment of Serb civilians.

With the withdrawal of Serbs from Mostar many Serbs fled Mostar. Some remained, however, and atrocities were committed against them. There were retaliatory killings of Serbs in and around Mostar, others were expelled from their homes and many were detained, including women and children. The new Hercegbosnian rulers of the town were rather unabashed about the need to cleanse Mostar of the Serbs (Schmid 7 August 1992). Thus the HVO conveniently stood aside as the neo-*ustaša* HOS expelled the remaining Serbs from the liberated areas and burned and looted their houses.

The issue of detained Serbs also became an issue during the visit of the UN Envoy for Human Rights, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, to Mostar on 17 October 1992. Mazowiecki managed to get a commitment from Mate Boban, the president of the Bosnian Croat Community of Hercegbosna, to release all Serbian prisoners. Indeed, some prisoners were released. By the end of the war, of the originally roughly 23,800 Serbs, some 2,000 still remained in Mostar. A shockingly low figure, but still somewhat better than the average minority population of several other, mostly Serb-controlled Bosnian towns.

Working in Mostar in the second half of 1992 and the first half of 1993 was tough, but the real test for UNHCR, and in fact for all international organizations, came with the outbreak of fighting between Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Government forces. As already described, on the morning of 9 May 1993 the HVO launched a surprise attack on the Bosniac majority on the east of the town. Already in the first hours of the assault, the attack got stuck, the HVO not being able to completely dislodge Bosniac units from the western bank of the Neretva.

Radio Free Europe (9 May 1993) reported “the fighting in Mostar was so intense that Spanish UN troops (SPABAT for Spanish Battalion) literally had take to the hills”. After evacuating Mostar the new base of the Spanish became Međugorje, a Roman Catholic pilgrimage site of an apparition of Mary in 1981.⁴¹

⁴¹ With the exception of the pilgrims, to most people Međugorje appears as a well-run commercial enterprise with dozens of hotels, pensions and stores selling religious souvenirs. During the war Međugorje, located some 30km to the Southwest of Mostar and mostly untouched by the fighting, took on a more sinister appearance: an international aid worker (personal interview 7 August 2000), whose organization also shifted its seat from Mostar to Međugorje described the town as “one of Dante’s circles of hell or a wild west town - shrewd villagers running

The HVO attack was followed by the detention of Bosniac members of the HVO and of Bosniac citizens living in parts of Mostar under the control of the HVO. Besides Bosniac members of the HVO, it was Bosniac community leaders and public personalities who were first to be rounded up and detained. Many of them were also killed. The detainees were first grouped in the Mostar football stadium and then moved to a helicopter production site and airport in Rodoč, in the north of Mostar. Later several other notorious camps were also opened up: in Gabela, Stolac, Ljubuški and other places. As already described, initially the Croat population did not fully support the assault and the strategy of ethnic cleansing and detainment, and many detained Bosniacs were released due to the interventions of their Croat friends and even returned to their homes.

In these first days of the Croat-Bosniac war the possibilities of international organizations to stop or at least contain the fighting and reduce gross violations of human rights were rather limited. Probably the most important aspect of their activities was their constant monitoring presence and the passing on of the information thus gained to the international media. E.g. the *New York Times* reported on a 10 May 1993 press conference that

“Lieutenant General Lars-Eric Wahlgren, the U.N. commander in Zagreb, left little doubt as to who he thought was responsible for the attack by asking President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia to rein in the Bosnian Croat forces. U.N. officials say he was assured the president would try ‘to calm things down’” (New York Times, 10 May 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

Meanwhile UNHCR was sending out similar messages with regard to the detentions of Bosniacs by the HVO. This is not to say that there were no independent investigations of committed journalists, but that, due to their permanent presence in an area, UN organizations became the first and, in many instances, best source of information for visiting journalists.

the Međugorje scheme”. Bosniac IDPs, fleeing a new wave of Serb ethnic cleansing were definitely not welcome here. The eerie comment of the Head of the local Franciscans to an appeal of a UNHCR official to accommodate these IDPs – after all, “Muslims or Christians, they were all humans” - was only: “No they are not. Make them drop their pants!”

As an additional advantage for UNHCR in achieving its protection aims, at the time of the outbreak of war between the HVO and government forces, the Mostar office of UNHCR was led by Isumi Nakomitsu. Acting as a temporary replacement in Mostar, Nakomitsu was the executive assistant of the UNHCR Special Envoy, José-Maria Mendiluce. Her good connections to the Special Envoy provided additional political clout to the UNHCR mission in Mostar. Using the media-friendly policy of Mendiluce, already early on in the war the Mostar UNHCR office was able to put the Croat-Bosniac conflict on the international media landscape.

This was certainly no easy feat, as many Western governments at that time would have preferred to ignore the Bosniac-Croat conflict, preferring the simple scheme of the “good Croats and Bosniacs” and the “bad Serbs”. Moreover, among some governments, most notably Germany but also the US, Croatia was considered some kind of an ally or “friend”. Thus through the efforts of international organizations, such as UNHCR or, to an extent, UNPROFOR, from the beginning the Western public was presented with a fairly accurate picture of the events in and around Mostar, including a rather correct evaluation of responsibility for the fighting.

Probably as a result of negative international media reactions an attempt was made by President Franjo Tuđman, to avoid being identified as culpable in the recent escalation in Bosnia. Thus already on the second day of the fighting (10 May) President Izetbegović and Mate Boban, the leader of the secessionist Bosnian Croats, called on UNPROFOR to monitor a ceasefire between the hostile parties. Apparently, however, there was no real willingness to stop fighting as, after a brief lull, on 11 May fighting resumed. On 12 May, now on its own initiative, UNPROFOR, led by its commander, Philip Morillon, tried to facilitate in similar negotiations. At the meeting in Međugorje UNHCR managed to put its own priorities on the negotiating table: to gain access to the prison camps and obtain the release of the Bosniac detainees, estimated to be already between 1,000 and 2,000. Access of UNHCR to the camp was agreed for the following day and commitments were also made to release some of the prisoners. While also the new ceasefire failed, the UNHCR visit to the Rodoč camp went ahead as planned.

This attempt of UNHCR to pick up the issue of detainees immediately led to a row between the UN refugee organization and ICRC who claimed that the issue of detainees was purely one of the Red Cross. ICRC, however, was unable to gain access to the detained. It must be mentioned that, while negotiating with the Herceg-Bosnian authorities, UNHCR officials demanded that ICRC was also allowed to access the camp in order to register the detainees (interview with a UNHCR officer on 14 August 2000).

Registering detainees is a routine ICRC activity, its aim being the protection of detainees by documenting their identities. Having determined the identity of a certain detained person, responsibility for his or her treatment and well-being is clearly established with the detaining organization, i.e. in the case of the Rodoč camp with the HVO and the authorities of Herceg-Bosna.

The very different clout UNHCR and ICRC had in negotiations with the warring parties would remain so throughout the war. The main reason for the lower efficiency of ICRC lies in the institutional constraints of the organization. As already noted, among the core values of ICRC are absolute “neutrality and impartiality”. ICRC interventions are thus supposed to be discrete and low-key, never associating itself with other organizations or countries. Turning to publicity is understood as taking sides in a conflict and the last option of the organization to make in order to achieve its aims. Similarly, this approach also bars any participation in meetings such as the 12 May meeting in Međugorje, where the access to the Rodoč camp was achieved.

The limited success of UNHCR, on the other hand, can be explained through the use of instruments rejected by ICRC: participating in higher-level political meetings and using the media. While an open media policy is not necessarily typical of all UNHCR operations, or in fact of other UN organizations, it has no institutional inhibitions in turning to publicity to achieve protection aims. As already mentioned, in the person of José Maria Mendiluce, UNHCR was represented by a Special Envoy, who was willing to make use of this very powerful tool. Participating in political meetings, if possible, to negotiate certain protection aims, can be considered to be a “traditional” instrument of the UN.

With its voluntary renunciation of turning to the media, even when faced with grave violations of international humanitarian law, ICRC lost negotiating clout and became insignificant and powerless when fighting for the humanitarian objectives dictated by its mandate⁴².

Nothing shows the difference between the two organizations more clearly than the news items picked up by the international media (New York Times, CNN, UPI, AP etc.) and attributed to either UNHCR or ICRC. In the first two months after the 9 May 1993 HVO assault on government troops in the Mostar area, only one ICRC statement, reported by UPI on 10 June 1993 referred directly to the situation in Mostar:

"In a report from Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross said supplies of running water are 'extremely scarce owing to action by Bosnian Croat forces' on the eastern bank of the Neretva River. [...] The inhabitants are forced to risk their lives by crossing the front lines after dark in search of water," the ICRC statement said" (UPI, 10 June 1993).

Even this news item is fairly non-judgemental, as it seems to point at a general consequence of war. The much more obvious and grave violations of international law, the detainment of Bosniacs under inhumane circumstances was publicly only mentioned by ICRC in the beginning of July 1993.⁴³

UNHCR's approach was very different. While in the summer of 1992 UNHCR was initially silent on the Serb concentration camps (see p.86), in 1993 the organization was not prepared to repeat the same mistake. The probably first statement of a UNHCR official on HVO-led detentions picked up by a major international media outlet dates back to 11 May 1993, stating that

⁴² Additionally, in some interviews the ICRC representative in Mostar in 1993 was described as "a good guy, but [due to his previous experiences in the war] burnt out" who was "not [anymore] well suited to deal with the difficult issues of the Mostar crisis" (personal interview, G., 14 August 2000).

⁴³ E.g. a first article of the German Taz dates 7 July 1993 (Zumach).

"in Mostar, Croatian forces continue their assault. As for the hundreds of civilians taken prisoners yesterday, U.N. officials said some of them are held in a factory" (ABC, 11 May 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

The term "UN officials" most probably refers here to UNHCR officials. UNHCR was even more vocal after its already mentioned visit to the Rodoč detention camp on 13 May 1993. Their statement about the situation in the camp was picked up by Reuters and later RFE as follows:

"UN refugee officials visited a Croatian camp where Muslims are held near Mostar and likened what they saw to 'pictures of Jews during the Second World War'" (Reuters, 14 May 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

The visit was also mentioned by the New York Times:

"The day after Bosnian Croats and Muslims signed an accord, key provisions were still not being carried out on Thursday by local commanders and fighters scattered across Bosnia-Herzegovina. Watched by armed guards and locked behind bolted doors, more than 1,500 men, women, and children remained crowded inside a former military base near Čitluk [referring to the Rodoč camp] on Thursday while the United Nations and relief agencies pressed their Croatian captors for their release. Officers with the U.N. High Commission for Refugees complained late on Thursday that they had been barred from moving food or other supplies to the Muslim civilians detained by Croatian forces" (14 May 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

Another main focus of UNHCR's work included the delivery of aid. Already on 9 May, i.e. on the day fighting broke out in Mostar, a scheduled UNHCR convoy attempted to enter the eastern part of the town, but the convoy was stopped at the HVO checkpoint near Mostar and four Muslim Slav drivers employed by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees were beaten (UPI, 11 May 1993). Clearly feeling some international pressure, a few days later, on 14 May, HVO commanders gave the green light to a UNHCR convoy to enter the besieged east side of the town and released some 50 detainees. Nevertheless, new expulsions of Bosniacs were reported already on 17 May.

