CHAPTER 1

UN PROTECTED AREAS

Introduction

The United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAs) in Croatia were, despite the name, more of a peace-stabilization than a human rights concept. They were meant to dampen the fighting and provide an international presence while peacemaking efforts continued to bring the conflict between Croats and Serbs to an end. Nevertheless, there were shades of protection in the concept and in the implementation given to it by United Nations forces. Some people were protected while others were not—inside, and on the perimeters of the UNPAs. Some ethnic cleansing took place under the very nose of the UN peacekeepers. But they did what they could to protect those they could, in difficult circumstances. They practised the art of the possible, which is a hallmark of United Nations peace and humanitarian operations. In this chapter we shall look at the concept, protection efforts on the ground, and the limitations of the operation.

By way of background, it will be recalled that on 27 November, 1991, the UN Security Council had adopted resolution 721 endorsing efforts for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation in Croatia, then still a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. An implementing Accord was signed in Sarajevo on 2 January, 1992. Six weeks later, on 15 February, 1992, the Security Council confirmed acceptance by all parties of what became known as the Vance Plan and agreed to establish UNPROFOR.

The Vance plan had been the result of a six month negotiation process. The plan’s aims were as follows: the cessation of hostilities; the withdrawal of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) from Croatia; the demilitarisation of areas designated as UN Protected Areas to protect the Serbs and other populations within the UNPAs; and facilitation of the return of displaced persons to the UNPAs.

UNPROFOR was initially deployed in Croatia, with its Headquarters in Sarajevo which, at the time, early 1992, before the recognition of its independence, was peaceful. Subsequently, with the spread of civil war
in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNPROFOR’s mandate was extended to Bosnia and later, as a preventive deployment, to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition, UNPROFOR had an operational mandate in Serbia and Montenegro and a liaison presence in Slovenia.

1. The concept of UN Protected Areas

The concept for a United Nations peace-keeping operation in Yugoslavia, which was discussed with Yugoslav leaders by Cyrus Vance, Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General and Marrack Goulding, USG for Special Political Affairs (Peacekeeping) in November/December, 1991, envisaged an interim arrangement to create the conditions of peace and security required for the negotiation of an overall settlement of the Yugoslav crisis. The military and police personnel required for the operation would be contributed, on a voluntary basis, by the Government of Member States of the UN approved by the Security Council.\textsuperscript{28}

All members of the peace-keeping operation would be under the operational command of the UN Secretary-General. They would be required to be completely impartial between the various parties to the conflict. Those personnel who were armed would have standing instructions to use force to the minimum extent necessary and normally only in self-defence.

United Nations troops and police monitors would be deployed in certain areas in Croatia, designated as “United Nations Protected Areas”. These areas would be demilitarized; all armed forces in them would be either withdrawn or disbanded. The role of the United Nations troops would be to ensure that the areas remained demilitarized and that all persons residing in them were protected from fear of armed attack.

The role of United Nations police monitors would be to ensure that the local police forces carried out their duties without discrimination against persons of any nationality or abusing anyone’s human rights. As the United Nations Force assumed its responsibilities in the United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAS), all Yugoslav National Army (JNA) forces deployed elsewhere in Croatia would be relocated outside that republic.

\textsuperscript{28} See UN doc.S/23592.