

Bosnian Leader Says Partition May Be Inevitable

By JOHN F. BURNS
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SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 18 — As Serbian nationalist troops advanced today on a mountain stronghold crucial to Sarajevo's defense, the President of Bosnia said his Government might have to accept the "inevitable" and agree to the partition of the country on ethnic lines.

Alija Izetbegovic, the Bosnian President, has agonized publicly over a plan proposed by Serbia and Croatia to partition Bosnia into three "ethnic states," for Muslims, Serbs and Croats.

The plan would mean the end of Bosnia as a republic where people of different faiths and cultures live together and share power, but Mr. Izetbegovic, a Muslim who shares power with Serbs and Croats in Bosnia's collective presidency, has said that continuing to fight for a multinational state could amount to collective suicide for Muslims.

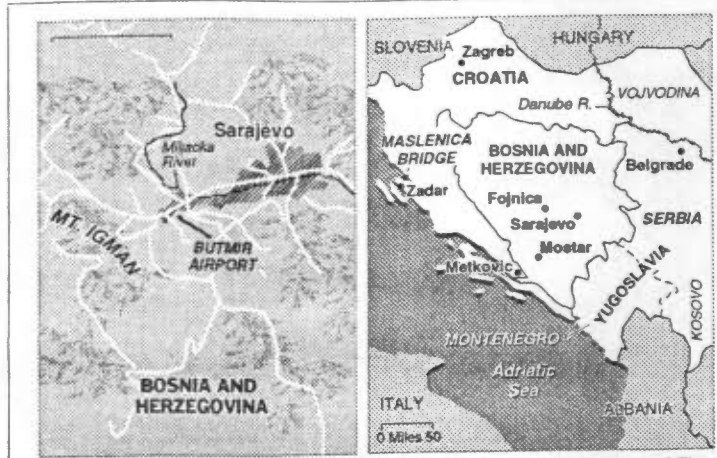
After a meeting today with Vitaly I. Churkin, a Russian diplomat who works closely with the mediators who are seeking an end to the war, Mr. Izetbegovic appeared to come to the brink of advocating what would amount to a political capitulation.

Concessions Called Inevitable

But there were serious doubts about whether he could count on the backing of Bosnia's Muslim-led army, or of the powerful Muslim Vice President, Ejup Ganic, for any settlement that sanctioned a permanent partition of the country.

"We should not accept a permanent division of Bosnia," Mr. Izetbegovic said. "But without great concessions in terms of ethnic division, there is no way to get peace in the near future. Maybe we can solve this dilemma if we are ready to continue fighting for another year. But if we want peace now, concessions are inevitable."

As the Bosnian leader spoke, the 380,000 residents of this besieged capital could look to the southwest and see puffs of smoke rising as Serbian tanks and artillery bombarded Bosnian positions on Mount Igman, overlooking the strategic western approaches to the city. The Serbian armor, backed by infantry, broke through Bosnian defenses atop the mountain on Saturday, and their advance today prompted the



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Balkan Update

Serbian nationalist troops broke through Bosnian Government defense lines west of **SARAJEVO** yesterday, posing a major threat to the city. Fierce fighting was also reported in **HADZICI**, west of the capital.

In Sarajevo, President Alija Izetbegovic of **BOSNIA** said his Government might have to accept the "inevitable" and agree to the partition of his country along ethnic lines.

In **BELGRADE**, the commander of Bosnian Serb forces, Gen. Ratko Mladic, was quoted in a newspaper as saying he would no longer allow international aid groups to supply Sarajevo. Serbs also continued to block Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia.

In **ZADAR**, President Franjo Tudjman of **CROATIA** led a group of diplomats across a disputed bridge, despite threats from Serbian gunners, after opening an airport closed for two years by civil war.

Bosnian Army commander, Rasim Delic, to say that his troops were in "a very complex position."

Mr. Delic, whose forces have not adopted formal ranks, said that the Bosnian First Army Corps, defending Mount Igman, had prevented a "decisive advance," suggesting that the Bosnian defenses had not collapsed.

New Roundups Expected

But Radio Sarajevo, the voice of the Bosnian Government, quoted Mr. Delic as saying a successful defense of the mountain might require "not just the army," composed mostly of conscripts fighting in hurriedly trained groups, but "other people." Many men of fighting age in the city saw that as herald-

ing new roundups in the streets to stiffen the Bosnian defenses.

The advance by Serbian forces on Mount Igman was made possible by their capture last week of the town of Trnovo, 25 miles south of Sarajevo.

Trnovo had been the linchpin of a stretch of Bosnian-held territory running in an arc south and west of Sarajevo, outside the Serbian siege lines that have virtually sealed off the capital for 15 months. If they captured Mount Igman, the Serbs would pose a new and potentially fatal threat to Sarajevo.

From Mount Igman, the Bosnian forces have been able to keep an uncertain supply line running into Sarajevo, through the Muslim settlements of Hrasnica and Butmir, which lie at the

foot of the mountain. From Butmir, hundreds of soldiers and civilians risk their lives every night in a dash across the Sarajevo airport into the city. Serbian forces maintain a steady stream of tank, mortar and machine-gun fire across the airport after dusk, but have been unable to halt the passage of food and ammunition.

If they seized Mount Igman, the Serbian forces would be in a position to cut off these supplies. With the city already desperately short of food, electricity and water, the closing of the only supply line the Bosnians have been able to keep open would have dire effects. United Nations relief supplies reaching the city by road convoy and military airlift have never amounted to more than a fraction of the city's needs.

Bosnians Losing Ground

The Bosnian reverses on Mount Igman appear to have weighed heavily in weekend discussions in Sarajevo among members of Bosnia's collective presidency, headed by Mr. Izetbegovic.

The possibility of a severe jolt to the capital's already shaky defenses followed the emergence in recent months of a loose alliance against the Bosnian Army between the Serbian and Croatian nationalist forces, which are engaged in attacks across Bosnia ahead of a possible peace settlement. With rare exceptions, as in their rout last week of Croatian troops at Fojnica, north of Sarajevo, Bosnian forces holding barely 15 percent of the country have been losing ground almost daily.

Mr. Izetbegovic, who came to power in 1990 as the leader of a Muslim nationalist party when Bosnia was still part of the Yugoslav federation, has switched under the pressure of the war and become an advocate of maintaining Bosnia as a country where Muslims, Serbs and Croats mingle, as they have for centuries, and share power.

But recent military reverses, and the increasingly desperate situation in Sarajevo and other mainly Muslim enclaves like Gorazde, Tuzla and Srebrenica, have caused him to waver. In the last week, he has spoken on several occasions as though capitulation to Serbian and Croatian demands for partition of the country was near.

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