An already previously scheduled meeting of the Vance-Owen peace talks on 18 May 1993 offered a brief glimmer of hope. Lord Owen, the chief negotiator of the UN, summarizes the meeting and the general political situation as follows:

“On 18 May Stoltenberg and I met with Tuđman and Izetbegovic at Međugorje to try to stop the fighting that was raging in central Bosnia between the Croats and Muslims. Mostar, where we had planned to meet, was too unsafe even to visit because of the fighting. That day the European Union, in a Political Cooperation press release, had reiterated that they would 'continue to lend their full support to the Vance--Owen plan' and promised 'to bring heavy pressure to bear on Serbia/Montenegro and the Bosnian Serbs, with no option being excluded'. [...] Progressive implementation was accepted and on that basis we hoped to be able to use UNPROFOR to monitor the ceasefire more extensively and help us start an agreed provincial government in those provinces [...] agreed between the Croat and Muslim leaders in December 1992 before the VOPP map was presented.

The Danish Presidency had sent a very strong letter to President Tuđman threatening EC sanctions, but Klaus Kinkel had visited Zagreb and, while talking toughly, had nevertheless left the Croats with the impression that there would be no real sanctions. After our meeting in Međugorje Tuđman did try to limit Boban's activities, realizing that Bosnian Croat behaviour was damaging the image of the Croatian government in the eyes on the world. Even so, the Bosnian Croats, though not as strong as the Bosnian Muslims, were not prepared to stop fighting, and Zagreb was not prepared to see them beaten by the Muslims” (Owen 1995:265-266).

It must be pointed out that Owen repeatedly seems to give the benefit of the doubt to Tuđman with regard to his plans of dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina. Such an approach is not consistent with commonly held understandings of regional experts and the testimonies of political actors of the time, such as Stipe Mesić. Bosnian Croats were part of Tuđman's political system and were not acting even semi-independently.

Returning to Međugorje, the results of the meeting were rather limited. A ceasefire, the release of civilian prisoners and the establishment of joint political structures were agreed. In all these aspects the agreement failed. Already the next day fighting resumed around Vitez in Central Bosnia and two days later heavy fighting flared up once again also in Mostar accompanied by further expulsions. Needless to say, no joint political structures could be established under such circumstances. It is clear, however, that Tuđman understood the international irritation caused by the HVO

assault and the grave human rights violations committed by these troops, which, thanks to the monitoring presence of UN agencies, could not be hidden.

Correctly judging that the world was still far from imposing any serious sanctions on Croatia, Tuđman, unwilling to compromise on the division of Bosnia and the creation of ethnically pure territories, seems to have opted for improving the Croat image by making minimal concessions in the humanitarian field.

UNHCR relief convoys now received permission to enter East Mostar regularly. However, for every convoy to the East, the Croats also insisted on a convoy to the HVO-held west. Towards the end of May it became feasible to arrange population exchanges. In a reciprocal fashion Croats from the AbiH-controlled East and Bosniacs from the HVO-controlled West who expressed a wish to leave to the other side were brought by buses over the front lines. Until the end of June 1993 some 2 or 3 such exchanges were organized.

Finally, towards the end of June, even permission to distribute aid for the detainees at the Rodoč prison camp could be negotiated. The entry was agreed for 29 June 1993. It is unclear why the Herceg-Bosna structures were so reluctant to allow for a renewed visit and distribution to the prison camp. One reason could be that, since the first UNHCR visit to the camp on 12 May, the situation there might have deteriorated so far that the Croat leadership was hesitant to allow internationals to visit the camp. Another reason might be the pressure of vindictive elements in the HVO and the Herceg-Bosna elite, who simply rejected any aid to their enemy – even if detained and harmless.

While certain progress regarding protection aims could be achieved, UNHCR's day-to-day work in Mostar was becoming increasingly difficult. Bosniacs, fearing for their lives, were lining up every morning in front of the office begging to be helped out. Through their connections some managed to attain Croat passports or transport visas and left Mostar. Otherwise, however, Croatia, while supporting and planning ethnic cleansing, was not willing to accept unlimited numbers of Bosniac refugees and Western states were equally reluctant to put up with more asylum seekers.

Bosniacs who attempted to flee Mostar without such papers were stopped at HVO checkpoints.

Then the fall of Bijelo Polje on 30 June 1993 changed everything. With the fall of this area Bosniac-dominated troops in East Mostar managed to break the HVO encirclement towards the north and to link up with other government-controlled areas in central Bosnia. What first looked like an easy victory for the HVO increasingly began to turn into a defensive struggle. Fear spread on the Croat side and with it the initial reluctance of wide circles of the Croat population to fully embrace the war aims of the Boban clique on the Bosniacs evaporated.

The fall of Bijelo Polje radically changed the environment in which international organizations in the Mostar area were working. On the morning of 30 June a UNHCR convoy was already on its way to the Rodoč prison camp to deliver aid to the detainees, when news of the HVO debacle broke. Access for the convoy to the camp was cancelled. It is difficult to see any military logic behind denying humanitarian access to the non-combatant inmates of the Rodoč prison camp. The reason for such a, from the perspective of the HVO's international image, very negative move is more probably purely emotional and internal political: to get back at the enemy after the setback suffered. There might be a somewhat more rational aspect to denying access also, by reserving the possibility of an access as a negotiating chip. However, while detainees or the bodies of fallen soldiers were all used as bargaining chips in negotiations between the warring parties, I am not aware of access to the camps ever being explicitly used in such a way.

A desperate and furious HVO, now completely ignoring its international image, blocked almost all aspects of international humanitarian work: access to East Mostar was completely stopped and also visiting or supporting the inmates of prison camps now became impossible. The total freeze of relations with the east side also put an end to the voluntary exchange of population. At the same time, the HVO presented its intensified campaign of ethnic cleansing as a reaction to the "treason" of Bosniac nationality HVO fighters. Recently surfaced documents published by the Croatian weekly *Nacional* seem to indicate, however, that the decision to establish additional

new detention camps had already been made on 8 June 1993 and was signed by Jadranko Prlić, the Political leader of the HVO. In fact, a renewed and low profile wave of arrest of Bosniac fighters serving in the HVO began already in June. Actually, it could very well have triggered the mutiny of the Bijelo Polje garrison on 1 July.

The new wave of cleansing now touched not only the Bosniac elite, but the whole Bosniac population under HVO control. Men of fighting age (ages 15 to 65) were detained, non-combatants either detained or driven over to the ABiH side. Geographically the scope of the campaign was also broadened. In the coming months the cleansing spread from the Mostar area to Čapljina, Stolac, the Dubrava Plateau, located between Mostar and Stolac, and to the areas to the west of Mostar, like Ljubuški and Tomislavgrad.

The HVO being in a difficult position, hostility towards international organizations was also rising. They were felt as being an obstacle to Croat plans to divide Bosnia and were hated for trying to help the “Muslim enemy”. This growing hostility together with the increasingly vicious fighting in Mostar finally forced also UNHCR to move its office to Međugorje, where the Spanish UNPROFOR and a number of other international NGOs had already put up their new bases.

With most aspects of the work of international organizations blocked, there was little for UNHCR to do, except to monitor the unfolding campaign of ethnic cleansing in western Herzegovina and to pass this information on their the Zagreb headquarters and to the media. In a few cases individual interventions were still possible – in one case, UNHCR smuggled out a Bosniac child from West Mostar – but, in general, direct interventions in the post-Bijelo Polje period were impossible.

Every day UNHCR officials were “patrolling” and, with the exception of Stolac in the far South-East of Herceg-Bosna, they regularly accessed all of HVO-held West Herzegovina. They witnessed how Herceg-Bosna hard-liners took over more moderate communities, such as in Ljubuški or Tomislavgrad and forced them to implement the policy of ethnic cleansing and were also following events in hard-line

areas such as Čapljina. Additionally to the active monitoring of the area people also approached UNHCR informing the UN officials about new or ongoing human rights abuses or atrocities.

This way, the plans of the Croatian leadership to create an ethnically homogenous Croat region did not go unnoticed and the active media policy of UNHCR made sure that media learnt all the new twists and developments of this policy. The reports the Mostar office was sending out to its headquarters in Zagreb about events in West Herzegovina, were the following day with the press. Similarly, these reports were also just pasted into the publicly circulated UNHCR weekly reports on the headquarters level. Visiting journalists were also freely provided with information, though usually in confidentiality to be cited as “UN official”.

While in the weeks following the fall of Bijelo Polje, Herceg-Bosna politicians became virtually inaccessible to international officials, international pressure was nevertheless mounting on Croatia and consequently on the Bosnia Croats to improve their human rights record. With all the ethnic cleansing clearly exposed in the international media, the Bosniac detainees increasingly became a liability to Herceg-Bosna and Croatia.

According to a recently published article of the Croatian weekly *Nacional* (Rogošić 30 August 2001) at this time Mate Granić, the Croatian Foreign Minister, feeling international pressure the most and from the onset an opponent of Tuđman’s divisionist Bosnia policy began pressuring the Herceg-Bosna leadership to disband the camps and to allow for humanitarian convoys to cross the confrontation lines (Granić, 30 August 2001). At a meeting with Mate Boban and the second most powerful man in Herceg-Bosna, Jadranko Prlić, the president and political leader of the HVO, Granić presented his position.

“While Boban was justifying the existence of the camps by saying that the Bosniac people were put up in the detention facilities to their own protection, Prlić understood that the existence of the camps could no longer be kept secret or defended. Prlić openly admitted the existence of the camps and,

aware of his role in their formation, as the first Herceg-Bosnian politician consented to Granić's demands" (Rogošić 30 August 2001:19⁴⁴).

The political leader of the HVO, Dr. Jadranko Prlić, a former university teacher at Mostar University, stood out of the average crowd of Herceg-Bosna politicians. By far more intelligent than the regular provincial communist party activist turned nationalist politician of the Herceg-Bosna structures, Prlić well understood the long-term implications of bad relationships with the international community. Whereas in meetings with international officials most Herceg-Bosna politicians were ranting and shouting racist and nationalist slogans,⁴⁵ Prlić was friendly, even charming, pragmatic and seemingly easy to deal with. While definitely no nationalist fanatic, he nevertheless was on the forefront of implementing Tuđman's policy of division and ethnic cleansing.

