

Moscow and West to draw up joint Bosnian strategy

BY JAMES BONE, EVE-ANN PRENTICE AND OUR FOREIGN STAFF

SENIOR officials from the United States, Russia and the European Union meet in Bonn today in the first test of international unity over Bosnia-Herzegovina since the Sarajevo ceasefire began.

The gathering could also show whether Washington is prepared to force the Muslim-led Bosnian government to accept peace terms not to its liking. Muslim forces, meanwhile, are likely to intensify the war as they scent the increasing rivalry between America and Russia over how to build on the Sarajevo ceasefire and obtain a wider peace.

Arif Pasalic, Bosnia's Deputy Defence Minister, told the Croatian magazine *Danas*: "We have to continue the war ... for the liberation of all of Bosnia-Herzegovina." He said that Bosnian forces intended to retake the Croat-held Lasva valley in central Bosnia, and to launch counter-offensives in the Serb-held north around Brcko and the Croat-held south around Mostar.

Even without an overall peace accord in Bosnia, the EU and Russia now want to see Sarajevo placed under full United Nations administration. Indeed, this is a key Russian requirement, but the Bosnian government rejects the idea unless it forms part of a comprehensive peace. America has refused to take sides.

Vitali Churkin, Russia's special envoy, and Charles Redman, his American coun-

terpart, will attend today's talks in Bonn hosted by Jürgen Chrobog, the political director of the German Foreign Ministry. Murrack Goulding, the UN Under Secretary-General for political affairs, and officials from EU countries and Canada will also attend.

In Washington, President Clinton last night again ruled out undue American pressure on Bosnia's Muslim govern-

Zagreb: United Nations convoys will resume deliveries of food and medicines to central Bosnia today, the UN said. A spokesman said that up to 400 lorries were waiting to leave, and that convoys would be "in full swing" by tomorrow. (Reuter)

ment, saying it was "important that we do not pretend that we can impose a peace that the parties disagree with, that they do not freely accept".

Haris Silajdzic, the Bosnian Prime Minister, said after attending a meeting in Washington with Warren Christopher, the American Secretary of State, that the Muslims were "ready to compromise, but we are not ready to capitulate".

UN officials point out that even before a mortar killed 68 people in Sarajevo's main market, triggering Nato's lat-

est air strike threat, the Bosnian Serbs had agreed in principle to withdraw their heavy guns if the city was placed under UN control. Diplomats say Boutros Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary-General, is willing to undertake the operation, provided he has firm commitments of enough new peacekeepers.

Mr Clinton meanwhile gave a warning of a "certain and swift response" if the Serbs tried to resume their shelling of Sarajevo. He added that he was "very concerned" that the Serbs might transfer the heavy weapons they had withdrawn from Sarajevo to other Muslim population centres.

France said yesterday that placing Sarajevo under UN administration was now its top priority in Bosnia, and Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary, said Britain and France were working on a possible joint initiative to extend the peace process. This could include seeking a further UN Security Council resolution to cover steps to lift the siege in other towns, such as Mostar and Vitez.

He was cautious, however, about extending the Nato ultimatum to other areas. He said the Administration was considering the idea, but emphasised that Nato, too, should not undertake a mission it could not perform.

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