

RECORDED!

MINUTES

of the meeting held by the President of the Republic of Croatia, Dr. Franjo TUĐMAN, with military officials, on 31 July 1995 at Brioni

The meeting commenced at 1050 hours

PRESIDENT:

Gentlemen, I have called this meeting to assess the current situation and to hear your views before I decide on what our next steps should be in the forthcoming days.

As you know, we were determined to undertake further operations. The Grahovo-Glamoč operation was also designed to have an impact with respect to Bihać and to enable Knin to be surrounded. We were determined to start lifting the blockade of Bihać from the west.

However, the situation as it stands now is that the United Nations representatives, Akashi, Stoltenberg and the Serbs have deprived of us this reason, since they are in the process of withdrawing their forces from the Bihać area. They will not attack and they are allowing UNCRO to deploy on those borders as observers. And of course they immediately relayed this news to the whole world. And every military operation must have its political justification.

Accordingly, we no longer have the necessary justification to lift the blockade of Bihać. But it seems that we could /? take advantage of/ the favourable political situation in Croatia, the demoralisation in the Serbian ranks, the affinity /towards us / of people in Europe, partly in Europe, of those who are inclined to resolve that crisis to Croatia's benefit where we have a friend, Germany, which consistently supports us in political discussions, and in NATO as well where there is also understanding for our views. We enjoy the sympathy of the United States, but to a certain extent. If, gentlemen, you will carry out /the operation/ professionally, as you did in Western Slavonia within a few days, and that means three to four days, or a maximum of eight days, then we can count on the fact that we will not sustain any political damage, but will instead have scored political points in such a world.

Therefore, it is my opinion that our main objective can no longer be to break through to Bihać. The breakthrough is now only a secondary concern. We would now have to find some kind of an pretext for our actions, for our venture which we can commence according to plan as was the case yesterday, or we can start it tomorrow, or according to yesterday's plan for tomorrow, or let's see when we can do it.

But if in the forthcoming days we are to undertake further operations, then Bihać can only serve as some sort of pretext and something of a secondary nature. We must inflict total defeat upon the enemy in the south and north, just so we understand each other, leaving the east aside for the time being.

Why should we leave the east aside? Because even those who are our friends are afraid that all of Yugoslavia will become embroiled in the war, Yugoslavia and Russia, and there might be an all-out war.

Therefore, we should leave the east totally alone, and resolve the question of the south and north.

In which way do we resolve it? This is the subject of our discussion today. We have to inflict such blows that the Serbs will to all practical purposes disappear, that is to say, the areas we do not take at once must capitulate within a few days.

Therefore, we should reconsider and modify the plan we had envisaged for tomorrow. When I hear your assessments and views, I will make a decision. But let me repeat, the main task is not to lift the blockade of Mostar, but . . .

(Interjection: Bihać).

I'm thinking of Mostar, because down there they will probably meddle about in that area in order to tie us down and warn us that if we're going forward, then they too have the possibility of /advancing/ from the Neretva River, from which they will not desist and then on to Dubrovnik.

Therefore our main task is not Bihać, but instead to inflict such /powerful/ blows in several directions that the Serbian forces will no longer be able to recover, but will have to capitulate.

In this respect, we can count on the fact that Yugoslavia will not become directly involved. Last night their government met again in session. They are condemning our aggression and calling upon the international community to ensure the cessation of hostilities and a political dialogue.

You have all probably read my reply to Akashi, haven't you?

(Interjection: We have.)

Accordingly, as you have seen, it has the nature of an ultimatum. As early as this morning, Stoltenberg came to see ŠARINIĆ and he said that it could be corrected in the manner requested by the President. They propose that we have a meeting with the Knin Serbs in Geneva on Thursday. They are proposing their own delegation which would include Mile NOVAKOVIĆ, that's their general, their Minister VOJNOVIĆ, MACURA and PRIJIĆ, and they have urged us that our delegation be led by the /? head of the Cabinet/ ŠARINIĆ.

I told ŠARINIĆ that in principle we favour negotiations if they accept the conditions I have set out in my reply to Akashi, but that he will not head the delegation if the meeting is held. So we can do that, he will call today, and we can accept this as a mask, that we are accepting the talks, and even designate our own delegation, but let us discuss whether we will undertake an operation tomorrow or in the next few days to liberate the area from Banija to Kordun to Lika and from Dalmatia to Knin, and how to carry this out in three, four or at the very most eight days. Then only some minor enclaves will remain which would be forced to surrender.