Thus, around the beginning of July, Jadranko Prlić suddenly appeared in UNHCR's office presenting the organization with a strange offer. A UNHCR official recounted the meeting in an interview:

"Prlić saw us as a good interlocutor. He proposed UNHCR should erect a transit centre for Bosniacs around Ljubuški. 'We have a big problem,' Prlić said. He was speaking about some 10,000 detainees. 'We have no food for them. You feed them and facilitate their move out of the country.' It was clearly a plan made by the Republic of Croatia. Isumi was very informal. She led the negotiations very well. With Prlić she was clearly dealing with decision-maker. UNHCR said no. Prlić came two or three times more to try to sell the proposal, but the UNHCR position remained 'no' (personal interview 14 August 2000).

The reason for UNHCR's refusal to participate in the transit centre scheme was the already mentioned dilemma (see p. issue of principle 150) of not becoming an instrument of ethnic cleansing. Additionally, within UNHCR the detention issue was still seen very much as an ICRC responsibility. It must be mentioned that the UNHCR policy decision was not taken at the Mostar level, but far higher at the organization's headquarters in Zagreb and Geneva.

⁴⁴ My translation.

⁴⁵ A prominent Herceg-Bosna politician, Pero Marković, in 1993 the mayor of Čapljina, told a UNHCR officer that "Muslims were racially inferior and ought to be sterilized" (personal interview, 7 August 2001).

“UNHCR was of course willing to assist in any voluntary movement. The UNHCR position was for the prisoners to be released and given an option as to where they wanted to do: to return to their homes, to go to ABiH held areas or to leave the country. At that time it was also increasingly difficult for Bosniacs to get a transit visa for Croatia. That’s why Prlić proposed the transit center to be in in Herceg-Bosna. In addition, finding resettlement possibilities for more than 10,000 men would have been nearly impossible” (personal interview, 14 August 2000).

The Herceg-Bosna Croats, however, kept up the pressure. A few days later, presumably on 13 July,

“they [HVO] loaded up all Muslims in a certain area [probably Stolac] and brought them to UNHCR. UNHCR said ‘no!’ So they just dumped them at the front lines and chased them over to ABiH held area near to Jablanica” (ibid.).

UNHCR’s tough position proved to be correct as, just a little after Prlić’s first visit, on 24 July 1993, Prlić announced that all detention camps were to be closed and that convoys to Central Bosnia would be allowed to pass (Rathfelder 27 July 1993). And indeed, one day previously to the announcement 300 detainees from the Rodoč camp had been released to a transit camp in Croatia. The detainees who were interviewed by journalists reported about executions and forced labour on the frontlines – digging trenches and building HVO defences – a practice clearly in breach Geneva Conventions.

The release of prisoners by the HVO was an obvious sign of the increasing nervousness among the Bosnian Croat leadership. On the other hand, the permission to let relief convoys to Central Bosnia, though not to East Mostar, pass, was less of a publicity stunt, but more part of a deal with the Bosniac side since the Central Bosnian Croat enclaves were in an increasingly desperate state. Such deals usually consisted of a sharing of the aid between the warring sides.

At this time, i.e. around the middle of July 1993, an important change in the leadership of UNHCR took place. Nakomitsu left and in the person of Jerry Hulme the UNHCR office in Mostar received a new permanent head. Hulme, a former high-ranking British military officer, was a remarkable character. He was excellent with the press and his political connections from the time of his military carrier offered him

additional weight in achieving UNHCR protection aims. In his work he quickly recognized the paramount importance of Mostar in the scheme of the Croat-Bosniac conflict and made the town his absolute priority - unfortunately somewhat to the detriment of the Hercegovinian surroundings of the town.

In spite of the release of prisoners expulsions and ethnic cleansing were still picking up pace in the HVO-controlled Western Herzegovina. UNHCR and UNPROFOR sources were speaking of 10,000 to 15,000 Bosniac detainees in July and some 22,000 in August.

By the middle of August a number of factors came together exerting increasing pressure on the Herceg-Bosnian leadership. With the continuing intervention of Croatia in the Bosnian war and the atrocities committed there by the HVO, international annoyance with the country was growing. With international pressure on the rise, also domestic opposition was growing. A full-page advertisement of Croatian opposition parties summarizes the situation as follows:

“There have been serious errors in our policy toward Bosnia and Herzegovina, and those, coupled with the lack of full democracy within Croatia, have cut foreign aid to Croatia, isolated it from European and international institutions, frozen foreign loans that had been announced and cooled relations with proven friends of Croatia. They have even brought the threat of sanctions” (quoted in: Kinzer, 4 August 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

As a side note it is worth mentioning that it was on 10 August 1993 that a march of some 500 international peace activists reached Mostar. The march was originally meant to reach Sarajevo, but did not get further than Međugorje, nevertheless attracting additional attention to the plight of Mostar.

International pressure was also increasing. Around the beginning of August a new fluke of assertiveness on the international scene included the threat of NATO airstrikes against Serb positions around Sarajevo. It was only a question of time before these threats would also be addressed to the HVO. The talk about establishing an international war crimes tribunal also added pressure on individual decision-makers. The issue of detention camps increasingly became a hot potato,

the responsibility for which Herceg-Bosna politicians were trying to delegate to subordinates. Around the end of August 1993 Jadranko Prlić ordered the immediate transfer of responsibility for the camps to the Ministry of Defense of Herceg-Bosna. Similarly, the Mayor of Čapljina, Pero Marković, tasked his deputy, Krunoslav Kordić, to deal with the camps situated within his municipality.

With international and consequently domestic pressure mounting on Herceg-Bosnian Croats, after 5 or 6 weeks of stalemate, movement came into the deadlocked efforts of international organizations to achieve their humanitarian objectives.

The first breakthrough concerned access to besieged East Mostar. Additionally to the pressures exerted on the macropolitical level, three local level developments were also important in this regard. Plans were being made to include Mostar in the list of towns receiving US airdrops of food. Initially, on a New York and Geneva level, the UN was said to block the inclusion of Mostar, prompting allegations of blackmailing the Bosnian government into accepting the then negotiated Owen-Stoltenberg peace plan. Whatever the truth behind these allegations, the UN finally consented and the first airdrops of food were released over Mostar on the night 25 August. By way of airdrops the blockade of East Mostar by the HVO was rendered partially senseless.

In a similar vein, Jerry Hulme, the new head of UNHCR in Mostar, was threatening to access AbiH-held East Mostar from the eastern, Serb-held side. Allegedly the Serbs had already signalled agreement to Hulme. Once again, the threat must have signalled to the HVO that they were not in a position to deny relief to the East. A continuing blockade would just have further damaged their anyhow bad international reputation.

A last factor contributing to allowing humanitarian access to East Mostar was the pressure of families of fallen HVO soldiers, who were pushing for an exchange of bodies. The exchange of bodies was, however, connected to the access to East Mostar by relief convoys.

Thus, on 21 August 2001, a first UNHCR convoy led by Hulme and carrying some token amount of medicine, entered the besieged half of the city. The convoy was escorted by Spanish UNPROFOR troops and also Cedric Thornberry, the Deputy Chief of the UN Mission to Former Yugoslavia, joined the mission. The access was preconditioned on an equal delivery to both sides of the divided town. Still for a day the convoy was held up by the HVO until on 23 it was allowed to enter.

Upon his return Thornberry decribed his mission as “a symbolic success”, and added that much more aid would be sent within the next 24 hours. The reports of the convoy participants about the critical situation on the eastern side of Mostar added further pressure on the HVO. Aid workers thus characterized the situation as “much worse than Sarajevo” (Moore 20 August 1993, <http://www.naukanet.org/friends/news/omri/1993/08/930820.html>).⁴⁶ After this first visit, Hulme and the UNHCR corrected the population estimate of East Mostar from some 35,000 to 55,000 adding that the population was on the verge of starvation. In hindsight both statements appear somewhat exaggerated but they were useful in attracting greater attention to the plight of Mostar. A UPI report of the time summarized the situation as follows:

“Some 55,000 residents, predominantly Muslim Slavs are besieged by Croatian militia in the town of Mostar. They may face death by starvation unless they promptly receive humanitarian aid, U.N. officials said Sunday. This number includes some 35,000 refugees. They received almost no aid for more than three months because of the blockade by the Croatian militia, said Shannon Boyd of the U.N. High Commission for Refugees. [The medical situation was also grave with some] ’50 to 60 people [...] lying in a makeshift hospital in the basement of a Mostar office building [without] anaesthetics, very little antibiotics and [...] in very desperate need of medical equipment” (UPI, 23 August 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

From now on every concession the Croat side was forced to make to the demands of international humanitarian organizations actually just unveiled the full extent of atrocities committed, inducing further international pressure.

⁴⁶ In fact this comment must have been made after the first visit to the west side of Mostar, when UNHCR representatives met with HVO members to negotiate access to the East. The following day, 21 August 1993, the UN convoy finally did enter the eastern sector of Mostar.

Further bending to international pressure, on 23 August the HVO released 450 prisoners from the Dretelj and Gabela prison camps. The men, the old and unhealthiest cases, were according to one report, forced to undress and were chased over the frontlines close to Jablanica. UNHCR and international media, including CNN were present, documented clear signs of mistreatment of the men and their shocking state of malnutrition.

Regarding a second, in principle already negotiated access to East Mostar by a relief convoy, the Mostar HVO leadership was still unwilling to let the convoy pass.

“I do not see why we should let the U.N. feed our enemies. It would be a foolish thing to do, unprecedented in the history of warfare,” were the words of an HVO commander, whose name was not revealed” (UPI, 25 August 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

What was already foreseeable days previously, finally happened:

[On 23 August 1993] “U.S. officials announced that NATO's threat to stage airstrikes against nationalist Serbs blocking relief efforts in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina also applies to Croat militiamen besieging the city of Mostar. State Department spokesman Michael McCurry, now indicated that threat does apply to Bosnian nationalist Croats, too. ‘No question that the (NATO) document itself and the debate about the document centered more on Serb activity, but it certainly does reference directly other parties,’ he said. ‘I’m certain that the Croats are well aware.’ McCurry also said that proposal to impose U.N. sanctions against the Croatia was now ‘under active consideration’ (UPI 24 August 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

President Clinton has dispatched his special envoy to the peace talks in Geneva, Charles Redman, and U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina Vic Jackovitch to NATO headquarters in Brussels to discuss those matters with alliance officials.

In addition, the idea of declaring Mostar a UN safe area was also floated. It is thus not surprising that on 24 August 1993 the

“19-truck United Nations convoy carrying some 200 metric tons of food, (a one-week emergency supply of food) to starving 55,000 Bosnians was enroute Tuesday to Mostar. The nationalist Bosnian Croats suddenly lifted their blockade of the city. Asked why Bosnian Croat forces had suddenly reversed

themselves and allowed the convoy to proceed, UNHCR spokesperson Redmond said, 'I think there has been a great deal of international pressure exerted on them to do so'" (UPI, 24 August 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

As an additional incentive for the HVO to the body exchange, after delivering relief to East Mostar, the convoy was supposed to move on to assist in an evacuation of wounded Croats from Nova Bila, located in the besieged Central Bosnian Croat enclave around Travnik. Being of critical importance to the further fate of international operations in Mostar and in itself a dramatic event, based on an eyewitness account, I will recount the movement of the convoy in detail.

