

BOSNIA PRESIDENT REFUSES TO BUDGE

Rejects Croatian-Serbian Plan to Partition Sarajevo and Muslim Areas in East

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GENEVA, Aug. 5 — With international mediators saying he has been strengthened by renewed talk of using NATO air power against his Serbian enemies, President Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia refused to compromise today in the stalled peace talks, forcing the mediators to postpone a resumption in negotiations until Monday.

"There has been no progress on the maps," Mr. Izetbegovic said as he left the United Nations offices here after talks with the mediators on carving up Bosnia and Herzegovina into three loosely linked ethnic republics.

The President, who is a Muslim, said he was still unable to accept Serbian and Croatian proposals for dividing such sensitive areas as Sarajevo and Muslim areas in eastern Bosnia. Mr. Izetbegovic also continued to insist that Serbian forces pulled back from two strategic mountains that they had seized outside Sarajevo.

After hearing the Bosnian demands, officials said the mediators, Lord Owen of the European Community and Thorvald Stoltenberg of the United Nations, concluded that there was no realistic chance of an agreement between President Izetbegovic and the Serbian and Croatian leaders, who returned home on Wednesday after waiting for three days for the Bosnian Government side to return to the table.

'Weekend of Reflection'

The mediators therefore decided against inviting the Serbs and Croats to come back here on Friday to resume talks, as they had hoped to do. But rather than formally suspend the negotiations, Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg gave Bosnia's 10-member collective presidency a "weekend of reflection" to see whether this produces any change in its position.

Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, and Mate Boban, the Bosnian Croat leader, agreed to return to Geneva on Monday to resume negotiations. By then it should be clear whether Gen. Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb military commander, has honored a commitment he made to Mr. Karadzic today to withdraw his forces from the two mountains, Mount Bjelasnica and Mount Igman, on Friday and reopen two main roads into Sarajevo to allow the free passage of civilian traffic.

United Nations officials here also believe that the Bosnians are stalling until they see what comes out of a NATO meeting on Monday in Brussels. The meeting has been called to consider whether to give the go-ahead to detailed plans now being drafted for NATO air strikes against Serbian positions around Sarajevo and other locales that are under attack in defiance of a Security Council resolution that designated them "safe areas."

Talk of Air-Strikes, Then a Shift

Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg say they are convinced that once the Clinton Administration and then NATO started talking publicly about the possibility of air strikes, Bosnian Government leaders hardened their position in the belief that Washington and its allies might finally come to their rescue.

But like Britain, France and Canada, which all have peacekeepers in Bosnia, the mediators think that any resort to force now would end all hope of a negotiated settlement to the war and probably compel the United Nations to halt its relief operations, on which some two million people depend.

Since earlier this year, when increasingly bitter clashes destroyed the uneasy alliance between the Croatian nationalists and the Bosnian Government, the mediators have argued that the balance of forces inside Bosnia would compel the outgunned Bosnian Army to accept the demands of the other two factions or face extinction.

The current round of negotiations was intended to reach agreement on a Serbian-Croatian proposal to divide the country, with the mediators determined to secure the Bosnians an economically sustainable state of their own, occupying at least 30 percent of Bosnia and guaranteeing them access to the Adriatic Sea.

The Serbs and the Croats have already agreed in principle to a Muslim state of this size and offered to give back land that they have conquered.

As of last Sunday, President Izetbegovic agreed to abandon his attachment to a multi-ethnic, unitary state. He and the other faction leaders had also largely agreed on at least the core territory that should belong to each republic, although differences remained over sensitive regions.