Those were my introductory words on the matter. I would like to hear your views. Every one of you will bear responsibility for what we agree to implement and for mutual cooperation, because without extremely co-ordinated cooperation on all theatres, we will be unable to achieve the successful liberation of those areas within a short time. Since I want to be completely clear, I think we should consider deploying these forces from Grahovo in this direction for offensive action.

Those were my introductory remarks. Please, gentlemen, present your assessments and proposals with full responsibility, and then we shall adopt a decision on how to implement them.

Admiral Domazet.

Davor DOMAZET:

Mr. President, I will set out the strategic situation with respect to the adversary. I'd then like to provide an outline of a potential operation in keeping with the thesis you have just set out now, since I have been abreast of the entire operation and the course of planning it.

First, I consider that with respect to the enemy as a whole, and in viewing both Bosnia and the occupied parts of Croatia, the current situation is extremely favourable for us to carry out radical operations to liberate occupied Banovina, Lika and Kordun. I base this assertion on the following: the breakthrough to Grahovo and the action of cutting through /their lines/ resolved one of the four key points. This means that three remain which, at the operative and strategic level, lead to the surrounding of the adversary and his entire operational structure.

Second, the breakthrough has pinned down the already meagre reserve forces at the disposal of the Army of Republika Srpska, that is, in Bosnia, including the unengaged forces in eastern Bosnia.

Since they have set themselves both a political and military goal, to attempt to recover Grahovo, realising its strategic importance, their main orientation is now towards Grahovo, both in terms of forces from the occupied areas, mainly Lika and Dalmatia, as well as from Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are in the course of attempting, and I emphasise the word "attempting", to prepare a counterattack which would have as its only objective the lifting of the blockade of Grahovo. This is exceptionally useful for us because they cannot be ready to manoeuvre their forces in that area in the next four or five days or, in my opinion, not even in eight to ten days, which opens up possibilities for us, since it frees up the rear and the region behind us.

Second, the adversary has brought all possible forces to the Banovina, Kordun and Lika regions.

PRESIDENT:

Listen, how could they undertake a counterattack against . . .

Davor DOMAZET:

The counterattack is twofold, Mr. President. From Knin, or rather to the north-east of Knin, there are forces the adversary has partially transferred with . . . (they look at the map).

The counterattack forces come from two operational axes of Knin, they would be the forces from the occupied areas and from the north-east, from the direction of Drvar; those would be the forces of Republika Srpska. For now they are planning to use special forces and are already transferring them. They have left an armoured company at Slunj, thereby decreasing pressure on the 5th Corps. With the forces left over, and we know what the situation is over there, the special police forces in addition to the special Corps forces would be on the left flank, and on the right, the 1st Brigade of the Banjaluka 1st Krajina Corps and the 16th Motorised Brigade which he has transferred from the corridor, and those forces have replaced the forces from eastern Bosnia which were in Srebrenica.

PRESIDENT:

Have they given up at this moment?

Davor DOMAZET:

No, no, they haven't given up. They /? are/ manoeuvring their forces, Mr. President, because they are restricted primarily by a lack of fuel and then by everything else. The easiest manoeuvre for them is to pull these forces out because they can arrive the fastest, and to replace them with the forces deployed around Srebrenica.

But what is important here is that there will be no increase in forces which could jeopardise Orašje which is of vital importance for us.

That means that the overall forces he can muster for an offensive, and he will do it, would certainly not exceed 6,000 men. In view of our defence structure and the positions we hold, and GOTOVINA can discuss this in greater detail, we would have to stop them and lure them to us, just let them come, because this will then enable a strategic approach for us in the north and north-west.

Second, what is important is that he has let the Corps through, the pressure of special forces /as printed/. My suggestion is that the 5th Corps should not be substantially exhausted with the forces and in the area they have taken, because /?it/ has not changed the operative situation since communications have not been transferred. Instead, the Corps should be used as follows – it should leave a lot of its forces, because now it doesn't need a major force, regroup the main forces, proceed to Kulen Vakuf to the second critical point, where their forces would be completely cut off. Only an auxiliary road will remain for them to withdraw.

In this manner, we have resolved the second critical point and cut off the entire area. That's why it will be possible to carry out our other operations, of which you have spoken and which we will explain, in three to four days.