The convoy was initially prevented from proceeding to Mostar by a blockade of Croat women, "women in black", in the town of Međugorje and later in Čitluk (also lying on the way to Mostar). The HVO, however, broke up the demonstration and around 7pm the convoy finally reached Mostar airport close to the HVO-ABiH front line. Here the convoy paused for several hours until the body exchange was concluded. The same night the UN aid convoy was to enter East Mostar also the first air relief was dropped over the besieged enclave.

Finally, in the early morning hours of 25 August, the UN convoy received permission to proceed. It was escorted by Spanish and Belgian UNPROFOR, followed by trucks carrying relief items, armoured personnel carriers with UN staff from UNHCR, UNCA with Thornberry, WHO, UNICEF and the NGO IRC. Contrary to the first mission two days previously, the convoy was brimming with journalists – including a CNN team - drawn to Mostar by the statements of Hulme and Thornberry mentioning that 55,000 people were on the verge of starvation in East Mostar.

The situation was tense and crossing a mined frontline was by no means an easy task. E.g. just as the convoy was about to cross the lines, a lorry slipped off the road blocking the way. Hulme was furious and shouted at the Belgian UNPROFOR to pull out the van. Finally, around 4am the convoy reached Mostar. For the time of the entry a ceasefire has been agreed between the two sides. As soon the convoy came close to the center of ABiH held East Mostar, civilians, mostly women and children, led by a doctor, poured out from their shelters and blocked the front and the back of

the convoy. The demonstrators stated that they wanted to draw attention to their situation and that they were afraid that once the convoy moved on, HVO shelling and the blockade would continue.

The position of the convoy was precarious, fully exposed to snipers and the artillery of the HVO. Some in the UN team were desperate and quarrelling, while Jerry Hulme was walking around, happy.

Clearly the blockade was orchestrated by the political leadership of Mostar and was an extremely clever publicity move, generating huge international media attention that probably changed the course of the war in Southern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Through radio communication with its base in Međugorje UNHCR immediately alerted the UN and the issue was soon with the Secretary General – as with basically all hostage situations involving UN staff. From now on negotiations for the lifting of the blockade were proceeding on two levels – on the local level, led by Thornberry and on the international level between Boutros Gali and Izetbegović.

After some three-four days a political agreement was reached conceding that an UNPROFOR presence would be maintained in East Mostar. However, in spite of the political agreement, people on the streets refused to move so the convoy started to negotiate directly with the people.⁴⁷ All through this blockade people were very friendly to the members of the convoy offering them places to sleep, cigarettes and food as UN staff and UNPROFOR soldiers ran out of supplies.

Finally on 30 August 1993, seven days after entering East Mostar, while the blockade was still lasting, fighting between the HVO and ABiH once again flared up. As a bullet killed one of the demonstrating civilians everyone ran for cover offering the convoy an opportunity to leave. There was still a last dramatic moment when, under fire from the Croat side, the convoy briefly lost its way and had to take a guess between two

⁴⁷ In a somewhat incomprehensible move, Thornberry negotiated a separate free passage for himself, leaving the rest of the convoy behind.

roads leading towards the frontlines. It was a lucky guess and after crossing the lines the convoy went on to Međugorje and from the UN bases on the Dalmatian coast.

“It was a strange feeling as next day, relaxing in a hotel in Dubrovnik, we saw ourselves again and again on CNN, CBS and other international TV channels’ commented a UN staff member of the convoy on the finale of the mission” (personal interview, 17 May 2001).

Following the media event of the one-week hostage drama in Mostar things were speeding up on the humanitarian front.

“On 31 August 1993, Mate Granić, representing Croatia on another session of the Owen-Stoltenberg peace conference in Geneva pledged to open up all Herceg-Bosnian detention camps to inspection by the ICRC. Croatia’s international position was now increasingly precarious. Even the strongly pro-Croatian German State Minister in the Foreign Office (Staatsminister im Auswärtigen Amt), Helmut Schäfer, had to admit that ‘unless Croatia could improve its international image’ and ensure that the human rights abuses committed by the Bosnian Croats would stop, ‘it would be very difficult to keep on with sanctions only imposed on Serbia’”⁴⁸ (Zumach, 31 August 1993:8).

And indeed, on 1 September 1993, ICRC gained access to camps and journalists were able to interview detainees released to AbiH-held territories. Maggie O’Kane (2 September 1993), a journalist on the *Guardian*, described the situation.

“The worst conditions are in a camp called Dretelj, a former army supply barracks, where the Croats are holding the prisoners in two caverns built to keep army fuel supplies. The Red Cross was expected to be allowed into Dretelj for the first time in six weeks yesterday.

The other detention camps are at the Heliodrome in Mostar, where the Red Cross say that over 2,000 men are being held, at an army barracks fuel supply depot at Gabela, and in army barracks at Grabovine, Ljubuški and Rodoč.

In interviews with more than 30 former detainees from Dretelj and Gabela, the men said that 10 days ago they were ordered out of the army hangars and mountain caverns and were hosed down in groups by Croat soldiers, then ordered to shave in preparation for the Red Cross visits. The men interviewed by the Guardian gave reports of being held in mountain caverns where some died from lack of oxygen; of starvation rations; and of beatings and torture.(<http://www.bosnet.org/>)”

⁴⁸ „Wenn ‚Kroatien sein weltweites Image nicht verbessern‘ könne und nicht dafür Sorge, daß von bosnischen Kroaten begangene Menschenrechtsverletzungen aufhören, werde es ‚sehr schwer sein, es lediglich bei Sanktionen gegen Serbien zu belassen“.

Under strong international pressure a shift in Croatian politics was becoming visible. The new approach might be characterized as improving the human rights record of the HVO, while further sticking to the divisionist plans of Tuđman. The Croatian and Herceg-Bosna leadership was now trying to get rid of the detainees and to dissolve camps. On 7 and 8 September foreign and Croatian journalists for the first time also gained access to some of the camps delivering further shocking images and stories about the detainees.

Certain personnel changes were also part of this effort to clear up the Croatian image, like the appointment of Slobodan Praljak, a professional soldier within the newly established HV (Croatian Army), as the new commander of the HVO or the appointment of a new director of the Dretelj prison camp. Improving a human rights image while sticking to a policy totally in contradiction with international legal norms can, of course, have only limited success. Accordingly, Praljak himself later became infamous by ordering the destruction of Mostar's famous Old Bridge (*Stari most*) and is currently also being mentioned as a suspect for The Hague War Crimes Tribunal for his role in the siege of Mostar and the ethnic cleansing of Bosniacs.

That there was no shift regarding the basic aims of Tuđman's Bosnia policy was clearly demonstrated on 28 August, i.e. while the UN convoy was still being held in East Mostar, when the Community of Herceg-Bosna transformed itself into a republic (the Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna – *Hrvatska republika Herceg-Bosne*, HR HB) and declared itself independent from Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴⁹

Being an integral part of Tuđman's nationalist ideology of national segregation, ethnic cleansing, too, was continuing, albeit less bloody than in the hot summer months. On 4 September, followed by UNHCR and international media 2,000 Bosniac civilians were reported marching from HVO-held Prozor and Western Herzegovina towards AbiH-held areas in Jablanica. Many of the civilians were men and released detainees and bore marks of mistreatment and torture (*taz*, 4 September 1993). By the 6

⁴⁹ While a direct connection to the ongoing peace negotiations is obvious, there might also be an aspect of concession or of commitment by Croatia towards Herceg-Bosna, at a time when unpopular concessions regarding Croatia's international image were demanded from them.

September 1993, UNHCR was already speaking of 10,000 Bosniacs, among them former detainees on the move – the HVO was trying to solve its detainee problem by clean sweeping its territory in a huge effort (*taz*, 6 September 1993). Once again, however, with utter disregard to humanitarian norms, but now all international media were still around Mostar, following the event and giving further bad publicity to Herceg-Bosna and Croatia such as the accusation of

“Roger Wilkinson, a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, [who] remarked that Muslim civilians released from Croat detention camps near Mostar 'looked like concentration camp victims from the Second World War'” (Andrejevich, 6 September 1993, <http://www.naukanet.org/friends/news/omri/1993/09/930906.html>).

International media pressure was such that on 7 September 1993, even Tuđman himself had to step in requesting in no uncertain terms that the Bosnian Croats ensure the humane treatment of the detainees. Finally on the following day, 8 September,

“nationalist Bosnian Croat leaders admitted [...] that living conditions in prison camps in which they are detaining thousands of Muslim men have been inhumane according to international law and that prisoners may have been physically abused. About 4,000 Muslim men are still being held in three detention camps within a few miles of [Međugorje], said Krešimir Zubak, vice president of the Croatian Defense Council, the main militia of Bosnia's Croatian nationalists. The camps also include a helicopter base outside of Mostar and former Yugoslav army installations at Dretelj and Gabela, Zubak said in a news conference (New York Times, 9 September 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

While concerning the detention camps was gradually relaxing, the HVO was still resisting pressures to allow for follow-up relief convoys to reach East Mostar. However, as on 10 September 1993 the American ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Victor Javkovich, visited Mostar he was once again able to cross over to the besieged Eastern side of Mostar and commented that 'situation in Mostar is worse than in Sarajevo'” (BH Press, 11 September 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

The humanitarian situation in and around Mostar now also became a topic of the ongoing Owen-Stoltenberg peace conference. Accordingly, on 14 September 1993 in Geneva, Presidents Tuđman and Izetbegović signed a “Joint Declaration” calling for a

“prompt cessation of hostilities [...] the bilateral and unconditional disbanding of all detainee camps and for the release of detainees in territories under the control of the Army of the Bosnia and Herzegovina and HVO [and to] create bilaterally the conditions for free and unhindered passage of all relief convoys and activities of humanitarian organizations” (Joint Declaration, 14 September 1993).

The deadlines for implementing the demands of the agreement were generally not met and especially the cessation of hostilities proved only a dead letter. However, the tendency was for the humanitarian aspects of the agreement to be gradually fulfilled. UNHCR and other agencies were now with increasing frequency accessing East Mostar and the detention were also disbanded and their inmates released, some to ABiH-held territory, others to third countries via some Croatian islands where they were fed and brought back to shape before exposing them to the eyes of the Western world.

Thus in the aftermath of the huge publicity Mostar received by the end of August, beginning of September, many of the local level, international humanitarian initiatives were slowly beginning to show positive results. With increased access to the ABiH held territories of Southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, a closer scrutiny could be paid by international organizations to the humanitarian situation on that side.

