COMPTE RENDU D'UNE DISCUSSION ENTRE M. YASUSHI AKASHI, LE GÉNÉRAL BERNARD JANVIER ET LE GÉNÉRAL RUPERT SMITH, LE 9 JUIN 1995

(source : MSF)

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SRSG: (AKASHI)

1. It is important to make sure that our analysis of the situation and our approach to it are the same. One of the main issues will be the negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs. I understand why you have taken the position of no negotiations with the Serbs until all hostages are released, however Zagreb and New York believe that some discussions should take place - but this is not contradictory. We can have firmness on the ground while exploiting opportunities to talk with political and military leaders.

Smith:

2. This is the situation as of last night. There is still a hard core of hostages held by the BSA. I call them hostages because they come from a wide range of nations. I believe that it will be harder to obtain their release than it was with the first two batches. The eastern enclaves are also to be considered hostages in that we cannot feed them. In Zepa and Srebrinica we have OPs that could be overrun and captured. We also have a large number of camps at risk of artillery attack: the eastern enclaves, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Visoko, and others.

3. We do not have the consent of the Serbs. We have less cooperation from the BH than we did one week ago. To all intents and purposes we have been neutralized. The Exclusion Zones and Weapons Collection Points are ignored; the safe areas are under increasing threat. The UNHCR and our ability to resupply is limited. While the new convoys (to Sarajevo) are welcomed, the result is to further remove UNPROFOR from the equation. The Serbs continue to squeeze us and I do not believe that they want a cease-fire. I believe that they want to continue to remove UNPROFOR from their affairs and to continue to neutralize NATO. This analysis is supported by the facts. Being more speculative, I believe that the BSA will continue to engage the international community to show that they cannot be controlled; this will lead to a further squeezing of Sarajevo or an attack in the eastern enclaves, creating a crisis that short of air attacks we will have a great difficulty responding to.

4. The Bosnians are getting more fed up with the UN; they hoped two weeks ago that the world was coming to their rescue, now they realize it is not true - they do not think more will be done to help them. They may want to continue what they started in May: taking the battle to the BSA, and sticking to their political position insisting on the

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permission for convoys, but it is something that I had to do and I did it. It may seem that UNPROFOR is on the sidelines, but the parties must take responsibility.

9. Our first objective is the release of the hostages, and we must also resupply our soldiers in the enclaves - in reality they are potential hostages also. Another position that we must maintain is firmness: the creation of Task Force Alpha is very pertinent, as is the implementation of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) which I would rather call the Theatre Reserve Force (TRF). If no crisis comes to modify the situation, the hostages are liberated, and we are able to resupply the enclaves, we can maintain this pause until political negotiations resume.

10. Another point to underline is that the BSA considers UNPROFOR as an enemy - this is clear. Their behavior reflects this. Mladic said that he would not fire on our positions - he knows that it is not in his interest to do so.

Smith:

11. Mladic won't treat us as an enemy as long as we do everything on his terms. If we try to do our job our way, then we are his enemy and he will treat us that way. If we bring in force behind us, he will make concessions, but if we do things on his terms he will succeed in neutralizing us.

Janvier:

12. The main point of the situation is that we are a peacekeeping force, whether we want it or not - this is the whole difficulty of planning the TRF. What is essential is to allow for political progress to begin; as long as the situation is such, we cannot go toward confrontation. What would be most acceptable to the Serbs would be to leave the enclaves - it is the most realistic approach and it makes sense from the military point of view, but it is impossible for the international community to accept.

Smith:

13. The moment to move toward confrontation has passed, at least for the time being. But our analysis of Serb intentions is different. I remain convinced that the Serbs want to conclude this year and will take every risk to accomplish this. As long as the sanctions remain on the Drina, they risk getting weaker every week relative to their enemy. They will only accept a cease-fire if their political identity is guaranteed.

14. Everyone in Sarajevo and in Pale have worked out that the anger in London and Paris has been the result of threats to individuals not to the UN or the mandate. The driving force is to get the hostages released, not to solve the problem. Bildt has been appointed, but it is not clear what his mission is going to be. It is hard to develop military plans not knowing what they are going to support. I agree that a stabilization period is good for political talks, but believe the pot will boil over before the political process can work.

Janvier:

15. Regarding safe areas, the difficulties are greater now, and all we can do is try to obtain a minimal situation. Regarding the TRF, I remind you that it was a demonstration of internal politics. For example the two (British) batteries were announced before I knew it; the section of (French) heavy artillery is the same thing - neither you nor I knew about it. The TRF will help us with defense, but will not help us open a corridor to Srebrinica, Gorazde or even Sarajevo.

16. The Serbs need two things: international recognition, and a softening of the blockade on the Drina. I hope that these conditions will be met quickly, given the urgent situation. I think the Serbs are aware of how favorable the situation is to them - I don't think that they want to go to an extreme crisis. On the contrary, they want to modify their behavior, be good interlocutors. It is for this that we must speak to them - not to negotiate, but to show them how important it is to have a normal attitude.

Smith:

17. I agree that they do not want a crisis - they want to neutralize the UN and NATO, have the UN and NATO as constant factors as they fight the Muslims. That is why I wanted to push them early on - I did not think they would go that far, and would thus back down. Now, whenever we find ourselves in a position to negotiate, we are dealing with the matter in isolation. Our efforts need to be tied into a broader process - all these activities get tied into the hostages, because that is what's neutralizing us.

Janvier:

18. What the (Bosnian) Serbs do not understand is that the hostages are losing their value as days go by.

SRSG:

19. I agree that the hostages' release will become harder unless the (Bosnian) Serbs get assurances of no further NATO air strikes, which is impossible. But the gradual release of large numbers of hostages follows past patterns - this time is different though because the Serbs are more isolated than in the past, and the air strikes were more robust than in the past.