The second critical point or what is important are two areas – Kostajnica and Dvor na Uni. By resolving the question of one area, especially the first, and then the second – and the bridges for pulling out forces are in the second – the entire area will be cut off in operational terms. That operation could be carried out, to all practical purposes, very quickly. The directive which has now been given rests on all these foundations. It is only a question of planning the ratio of forces in that direction.

Accordingly, we will first proceed to the Gospić Military District which I think is vital for two reasons. First, a breakthrough to Ljubovo makes it possible to cut off communications and place the Udbina airport under our control with minimum forces. The importance of Udbina airport can cause us great damage, above all in terms of an attack along the Urin River. This is how we would resolve this critical problem.

The second key problem is a breakthrough in the narrowest part for which a plan already exists and should not be changed. We must advance towards Bihać, right to those Croatian villages there where HVO /Croatian Defence Council forces are deployed which, I believe, will be of special significance.

The third matter we must resolve is the missile attack which he will certainly attempt to launch against Zagreb. Therefore, the enclosure or pincer movement in the Petrinja areas must be two-fold, to remove /that danger/. The same applies to Karlovac.

The major part of the operation remains. The main thrust would have an operational basis as an auxiliary /as printed/ from Dubica and via Sunja where an operation against Kostajnica has been worked out, so that we would remove that critical point.

Next, the areas stretching along the Una River valley /facilitate/ a very easy threat to Dvor na Uni. In addition, we can give the forces of the 5th Corps the task of

advancing towards Sanski most, not to the Croatian borders, but south of the Una River, that is to say towards the Bosnian . . . , and in that manner we shall pose a threat to Dvor na Uni since it is possible to do so in that area. In this way our forces for the operation are quite realistic, because the overall ratio, and I would like to conclude with this, is as follows. In these situations, the response to their mobilisation is only 17%; that's information obtained yesterday. The figure speaks for itself of the internal disorganisation and the fact that the first problem now is how to flee, and not how to fight.

The overall forces in this area are as follows. With all its regroupings, the 7th Corps has 7,000 troops. The Lika 15th Corps has no more than 6,000; Kordun, with reinforcements, has 4,500 and Banovina 5,000.

(Interjection:) And the 2nd Krajina /? Corps/?

It has been shattered. I will give you the information I have.

Therefore, Mr. President, there is a realistic change of executing the operation within that time limit.

I can go over the additional elements.

As regards Eastern Slavonia or Baranja, the ratio of forces is entirely different. The reason is the engagement of the Yugoslav army and the arrival, six days ago, of the Novi Sad 18th Motorised Brigade with its entire hardware and equipment as well as volunteers who have infiltrated the area. The total forces in the eastern sector are 16,000 troops, 160 tanks and 3 mixed artillery regiments. Those forces are already in battle order, both armour and artillery, and they have been deployed with a clear goal. They will undoubtedly attempt to do it, by occupying the bridgehead at Baranja, and the goal is to throw out /? the last/ Croatian soldier from that area.

Second, they will also certainly attempt to fire on the towns. It is their assessment and plan that if they are perhaps in the position to do so, in the event operations take a while – that's why the operation in the west must be brief – that they could, if they attain a result, make an attempt even from the direction of Tenj, because yesterday they evacuated the entire population and their main forces are concentrated there, with the forces he has in Baranja and the pontoon bridges he's bringing from Yugoslavia, he might attempt to cut off Osijek. But only on condition that the operation takes a while and if they really decide to engage themselves in that area, and succeed in moving us from the bridgehead.

In this situation, there is no danger yet, regardless of the fact that they have the forces, because he has to bring in the forces of the 453rd Motorised Brigade from Šid, there is no danger, primarily because of the firmness of the HVO defence at Orašje, that they could attempt their long-standing and planned manoeuvre south of Vinkovci towards Županija.

So we may exclude this possibility at this stage. What they are left with is opening fire on Vinkovci.

Therefore, the realistic prospects for that operation are now favourable, in view of the military aspect and engagement of forces, since their planned assault will play into our hands in the sense that they will be tying down all forces both the in operations in depth and in the occupied areas, while leaving us the opportunity to quickly close the remaining three windows or doors that they have, and then, with the already planned and developed operations forces of the HV /Croatian Army/ we shall penetrate deep within and break through to the border.