4.2.1.1 The Humanitarian Situation on the ABiH Side

The humanitarian situation in the ABiH held areas of Mostar and the Herzegovina was by no means good. Detentions and harassment of HVO military personnel and the Croat civilian population, killings and even massacres did take place also on ABiH-held territory. However, on a lower scale than exercised by Bosnian Serbs and Croats and not as a systematic policy of the Sarajevo leadership. As already discussed, such an evaluation is consistent with indictments and court decisions of the ICTY and with the impressions of international officials I have interviewed.

“The Muslims quickly learnt that it was better for them to cooperate with the international community. They were in a really desperate situation”, analysed a

UNHCR official the cooperation of his agency with the Bosniac side around Mostar. An example of the strong bargaining position of international organizations is reported by Hodžić (8 February 1999). Around the beginning of October 1993 soldiers of Zuka, a Jablanica-based warlord, stole a vehicle from a UNHCR convoy that had just reached Jablanica with aid for detainees released from HVO camps. The leaders of the convoy threatened to stop all aid unless the vehicle were returned. The vehicle was immediately handed back to the convoy. Such a quick retrieval of a stolen vehicle would have been impossible in HVO-held areas. Almost all international organizations active in those areas had lost vehicles.

Detention camps existed throughout the area in question. Initially, in 1992, Serbs, mostly civilians, were detained in the notorious Čelebići prison camp near Konjic. The camp was still run jointly by Bosniacs and Croats and was probably under the command responsibility of the Bosnian Army's 4th corps – the ABiH army unit that later defended Mostar against the HVO assault (Judgment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the case of Delalic et al. Case No.: IT-96-21). Later, in the beginning of 1993, the area of responsibility of the 4th corps was redefined and limited to Mostar and the Konjic/ Jablanica area came under the control of the newly founded ABiH 6th corps.

The geographical/ military separation, as well as that of the command lines, resulted in differences in discipline and approaches. Probably because of the grave situation in Mostar, the unification and disciplining of the various independent fighting units within the ABiH and the imposition of the government line was already early on relatively successful. In contrast, the situation to the north of the Mostar area, around Jablanica and Konjic, was quite bad. E.g. Jablanica was controlled by the militia leader Zulfikar Alispago called Zuka,

“an intelligent, but dangerous guy who after the clampdown on mafia style resistance fighters in Sarajevo, like Juka Prazina [October 1993], was himself fearing the RBiH government. There was also a heavy mujahedeen presence in Jablanica. The government did not fully call the shots there. The ABiH was also present. All very scary... Later the government asserted control over the area” (personal interview, 14 August 2000).

The Croat-Bosniac conflict first flared up in the area already in October 1992 as HVO units attacked the Bosniac population in the area. With Kupres in the hands of the VRS the road through Jablanica and Prozor was the only connection from Mostar Croat majority areas of Central Bosnia around the towns of Travnik and Vitez. A second phase of HVO takeover of the area took place on 17 April 1993, just one day after the HVO's Ahmići massacre that triggered the war in Central Bosnia, Tuta's troops cleansed the Bosniac population of two villages along the same Mostar-Jablanica-Konjic road, located just a few kilometres to the west of Jablanica: Doljani and Sovići (Le Tribunal Pénal International pour L'Ex-yougoslavie. Affaire No.: IT-98-34-PT, para 25). This could not be misunderstood: the aim of the attack was to secure and take over this strategic connection to Central Bosnia. In reaction, by the beginning of May 1993, probably still before the 9 May HVO attack on Mostar, the detention of Croats began in the Jablanica-Konjic area.

Following the outbreak of full-scale fighting in the Mostar area HVO POWs and civilians were detained on several locations in the area under discussion: in Konjic in the Musala camp, in Jablanica in the Muzej and in Mostar in the 4th Elementary School in Bijelo Polje, in Gnojnice (southern sector of ABiH held Mostar) and Mostar prison. In the darkest months of the Mostar fighting, when international organizations could not access the town, detained HVO soldiers and Croat civilians were beaten, tortured and some were even killed. In accordance with the Rome Agreement that allows persecuting certain war crimes domestically,⁵⁰ some of the crimes committed in this period in East Mostar are now being tried there in courts.

The situation in the detention camps in Jablanica and Konjic was somewhat different. Detainees there are said to have received food rations similar to those of ABiH soldiers and atrocities against them were relatively few, though I am aware of at least one report of a mock execution in Jablanica (Hodžić, 5 February 1999).

⁵⁰ Paragraph 5 in the Rome Agreement (18 February 1996) states:
"Persons, other than those already indicted by the International Tribunal, may be arrested and detained for serious violations of international humanitarian law only pursuant to a previously issued order, warrant, or indictment that has been reviewed and deemed consistent with international legal standards by the International Tribunal."

The difference between Mostar and the Jablanica/ Konjic area seems to have been the access of international organizations. UNHCR, UNPROFOR, ICRC and other international organizations had for almost three months no regular access to East Mostar, whereas, with the exception of some three weeks in July, they could access the northern ABiH held areas of the Herzegovina. On these occasions the situation in the detention camps were also regularly monitored.

Once regular access for international organizations to Mostar became possible access to the better run centres or camps became also possible. Some, however, were probably kept secret and were just quickly dissolved after the first visits of international organizations to East Mostar. The detained Croat civilians were subsequently released to the HVO side. In an interview with Croats from the village of Zakrižje, in Bijelo Polje, who were detained in the 4th elementary school, interviewees claimed never to have received a visit from either ICRC or a UN organization (personal interview, 27 July 1998). To my knowledge, UN organizations were also not aware of these detention centres.

Others centres, which were run more professionally, became accessible to ICRC, UN organizations and the media. Rathfelder reports of a visit in December 1993 of HVO POWs captured in July in Bijelo Polje:

“The door of the cell opens, and eight surprised figures rise from their beds around the warm fireplace. Until now it was only allowed to representatives of the ICRC and a team of the BBC, to enter the prison. Two women are also among the group. [...] ‘We were neither sexually harassed nor otherwise treated badly,’ explain the two women, as, upon our request, the guards retire. The food is the same, as also the Army receives. They are kept here together with the male captives in one room, because water was dripping through the ceiling of the old cell. Also in the room, in which the 62 other prisoners are kept, it is confirmed to us, that no incidents have taken place. The darkness in the cellar is, however, a problem, but at least they were deployed for some maintenance tasks outside. And indeed, the condition of the prisoners is not bad, incomparably better than of those of figures, who, looking like concentration camp inmates, were recently released from the Dretelj camp”⁵¹ (Rathfelder, 29 December 1993, p.11).

⁵¹ The text is my translation. The original reads as follows:

Die Tür zur Zelle öffnet sich, acht überraschte Gestalten erheben sich von ihren Bettgestellen rund um den warmen Ofen, denn bisher war es nur Vertretern des Roten Kreuzes und einem Team des britischen Fernsehens

The human rights record of the ABiH side in the Herzegovina region is further blemished by three massacres committed in the Konjic / Jablanica area between August and September 1993. These incidents were investigated by UNPROFOR and, by default, also by UNHCR. The first incident occurred on 28 July, in which some 22 people were killed.

“These killings reportedly occurred as people were fleeing from smaller villages around Doljani in order to escape the fighting between the Muslim and Croat forces, which had just recently reached the area. According to survivors, ‘Muslim forces’ from Jablanica opened fire on them in an ambush as they were trying to cross the woods surrounding Doljani. Several people were wounded and the Muslim soldiers then approached and ill-treated them. Those not wounded were detained but later managed to escape and reported this incident to local physicians and human rights workers in Međugorje, near Mostar. On 1 August a team of these physicians and survivors [and UNHCR] went to the site of the ambush and reportedly found the bodies of at least 22 people. At least five of those killed were civilians and one was a woman. Several of the bodies bore the signs of ill-treatment and mutilation” (Amnesty International, For External Distribution, 5 August 1993).

Access to the area was possible from the HVO side, as the Croat militia had retaken the ground after the killings. The second massacre took place in Grabovica, located between Jablanica and Mostar, though technically still belonging to Mostar municipality. On 8 and 9 September 1993 32 elderly and very young Croats were slaughtered in a vicious and quite incomprehensible attack.

The massacre took place in the wake of preparations for the “Neretva 93” operation aiming at breaking the siege of Mostar. In this period the Jablanica area was brimming with troops, many of them of criminal origin, such as the 9th motorised brigade of Ramiz Delalić, called Čelo, or of the 10th mountain brigade of Juka Prazina. Both militia leaders were fighters of the first hours, who organized the initial

BBC erlaubt, das Gefängnis zu betreten. Auch zwei Frauen sind darunter. [...] "Wir wurden weder sexuell belästigt noch schlecht behandelt", erklärt eine der beiden Frauen, als die Wachen sich auf Wunsch zurückgezogen haben. Das Essen sei das gleiche, das die Armee bekomme. Sie seien hier mit den männlichen Gefangenen in einem Raum gesperrt, weil das Wasser durch die Decke der alten Zelle tropfte. Auch in dem Raum, in dem die restlichen 62 Gefangenen festgehalten werden, wird bestätigt, dass es zu keinen Übergriffen gekommen sei. Die Dunkelheit im Keller jedoch sei ein Problem, immerhin würden sie oft zu Aufräumarbeiten draußen eingesetzt. In der Tat scheint der Zustand der Gefangenen nicht schlecht, unvergleichbar besser als jene Gestalten, die KZ-Häftlingen gleich, kürzlich aus dem Lager Dretelj entlassen wurden.

resistance in Sarajevo and were well-known figures of the pre-war underground of the city. Their troops, similarly, had a bad reputation concerning discipline, but were considered to be good fighters. Adding to this Zuka's troops, a provincial equivalent of Čelo's and Juka's units, the Jablanica area must have been quite an awful place to be in September 1993.

According to the investigations of The Hague, the massacre began upon the arrival of a group of soldiers of the 9th motorised brigade in Grabovica on the evening of 8 September. As they were seeking accommodation in the Croat houses, they encountered some disapproval and resistance. In order to depict the circumstances of an ABiH war crime and the relationship of the then leadership, I quote the ICTY indictment:

“On that day Vehbija Karić, and some other members of the Inspection Team [from Sarajevo] visited Grabovica to check on the troops. During that visit Sefer Halilović was present in the village when the troops complained to Vehbija Karić that many of the Bosnian Croat civilians would not let them into their houses. Mustafa Hota, a soldier from the 9th Motorised Brigade, was one of those who had complained to Vehbija Karić about the accommodation. Vehbija Karić then in word and gesture indicated that the troops should try those Bosnian Croat civilians summarily and throw them into the Neretva river if they did not co-operate. Sefer Halilović voiced his disapproval about the comment to Vehbija Karić but said nothing to prevent the soldiers from acting on it” (ICTY 10 September 2001, <http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/hal-ii010912e.htm>).