20. We are in an ambiguous, transitional phase. Our likely legal framework will be more or less the same, like option "B", with elements from options "C" and "D". The Council will allow redeployment from the WCPs, but safe areas are a very divisive issue. The actions that we propose must be acceptable to the Council and to TCNs. The reinforcements you and the Force Commander will receive may be less than you wish in some cases and more than you need in some cases. You need to bring the new elements into the peacekeeping context, which means consent, impartiality, use of force for self-defense, and freedom of movement. But there are also elements of enforcement - and

this combination brings us to the edge of the Mogadishu line. If we do not cross it, we will be accused of being timid and pro-Serb; if we cross it, we will be accused of being reckless and abandoning chances for peace. As peacekeepers, we must talk to all parties; the small gains that we achieve from doing so are better than the losses from the combative approach. We remain vulnerable, but our vulnerability provides for a modicum of support from the parties.

Smith:

21. We need to do more than stabilize the situation; we need to build a platform from which progress can be achieved, but it is difficult to do so if we don't know the political direction. One way to judge the success of stabilization efforts is to see: 1) if we are no longer being directly targeted while we try to carry-out our mandate; and 2) if we have freedom of movement, which at a minimum should be defined as the ability of UNHCR and UNPROFOR to deliver supplies to the enclaves. We did not have these conditions, or stabilization, before the air strikes, and we must try to get it now. We are in danger of reverting to the *status quo* minus, of operating in the mode of supplicant. This is why I keep returning to the question of the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF): are we going to use them to fight? If not, I am not sure I want them - they will just be more mouths to feed, and create expectations that I cannot meet.

22. Going on from stabilization, we need two things, without which we cannot operate: 1) safety for our bases, and 2) to reduce the exposure of potential hostages. Regarding the first, we should perhaps consider a massive response - by air attacks - if a UN camp is attacked. This would be stated openly. There would be a risk of BH provocation, but this could be dealt with. Or we should not do anything that will provoke an attack against a UN base. Reducing exposure of potential hostages would have an impact on our ability to carry-out our mission; they would have to be secure enough to protect themselves until rescued. It may also be useful to have UN routes created by the Security Council, similar to the three routes that use to go to Berlin. The RRF could perhaps do that, but the TCNs would have to sign up to it. These are the only two jobs I can think of for the RRF: rescuing isolated elements and escorting aid to the enclaves.

Janvier:

23. It is clear that we cannot impose a solution, such as a corridor. We can only achieve that through political negotiations.

Smith:

24. I see no prospects of the parties agreeing to such routes; it would be a waste of time to negotiate. My suggestion was that the United Nations in New York establish the ground rules. But as I keep saying, to do so we need to be prepared to fight across a whole range of threats. If we are not prepared to fight, we will always be stared down by the BSA. We are already over the Mogadishu line; the Serbs do not view us as peacekeepers.

SRSG:

25. Can we return (back over the line)?

Smith:

26. Only by either doing nothing, or by showing an absolute readiness to fight, including going over the top. That is possible because the BSA has its hands full with the BH.

Janvier:

27. I insist that we will never have the possibility of combat, of imposing our will on the Serbs. The only possible way is to go through political negotiations - that is the only way we can fulfil our mandate.

28. In Paris, I explained that weapons in the WCPs are in Serb hands. We tried to agree on ways to prevent them from leaving the exclusion zone. If heavy weapons leave the zone, problems will be created for the Serbs because of the BH infantry.

Smith:

29. The situation with exclusion zones, safe areas, and WCPs is very disconcerting. I see them as the next series of major problems that we will face. There may be crises in these areas before the Reaction Force is available. I anticipate actions that will lead our political masters by the nose. I can easily see a situation arising where we will be forced to request air power.

Janvier:

30. It is just for this that we must establish contact with the Serbs, to show, explain to them that there are just some things that they cannot do.

Smith:

31. My judgement is that they will not listen.

Janvier:

32. I have a different approach. Once again the Serbs are in a very favorable political position, and that is something they will not want to compromise. The external political situation is such that the Serbs will come to understand the benefits of cooperation. Unless there is a major provocation by the BH, the Serbs will not act.

Smith:

33. It is the interplay between the Serbs and the BH that might produce something. The Serbs' enemy is the BH, and they want us neutralized, not as an enemy. But because we have some enforcement obligations, either we fail, or we act and we will be the enemy of the Serbs. I think that we will be forced to make a decision within one month.

Janvier:

34. The Serbs are placing constraints on us. The only option I see is to resume negotiations, get a cease-fire, and resume our operations. We may regret that UNHCR convoys to Sarajevo are not escorted by UNPROFOR, but the objective is to get food to the people. If the convoys' safety is guaranteed by the Serbs, I have no problem with that.

Smith:

35. But we remove the UN from the equation, which is in the interest of the Serbs, and fuels the government's belief that they rather have arms than the UN. We are taking decisions in the short-term that will have long-term implications that we do not know.

Janvier:

36 With the Reaction Force, we would be able to impose tactical superiority in Sarajevo; if we had a conflict, Mladic's tanks would have a problem. But that is not their task. As long as the enclaves continue to exist, we will be neutralized to an extent. In New York I said that the BH army should defend the safe areas, they are strong enough to do it. This was not well received at all.

[There followed a brief discussion of the four BSA detainees, during which it was agreed that they would not be released until all UN hostages are released; the FC also said they would be turned over to the BSA after that point. There was also a discussion on UNPROFOR re-supply convoys to the eastern enclaves; the FC said Mladic had assured him they could take place, but through the FRY because there would be resistance if the convoys passed through Pale.]

The meeting began at 10:50 and ended at 13:30.