PRESIDENT:

Gentlemen, I have still not informed you about a political matter. Bildt, you know who Bildt is, has replaced Owen. He was in Belgrade recently. With MILOŠEVIĆ he negotiated a solution to the political crisis in Bosnia, on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, whereby MILOŠEVIĆ would recognise Bosnia and Herzegovina on the basis of the Contact Group's proposal. That means a 49:51 ratio, a Federation, a Confederation, and so forth. If he does, they will lift all sanctions within nine months. That means that MILOŠEVIĆ has agreed. Russia, France and England are backing it.

For our part, we have taken all steps to have both Germany and the United States resist, since this leaves the problem of the Croatian areas open and represents a type of pressure on us.

But this points – I am mentioning this because we have to conceive the implementation of our operations so that we do not provide Yugoslavia with a pretext – to MILOŠEVIĆ and their friends in the West agreeing to intervention by Yugoslavia's on Croatian soil.

I think, as the Admiral put it just now, that if we hold on to, I think that, just between ourselves, we can even reconcile ourselves to the loss of the Drava bridgehead. If they attacked the Drava bridgehead in Osijek with all their forces, we would have great difficulty in stopping it. If we were to go to war there, then as far as the West is concerned, we're getting embroiled in a war with Yugoslavia. And, as I said, they are afraid of Yugoslavia, Russia, Islam, a world war, and so forth.

What this means is that from a strategic and military viewpoint, we can even ignore that bridgehead, since it is not so significant. If we resolve this, then we shall resolve the other at a later period.

Of course, this can lead to their shelling of Osijek or Vinkovici. I doubt that they would attempt to take Osijek.

Davor DOMAZET:

No, I said that Yugoslavia could get involved there.

PRESIDENT:

That's why I'm saying this.

One more thing, in this operation of ours, I don't know, General, what would happen with ABDIĆ. We must force ABDIĆ to side with us and in the area of Velika Kladuša we would not encounter enemy forces but Muslims who would side with us. I think that this should be borne in mind in military considerations. ABDIĆ was in favour of cooperation with us, but IZETBEGOVIĆ was against it, and so forth.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

What I told you about, Mr. President, we had the conversation with him. He will not speak to any Muslims from Croatia and I think that he will abide by his positions as he has, at least up for the moment.

PRESIDENT:

Good, he has abided by his positions, but if we launch an offensive, then we should tell him, if you're going to side with the Serbs you will suffer defeat, but if you stay neutral or come over to our side, then your future is secure. We have to act both militarily and politically.

Now, Udbina, as the Admiral said, /? should be put/ under control. It probably has to be destroyed by shelling. Do you know what, from a strategic point of view, is a drawback to our consideration of the plan? It's all very well that the Admiral is now supposed to close off their remaining three exits, but you are not providing them with an exit anywhere. There is no way out to . . . (. . . to close it off). To pull out and flee; instead, you are forcing them to fight to the bitter end, which exacts a greater engagement and greater losses on our side. Therefore, let us also please take this into consideration because it's true, they are absolutely demoralised, and just as they have started moving out of Grahovo and Glamoč, when we put pressure on them, now they are already partly moving out of Knin. Accordingly, let us take into consideration, on a military level, the possibility of leaving them a way out somewhere, so they can pull out part /of their forces (. . . there is Dvor na Uni . . .). Yes, but this Dvor na Uni is up there, but this here . . .

Davor DOMAZET:

Mr. President, here is a way and two ways; that is why in planning the operation we left this road in this area. This is the Lika area, here where the Serbs are, it is by the Serbs. We are leaving a route here and they can get out. The second route is leaving /? them/ Dvor na Una, because only at the final stage will we break through to Kostajnica, gradually advance and allow them to leave. We won't close it off. So there are two key routes.

PRESIDENT:

Yes, let's make it easier on ourselves and do that as quickly as possible.

Davor DOMAZET:

That's what we were thinking about.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Mr. President, just briefly, we have discussed here in detail the plan of the complete operation such as it is, and it is good, and we have carried out all the preparations in order to be able to do it. If the political circumstances aren't ripe to adopt a decision to go all out, I suggest that instead of tomorrow morning, we start out a day or two later, and that we at least undertake the first stage of our entire plan.

PRESIDENT:

What does that mean, the first stage?