After the officers had left, some of the soldiers, among them the aforementioned Hota, went on a killing spree that lasted until the following morning. Probably in order not to endanger the offensive operations, which were to begin two days later, Halilović failed to act after having been notified of the ongoing massacre in the evening of 8 September. Survivors of the massacre, among others also two young boys, were accommodated by Halilović and Čelo in Jablanica and were later interviewed by UNHCR representatives, which, by the way, also shows the strong position of international organizations, since all the participants/ perpetrators were keenly aware of the magnitude of the incident. Upon orders of Čelo and with the help of Zuka's soldiers the corpses were disposed of.

“Following the incident in Grabovica the Commander of the Supreme Command Staff, Rasim Delić, sent an order, dated 12 September 1993, to Sefer Halilović requesting him to re-consider the scope of the “NERETVA-93” Operation, to isolate the perpetrators of the incident, to take active measures and to immediately report on the measures he had taken. He was also ordered to do everything to prevent such events in the future. Sefer Halilović failed to implement the order resulting in a failure to punish the perpetrators of the crime who were in the area until 19 September 1993” (ICTY, 10 September 2001, <http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/hal-ii010912e.htm>).

Under such permissive circumstances it is not really surprising that during offensive operations five days later towards Prozor, on 14 September 1993, a new massacre was committed by ABiH troops in the village of Uzdol. The massacre was committed by soldiers of the Prozor Independent Battalion, themselves expelled from Prozor, now under the control of the HVO. A proper investigation was, according to the indictment, once again not initiated. For these omissions Sefer Halilović now stands trial in The Hague. The indictment is based upon his command responsibility.

With the clamp down on criminal elements within the ABiH in October 1993 and the assertion of control over other independent units the human rights track record of the ABiH significantly improved. I am not aware of further gross violations of the Laws or Customs of War or of any other grave criminal acts in the Mostar area until the end of the war with the HVO in February/ March 1994.

4.2.2 Mostar Until the End of the War

Returning to the general developments in and around Mostar, in the autumn of 1993 the interaction of international organizations and the HVO/ HDZ reached a new status quo: under significant international pressure and strongly supported by moderate wings of the HDZ’s Croatian mother branch the HVO proceeded in gradually disbanding its detention camps. The dilemma faced by the HVO was where to release the prisoners. As also Prlić’s July visits to UNHCR indicated, the HVO would have preferred a release to third countries, thereby preventing a strengthening of the ABiH with additional (probably highly motivated) fighters. The position of the UN organizations and of ICRC, based on international law, was that a free choice

had to be offered to the detained: to return to their homes, seek refuge in a third country or relocate to an area within the country, i.e. in the case of Bosniac detainees to ABiH-held territory. In other words the movement had to be voluntary.

As already recounted, by September 1993, international pressure had reached such an intensity that the HVO had no choice but to release its prisoners and dismantle the camps. Since the immediate transfer of some 10,000 to 15.000 detainees to third countries was not feasible, prisoners were increasingly also released to the ABiH-held areas. The releases were partly unilateral, partly a regular exchange of prisoners or a reciprocal agreement of another form, like the 25 September exchange of 500 Bosniac detainees for the evacuation of 60 injured HVO fighters from a Central Bosnian enclave.

Jadranko Prlić, the wartime political leader of the HVO, claimed in an interview in March 1994 that some 3,600 prisoners were released in September and October 1993. The notorious prison camp at Dretelj was dismantled on 16 October, Gabela and others followed December 1993 and January 1994. Finally in the first week of December 1993,

“The Zagreb-backed Bosnian Croat militia [...] promised the gradual, unconditional release of 4,300 mostly Muslim detainees from 22 prison camps in Croat-controlled regions of western Bosnia. Tuesday’s release was seen as the result of successful pressure from Zagreb on Bosnian Croats to comply with international community demands. European leaders had voiced their concern last week with Croatia’s role in the Bosnian conflict, threatening the nation with cultural, diplomatic and economic embargos last week” (UPI, 14 December 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

By the time of the signing of the Washington Agreement in March 1994 there were only a few prisoners left in the Mostar Heliodrom detention camp. In addition to international pressure, which definitely had a strong impact on Zagreb, the military defeat of the HVO forced the Croat side to rethink its strategy. Lord Owen states for late 1993 that the Croats, “who were losing ground in the Muslim-Croat war, clearly had a strong interest in a breakthrough and a renewal in Muslim-Croat cooperation” (p.394).

Thus the release of detainees was supposed to improve the image of Croats and probably send positive signals to the Bosniac side, but the way it was conducted just provided more bad news on HVO atrocities.

“When international agencies obtained access to Bosnian Croat detention centres they found conditions of appalling brutality and degradation. According to U.N. human rights monitors, broken ribs, broken fingers, bruises and heart problems were common among detainees as a result of beatings they had received from guards” (UPI, 14 December 1993).

This inability, in spite of a rational understanding of the effects of a bad international image, to implement release in an acceptable way requires an explanation. Bosnian Croat and Serb and Bosniac war propaganda were, in most areas, fundamentally different. This is best brought to the point by the “Naibu Reis”⁵² of Sarajevo, Mustafa Ćerić, quoted in an article of Rathfelder:

“The other sides are fighting out of hatred, they want to destroy us and the Bosnian society. But we are fighting for our sheer survival, also for a positive goal, to save Bosnia” (Rathfelder, 15 November 1993).

While morale seems to have been extremely high among Bosnian Croats in the initial year of the war, when faced with the Serb aggression, several observers noted the low morale of the HVO during the Croat-Bosniac conflict. The conflict was, in spite of intensive propaganda efforts, not justified. It was only through a “hate” campaign that moral could be upheld. Under such circumstances implementing a policy of proper treatment of the “hated enemy” must fail.

With success on its side, both in terms of military victory in Central Bosnia and in terms of international public opinion, the Government side was occasionally being “difficult”. E.g. an exchange of prisoners in October 1993, 300 HVO soldiers for 700 inmates of the Gabela prison camp, was twice postponed, mainly due to objections raised by the Bosniac side.

⁵² Naibu Reis is a Muslim religious title.

This attitude paralleled the increased confidence of the Bosnian Government also on the level of international peace negotiations. Lord Owen evaluates this new strategic balance in late 1993 as follows:

“The Muslims, who were gaining, were unwilling to enter into definite commitments and sought always to keep their options open, including continuing fighting. Conversations in the margins confirmed that this was their intention. The Muslims were enjoying a renewed confidence in their fighting ability and seemed determined to concentrate attacks on the Croats leaving the Serbs until they had gained what they needed in central Bosnia” (Owen 1995:393-394).

In retaliation for the postponement of the prisoner exchange Croat women, mostly IDPs from Central Bosnia and most probably also politically orchestrated, blocked the evacuation by helicopter of injured Bosniacs from the east side of Mostar. This was possible because, due to the intense fighting no helicopter could land in East Mostar. The injured first had to be brought to the Spanish UNPROFOR base in Medjugore, an HVO-held area, from where they were to be flown out. These evacuations, apart from the now regular access of UN organizations to East Mostar, became, after the August blockade, a “normal” feature of life in Mostar.

Thus, in many respects, on a local level, UNHCR was quite successful in forcing concessions from the HVO: the detention camps were being disbanded and with the exception of the two-week long suspension of UN relief convoys, following the death on 26 October of a Danish truck driver of a UN convoy in cross-fire in Central Bosnia,⁵³ aid shipments were regularly entering the ABiH held east. Equally important, with the UN vehicles also Western journalists could frequently access the besieged eastern side. The supply of the eastern side of Mostar was additionally supported by airdrops from US plains. In order to improve target efficiency and probably also to drive home the message that the US opposed HVO aggression, on

⁵³ The perpetrators of the incident were never identified. It is suspected that the crime was committed by mujahedeen fighters active in Central Bosnia. Another rumour connects the murder with HVO fighters, probably foreign mercenaries. Upon the death of the driver, the 10th casualty of UNHCR’s mission to former Yugoslavia, Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, suspended the relief effort demanding guarantees for the safety of UN staff. Humanitarian convoys were resumed after two weeks of suspension on 11 November 1993.

27 November 1993, a US Air Force officer visited Mostar's government-held side to identify new drop zones for the airdrops.

International influence on the Bosniac side was significant, too. As already mentioned, in their desperate situation Bosniac politicians chose to cooperate with the IC and consequently to respect international regulations and expectations regarding the conduct of the war. A number of personnel changes in the ABiH in November 1993, among others Sefer Halilović, the officer in charge of the "Neretva 93" operations and Arif Pašalić, the commander of the Mostar 4th corps, were officially justified by atrocities committed by troops under the command of these officers. There were of course also important political reasons for the dismissal of the two men, both of whom had on occasion defied orders from Sarajevo.

However, what local-level international interventions could not achieve was to stop ethnic cleansing in HVO held Herzegovina. And this cleansing was exceedingly brutal.

"Every night, relief workers say, dozens more [expelled Bosniacs] are forced across the dangerous no man's land by HVO ethnic-cleansing teams. 'I had to crawl with my (15-year-old) son on my belly in the rain,' said Pasana Fejzić, 'and then the HVO started shooting at us, too.' When she got up to run, she says, she passed the scattered bodies of Muslims who hadn't made it. Now [on the east side of Mostar] she shares a single toilet with the other 30 residents, and 70 from the basement next door" (Nordland 29 November 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

Needless to say, reports such as the above caused further substantial damage to Croatia's international image. Two, in terms of media highly visible blunders of the HVO contributed additional devastating international public attention. On 9 November 1993 HVO artillery destroyed the 16th century "Old Bridge" of Mostar – one of the most famous tourist attractions of the country. The BiH government immediately capitalized on the event. A contemporary evaluation of the impact of the destruction of the bridge states:

"The Sarajevo authorities asked that Mostar be given special status and made a 'safe area.' They also wrote to UNESCO, which had listed the bridge as an

international cultural heritage monument, saying that its destruction should make the UN realize the difference between 'Croat aggression and Muslim defence of freedom.' The Croats claim the Muslims were using the structure for military purposes, but some observers are already saying that demolishing the world-famous bridge may well prove to be the most politically self-damaging act committed by the Croats in the course of the conflict. According to Vecernji list of 11 November, the Croats are not admitting responsibility for destroying the bridge but rather present it as a tragedy that somehow just happened." Moore 11 November 1993,, RFE/RL, Inc. <http://www.naukanet.org/friends/news/omri/1993/11/931111.html>

Another significant own goal occurred a few weeks later on 30 January 1994, when

"out of the 44 shells that struck the Muslim-controlled part of Mostar in the last 24 hours, six landed just a few meters away from a makeshift hospital, destroying an ambulance [...]. Three Italian TV journalists were killed in an artillery exchange on Friday in front of the Muslim-run Mostar hospital. Mostar is the scene of some of the fiercest fighting between Muslim-led Bosnian Government troops and their one-time Croat allies, who consider the Ottoman-era city the capital of their self-styled Croatian Republic in Bosnia" (UPI 31 January 1994, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

International reaction was swift. Just one day later, for the first time the UN officially accused Croatia of deploying its regular troops in Bosnia, a fact that Croatia was still categorically denying. Accordingly, also the protest letter of the Italian Foreign Minister Andreatta was sent to Zagreb. It must be mentioned that Lord David Owen, the Chief Negotiator of the EU, had already previously criticized Croatia of direct military involvement in the Bosnian war.

It is interesting that, judging at least from Lord Owen's memoirs, these incidents did not play a significant role in the evaluation of Croatia's conduct in state level peace negotiations. In fact, Owen does not even mention the destruction of the *Stari most* or the killing of the Italian journalists. Instead, he explicitly mentions and criticizes the involvement of regular Croatian troops in Bosnia and the existence of concentration camps in Herceg-Bosna. On the image side he lists two incidents, the HVO massacre of Bosniacs in the Central Bosnian village of Stupni Do and the massacre of separatist Serbs by HV troops in Medak, Croatia.

Does this mean that such spectacular events are, on the level of international politics, insignificant? I do not believe so. Instead I would assume a twofold mechanism: on the one hand such events contribute to changes in the domestic public opinion of the mediating/ intervening countries. Not surprisingly Western public opinion is a factor Owen repeatedly mentions as being important in political decision-making. Secondly, a steady flow of negative pictures of a warring party definitely contributes to its being associated with a rogue image. I assume this was effective both on the level of public opinion and within the subculture of international politics.

By late autumn and winter 1993 the image of Croatia as the aggressor and the perpetrator of gross human rights violations was firmly established. Owen's summary of his position about how to deal with the three parties to the conflict reflects this international irritation with the country.

"In the short term, it was right to push the parties to reach a settlement on Bosnia alone. We had to support the Muslim claim for extra territory and offer guarantees for a settlement. However, the Muslims had to understand that military options would now lead only to a dead end and would alienate the European Union. Pressure on the Serbs over territory had to be balanced by a commitment to progressive lifting of sanctions. Both carrots and sticks were needed with the Croats, including the threat of sanctions" (Owen 1995:246).

With Croatia in such a precarious position, a new "front" could be opened up by Mostar-based international organizations. On 23 November 1993

"U.N. officials warned [...] of an imminent humanitarian disaster in Mostar, where Bosnian Muslims have been under siege for five months by Bosnian Croats. 'The situation in Mostar is just the pits,' U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees spokesman Peter Kessler told United Press International. He said while some convoys were reaching the Muslims in the besieged eastern part of the city, 70 km (45 miles) southwest of Sarajevo, local authorities now say that residents are starving to death. 'The big problem people are facing is that they cannot get out of their shelters to the food that's being delivered or even to collective centres because of the constant shelling and sniping,' Kessler said" (UPI 27 November 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

In hindsight it seems that the threat of "starving to death" was somewhat exaggerated, since supplies were steadily coming in. The situation was nevertheless horrific, with the HVO relentlessly shelling civilian targets in East Mostar in what can

be considered to be a clear breach of the Geneva Conventions. On the other hand, Mostar had now been under siege for seven months and in spite of the international relief effort, supplies were almost completely depleted.

It seems that the aim of this line of attack was precisely that: to limit the shelling and reduce the intensity of the siege of Mostar. In an immediate sense this new international initiative was probably not too successful. It managed, however, once again to focus attention on Mostar, this way keeping up the pressure on the HVO.

The images the journalists attracted to Mostar by the news of people starving depicted were stark:

“At [East] Mostar Hospital, director Zlatko Skikić is bitter as he talks about the six malnutrition deaths they have recorded so far. ‘It’s sad when people come to donate blood and we have to reject them because their blood is in such bad condition (as a result of poor diet),’ says Dr. Skikić. ‘The most nourishing meal anyone ever gets in Mostar is a blood transfusion’ (Nordland, 29 November 1993, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

When, after the shelling of the Sarajevo market place on 6 February 1994, international attention completely shifted to Sarajevo and the threats of NATO air strikes against Serb positions, Jerry Hulme drew renewed attention at the plight of Mostar by stating in an interview that people were “living like rats” in the town (Ottaway, 21 February 1994). Once again Mostar was in the headlines.

The second initiative launched by UNHCR in late November and December 1993 was to set up a field hospital donated by South African Muslims to Mostar. The hospital had arrived in Ploče⁵⁴ already in September 1993, but did not receive permission from the HVO to proceed towards East Mostar, where it was planned to be set up. In the initial months of the fighting, when international organizations could not even enter the beleaguered part of town, negotiating access for the hospital was simply not a priority and not realistic. Later in the year, as international organizations

⁵⁴ The Croatian Ploče Harbour at the Adriatic Sea is a natural transport entrance and exit for Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy, its use was regulated between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia by a special bilateral agreement after the war. During the war it was one of the main harbours used for supporting the UN humanitarian mission.

had already achieved regular access to East Mostar, the setting up of the hospital became more realistic and was picked up by UNHCR in November 1993. What made the issue particularly contentious was the fact that after a 26 October territorial gain by the HVO, basically the only sustained Croat military achievement after the 9 May outbreak of fighting in Mostar, the originally planned site of the hospital in the South of the ABiH held part of Mostar attained a strategic significance potentially shielding ABiH positions. Due to the extreme narrowness of the AbiH-held Mostar pocket, the built-up riverbank is flanked by steep hills on the east at the top of which were the VRS positions, sufficient space to set up the relatively sizeable (38 containers of material) structure would have been very difficult to find.

By the end of December 1993, the issue was already on state level and on 30 December it was Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granić, who gave a red light for the passage of the hospital. In response on 4 January 1994 President Izetbegović wrote a letter to President Tuđman and the issue was also negotiated between the Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdžić and the Croat Foreign Minister Mate Granić. This time an agreement was achieved. The hospital was supposed to be brought in to East Mostar in the next few days. The permission was, however, revoked by Ante Roso, the then Commander of the Bosnian Croat forces, demanding that the hospital should be set up in “no-man’s land” on the front line between the two forces. This not being a feasible proposition, it was rejected and the quarrel dragged on.

At this moment a lucky coincidence offered itself for Mostar’s UNHCR team to further its aims. In the beginning of January 1994 US Representative Frank Wolf from Virginia was visiting Bosnia. Heavy fighting prevented him from reaching Sarajevo and forced him to remain in the Mostar area. Wolf was the Co-Chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus and was also among the first to visit and draw attention to Serb concentration camps in 1992.

UNHCR assisted the congressman and briefed him on the details of the Croat-Bosniac fighting. Wolf was shocked by what he saw and was outspoken about it. Upon his return to the US he told journalists that conditions in Mostar were “perhaps worse than in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo” and described “surgeries performed by

doctors operating without the aid of heat, electricity, anaesthesia or oxygen” (UPI, 13 January 1994). On a meeting with the Herceg-Bosna leadership the religious Wolf confronted Mate Boban telling him he would “burn in hell” for all the evil he had done. Probably not too surprisingly, soon after Wolf’s visit UNHCR received permission to bring in and set up the field hospital at its planned location. The Bosnian Croat army (HVO) chief commander, General Ante Roso personally guaranteed the safety of the operation. Finally, on 1 February 1994 UNPROFOR crossed the frontlines and transported the hospital, disassembled to 38 containers, to the eastern bank of the Neretva. That such a huge installation could be carried out right behind the frontlines of a high intensity battle clearly illustrates the negotiating clout of UNHCR in Mostar. It shows that, even on a local level, with commitment and a tough approach officials of international organizations can today force warring parties to concessions that go against their real military and territorial interests.

The impact of Wolf’s visit to Mostar was possibly much more far-reaching. Some UN officials credit him with setting the US in motion to stop Croat Bosniac fighting. Namely, the representative was also outspoken towards the US administration, which, in the aftermath of the withdrawal from Somalia in November 1993 reverted back to its cautious, non-interventionist attitude. Additionally, the US embassy in Zagreb, considering Croatia a “friend”, was reluctant to acknowledge the full scope of Croat aggression in Bosnia. Mostar-based UNHCR officials recounted to me telephone conversations, which Wolf was said to have led in sharp tone and in which he forced the Zagreb US embassy to wake up from its denial. Back in the US he lobbied further.

“Detailing the horrors he witnessed during his recent trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rep. Frank Wolf [...] urged President Clinton to appoint a full-time representative to the former Yugoslav republic to mediate peace talks among the warring factions. Wolf, criticizing the administration’s policy of distancing itself from the ongoing U.N.-mediated peace talks, said the president’s ‘first order of business’ should be to help resolve the Bosnian conflict. The United States, not wanting to be a party to a potentially unfair solution, has been represented in the peace process by a special observer who does not actually participate in the negotiations. ‘I hope our government will now make this a top priority matter and appoint a special representative...whose job will be literally to aggressively and solely pursue this issue, criss-crossing the country, meeting with all the leaders, bringing

them to the table to hammer out solutions,' Wolf said" (UPI, 13 January 1994, <http://www.bosnet.org/>).

Just a few days later, on the 18-19 January 1994 meeting of EU Action Plan in Geneva, the then latest peace initiative, Lord Owen already observed a change.

"The one important new feature was that the US were now ready to engage themselves in the negotiating process and Ambassador Redman [the US Special Envoy] told me that he had instructions to explore how Croat-Muslim relations might be improved, as – quite rightly – Washington was becoming ever more horrified at how this internecine struggle was helping the Serbs to consolidate their position" (Owen 1995:404).

With this strategic shift the "war in the war", the fighting between Croats and Bosniacs was almost over. The 6 February 1994 shelling of the Sarajevo market place at which more than 70 people were killed triggered the threat of NATO air strikes against Serb positions. Immediately the threat was understood to be expandable to the HVO positions around Mostar. On 8 February 1994 Mate Boban resigned and the following day, on 9 February 1994, the day also the NATO threat was spelled out, Croat commanders drastically reduced the shelling of the divided town. On 17 February 1994 HVO offered a unilateral ceasefire and another two weeks later representatives of the Croat and Bosniac sides signed the Washington peace agreement. Here ends the description of the wartime engagement of international organizations.

4.2.3 Analysis – International Negotiations on the Field Level

An evaluation of international negotiating success on the field level of Mostar is difficult - probably even more difficult than assessing the success of international intervention on the state level. A fundamental difference between state level and field level interventions is that in the case of the former direct sanctioning tools are available while in the case of the latter such tools are not available. This has two basic implications for field level international interventions.

(1) The capacity of field level success is a function of state level interventions. I.e. if on the state level there is no willingness to impose serious sanctions, the degree of field level success will also be limited. In this sense the competence of field level actors is revealed by how far they are able to capitalize on the existing intensity of sanctions or pressure to achieve field level success.

(2) Field level officials also have the possibility of convincing, or even “manipulating” higher levels of decision-making into exerting increased pressure (by threatening or imposing sanctions) to attain field level goals.

A prerequisite for success on both levels are negotiating skills. More specifically, the keen understanding of one’s own negotiating clout vis-à-vis the counterpart. Before treating negotiating skills as such, a look at the Mostar level interventions of international organizations, mostly UNHCR will follow.

Similarly to the state level international interventions in the previous chapter a differentiation of minor and major concessions as judged by the perceived national interest of the warring parties is necessary. The perceived national interests of Herceg-Bosna in the Mostar area were to (a) establish an “ethnically clean” territory in Western Herzegovina and (b) to make Mostar the capital of this new structure.

The Bosniac side’s main interest was simple: to hold on to its territory, i.e. to survive, and to extend it. While there were certain extremist forces within the Sarajevo government that did embrace a similar fascist aim of an ethnically pure state, there were also strong forces that firmly believed in and fought for the maintenance of a multi-ethnic state. In the end, the strong reliance on the IC’s support enabled the multi-ethnic option to prevail.

In this sense only demands no.6 and no.7, the stopping of ethnic cleansing and of the targeting of civilian targets, reached the level of a major concession, i.e. directly and gravely interfering with perceived Herceg-Bosna national interests. Clearly, stopping of ethnic cleansing interferes with the establishment of ethnically pure territories. The relation between the massive targeting of civilian targets and

capturing Mostar is, however, less clear. It seems evident that both Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats were followers of a “vulgar” artillery version of the 1930s Italian fascist, Giulio Douhet’s, theory of terror bombing.

TABLE 4 UNHCR-Local negotiation interactions on the level of Mostar

No	IO Action	Achievement Strategy	Date	Result	Evaluation
1	Intervention demanding the release detained Serbs	Persuasive Negotiation	winter 1992 - spring 1993	release of detainees	Limited success
2	Demand to access HVO prison camps of Bosniacs	negotiations with implied PR sanction, side benefits	summer/ autumn 1993	access granted	success
3	Demanding access to East Mostar	Negotiations with strong PR sanctions, “denial” threat, side benefits	summer/ autumn 1993	access granted	success
4	Intervention to release Bosniac prisoners	negotiation with strong PR sanction	summer/ autumn 1993	release of prisoners	Limited success
5	Demand to access to ABiH detention camps	Negotiations without sanctions	autumn 1993	access granted	success
6	Demanding the stopping of ethnic cleansing	Strong PR sanction	summer 1993 – February 1994	no change	failure
7	Demanding the stopping the shelling of civilian targets	Strong PR sanction	summer 1993 – February 1994	no change	failure
8	Setting up of field hospital	negotiations with strong PR sanctions	October 1993 – January 1994	transfer of hospital granted	success

Douhet believed that excessive bombing of cities would break civilian moral, lead to internal unrest and would subsequently cause governments to collapse or to surrender. Douhet writes:

“Imagine the centre of a large city and what would happen among the civilian population during a single attack by a single bombing unit. I have no doubt that its impact on the people would be terrible. [...] What civil or military authority could keep order, public services functioning, and production going under such a threat? [...] A complete breakdown of the social structure cannot but take place in a country subjected to this kind of merciless pounding from the air” (quoted in: Pape 1996:60).

The World War II bombing campaigns, by the way also of the allies, were partly based on this theory. Time and time again it has proven unsuccessful, which does not prevent warring parties to take recourse to this strategy. There is no direct evidence that VRS and HVO were followers of Douhet’s theory, but the attitudes of both armies during the Bosnian war point to similar beliefs. Also comments such as the already quoted statement of an HVO commander in the eve of the first UN relief convoy to enter the besieged part of town (see p.185),

“I do not see why we should let the U.N. to feed our enemies. It would be a foolish thing to do, unprecedented in the history of warfare,”

point at a belief that through civilian suffering morale could be broken and victory obtained. In this sense, stopping the shelling of Mostar would have contradicted Herceg-Bosna’s perceived national interest.

Naturally, the categories “minor” and “major concessions” is actually a continuum, with IO demands no.3 (letting relief convoys pass to East Mostar), no.4 (release of male prisoners) and no.8 (the field hospital in a strategic location) approaching the definition of a major concession.

The evaluation of field level international intervention in Mostar is thus extremely positive. All the demands for minor (to more significant) concessions from the warring were successful. Only the demand for the release of detainees is evaluated as a “partial success”, since the demanded choice for the released prisoners to return to

their homes was not offered. This, however, would have interfered with the Herceg-Bosna interest of a pure ethnic territory, i.e. with a perceived national interest.

Success in demanding major concessions on the field level is virtually unobtainable, because, as stated above, field level success is a function of state level sanctions and pressure. It is simply far beyond the possibilities of field level actors to fundamentally alter the national interests of a warring party.

To a large extent the success of international operations in Mostar can be attributed to the efforts and commitment of the UNHCR leadership in the town, to Isumi Nakomitsu and even more so to Jerry Hulme.

What made their interventions successful? Three factors made this field level intervention successful:

- Formulating and representing demands in an aggressive and committed way
- Engaging higher levels of decision-making
- Using the media

4.2.3.1 Formulating and Representing Demands in an Aggressive and Committed Way

While formulating and representing demands in an aggressive and committed way might seem self-evident, it is not. For a successful intervention a keen understanding of one's own negotiating clout and of the weaknesses and strengths of the opponent are essential. Otherwise maximising the negotiation results within the framework of the existing level of international pressure is not achieved and results of field level international intervention remain sub-optimal. This is of course true of any negotiating situation.

It is always difficult to argue in a hypothetical sense, but it is most probable that without a similarly committed engagement of international officials the success of all the successful intervention could have been delayed by several weeks or months, or

they might never have been fully achieved. Other surrounded towns of Bosnia, like Maglaj or Goražde, remained without relief convoys reaching for several months at a time. In Mostar, thanks to the efforts of Hulme this time has been reduced to a mere 7 weeks.

The issue of prisoner release is analogous. With most Western governments reluctant to acknowledge fully the extent of ethnic cleansing and detention campaign conducted by their Croat "friends", the release of prisoners could have dragged on indefinitely. Still in August 1993, just before Granić promised to dissolve the camps, certain German officials were still supporting Croatia's propaganda version of Croat-Bosniac fighting.

"When asked about his assessment of the situation in Mostar [...], Schäfer answered on the press conference by presenting the Croatian position. According to this the Croats are in a defensive struggle against Muslim troops, the goal of which is to seize the "whole of Mostar" and to annex it to the future Bosnian-Muslim republic. And thus the [German] federal government also assumes that Mostar, after a provisional administration by the EC, would become a part of the Croat state and would be its capital"⁵⁵ (Zumach, 31 August 1993:8).

Under such circumstances the existence of detention centres could have been ignored much longer. As a comparison, the existence of Serb detention centres was first noted in the beginning of August 1992, some six months after their establishment and the first inmates were released only by the end of September 1992, i.e. some 7 months after they were founded.

In contrast HVO detention camps were immediately publicized and the first groups of prisoners were released already in August 1993, only some 2-3 months after their detainment. For some this might seem a relatively minor difference. For the prisoners this was surely significant.

⁵⁵ The original is as follows:

Auf die Frage nach seiner Beurteilung der Lage in Mostar, wo nach Informationen der UNPROFOR und des UNO- Flüchtlingshochkommissariats (UNHCR) 55.000 muslimische Zivilisten von kroatischen Milizen eingeschlossen sind, antwortete Schäfer bei der Pressekonferenz mit der Darstellung der kroatischen Einschätzung. Danach befinden sich die Kroaten in einem Abwehrkampf gegen muslimische Truppen, die das Ziel hätten, "ganz Mostar" einzunehmen und zum Bestandteil der künftigen bosnisch-muslimischen Republik zu machen. Und so geht auch die Bundesregierung davon aus, daß Mostar nach einer Übergangsverwaltung durch die EG voll und ganz zur kroatischen Teilrepublik gehören und deren Hauptstadt sein werde.

Regarding the field hospital it is doubtful whether a less committed UN team would have ever managed to pressure the HVO to let the hospital pass.

4.2.3.2 Engaging Higher Levels of Decision Making

Since direct sanctions in situations of international missions lie with higher levels of IC decision-making, in order to increase pressure on the field level of international humanitarian intervention the involvement of such higher levels is essential in achieving goals. Increasing state level pressure widens the scope of local level negotiating clout, i.e. it opens up space for field level negotiations. This is exactly what was discussed in the previous section “formulating and representing demands in an aggressive and committed way”.

In many respects the Mostar UNHCR was quite successful in this regard, too. Nakomitsu’s connections to the UNHCR Special Envoy Mendiluce’s office were important. However, under Mendiluce and Sadako Ogata, the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR was anyhow committed and thus responsive to field level issues. Probably even more important were later Hulme’s connections to the British political circles – a result of his long career in the British army. When the first UNHCR convoy was to enter East Mostar, Spanish UNPROFOR initially refused to escort the convoy judging the mission to be too risky. It seems that it was only high level, behind the scenes political pressure, possible through Hulme’s connections that in the end forced the Spanish to reconsider their previous stance and escort the convoy.

Similarly, several Mostar field level issues were also elevated to and discussed on state level meetings. While this is not just the result of the pressure of Mostar level international officials – high level negotiators of the Peace Conference had also a humanitarian mandate and mission – field level initiative and representation of issues was nonetheless important in achieving this success.

On occasion committed field level officials might even have to “manipulate” higher levels into accepting certain responsibilities. In this sense it is for example difficult to disagree with Morillon’s actions with regard to Srebrenica and the east Bosnian

enclaves. Could the hostage taking of the August 1993 UNHCR convoy in east Mostar be viewed in a similar light? It is difficult to say. However, using the media can, under certain circumstances, serve a similar function. Bold media statements by the field level can force superiors to acknowledge issues and consequently to tackle them. Confidential internal reports, on the other hand, can easily be ignored.

4.2.3.3 Using the Media

In today's world mentioning the media as an important tool in exerting influence is not particularly original. Media as a tool is interesting in connection with international missions as it is, if given permission to communicate with media representatives, the only semi-direct form of sanction available on the field level. As already mentioned media is also a tool of drawing superior levels of decision-making into tackling problems perceived on the field level.

By both measures, the media activities of the Mostar UNHCR were effective. Systematically providing visiting journalists with information and guiding them to where serious violations of humanitarian law and the law of war were taking was in this respect very important. They also provided several catchy slogans such as "almost every night has been a kind of Kristallnacht in downtown Mostar" or "people live like rats" were gratefully picked up by journalists and quoted.

A deliberate media management, in a more sophisticated sense, can also be observed. When events in other parts of the Bosnia or the former Yugoslavia were overshadowing critical developments in Mostar, the UNHCR office there packaged statements in such a way as to redirect attention to the plight of the town.

Through its proactive approach the Mostar UNHCR office did much more than just simply reach field level objectives. Its actions impacted on state level developments and thus contributed to ending the Croat Bosniac war. They achieved this in two ways: by blunting the most inhuman and according to international norms illegal forms of warfare conducted by the HVO and by consequently exposing gross human rights violations of HDZ policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina and showing it for what it actually was: a racist expansion.