Davor DOMAZET:

Well, the first strategic stage after the operation, that's how it should . . . and next /as printed/. The first stage, seizing Ljubovo, placing Udbina under control. An attack by the forces of the Split Military District and the special MUP /Ministry of the Interior/ forces, from the slopes of Mt. Velebit to Gračac, and creating conditions in the second stage to emerge at Otrić. This implies an assault on . . .

PRESIDENT:

How long would that first stage last?

Davor DOMAZET:

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Two to three days, two days at least, no, it won't last longer (. . .for that, one day) /as printed/.

Ante GOTOVINA:

There we have the forces of the 2nd Battalion, the 9th Guards, with special units.

Davor DOMAZET:

Well, no more are needed, no more.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, with special MUP forces, without any support, stronger armoured forces in the breakthrough. We must create them, that means they would not be more than . .

Davor DOMAZET:

Furthermore, that same first stage of the operation includes the breakthrough by the forces of the 1st Guards Brigade and the other forces in the Military District, to the north and south of the Plitvice Lakes. This means removing the danger of an attack against Zagreb.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Yes, Zagreb, Karlovac and Sisak.

Davor DOMAZET:

Yes, and in the same manner from Karlovac, and in the same manner a breakthrough and our emergence in Kostajnica. That is the first stage of the operation, and it is logical and resolves all the crucial problems.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

And, Mr. President, half of Krajina is gone.

Davor DOMAZET:

It is cut in half, the Kraljinas /as printed/, and all vital strategic facilities are under control and the conditions for the second stage of the operation have been created, which will be of the same duration.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

Should this be cut off down here or not, from Mt. Velebit, here?

Davor DOMAZET:

Here? (Yes). No, no, the communication will be seized and we will break through to Gračac, not at Velebit; only during the second stage, when the 7th and 4th Brigades are introduced, will we break through to Otrić as a key point, the same as . . . in the direction of Grahovo, and then it is completely cut off, everything, all his forces, and only that line is left for him to get out.

PRESIDENT:

Well, while this is going on, what is Gotovina doing there with these forces, which he had over there?

Davor DOMAZET:

No, he's not doing anything with these forces, because he has done everything that needs to be done; he's only waiting for their attack.

PRESIDENT:

Wait a minute, it's better for him to do something than to wait for a counterattack.

Ante GOTOVINA:

I have a proposal which may fit into the plan of the Chief of the Main Staff, and it is on the other side of Bosnia. If you allow me, I will set it out (they leaf through the map . . .) This plan conforms to the operation plan of the Chief of the Main Staff of the HV, and extends from the east to the west, that is to say, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the already existing positions of Bosansko Grahovo, and also the wider Glamoč sector. The value of this operation is to tie down the forces of the 2nd Krajina Corps, break through to Vitorog and thereby create conditions to push through to Jajce and resolve the problem of Jajce. Second, with this axis, as in the first stage, the operation would take on . . . The operation /? would evolve/ at the same time, when the forces set out from the west towards the east, the forces of the 3rd Battalion, the 126th Regiment of the 1st Croatian Guards *zdrug* and the special units of the MUP of Croatia and Herceg-Bosna, in the direction of the red land /as printed/, thereby placing Knin completely under control. The main forces of the 7th Knin Corps would be tied down in the defence of Knin. As far as other forces are concerned, I have a request, namely, let's reach agreement with the BH Army on two BH brigades which would be attached and subordinated operationally to the joint staff here of the HVO but also the HV. They would have the task of going northward in the direction of . . . to head towards Kulen Vakuf to link up with the forces of the 5th Corps, which would be advancing in the direction of Kulen Vakuf. With this here we tie down part of the forces of the 2nd Krajina Corps, and by attacking in the direction of Kulen Vakuf from two sides and further . . . and the flank, from south to north of Kulen Vakuf, and from north to south of Kulen Vakuf, the remaining forces of the 2nd Krajina Corps would be tied down as would those which have come from the Zrinski Corps, following data obtained from the intelligence service. Only later, when we have achieved a result on this side, will our forces head towards Western Bosnia; it is certain that they would direct a part of their forces to strike the flank of the forces of the Gospić Military District from the Split Military District and from the direction, what we have of the Mt. Velebit slopes, in the direction of Gračac, and they are in the direction of Otrić /as printed/. At that moment only, after well-verified information, I would engage the forces of the 7th and 4th Guards Brigade, to push through, by encirclement, in the direction of Otrić and thereby completely shatter from the flank the forces heading in the direction of the forces of the Gospić military district and other military districts, Split, together with special MUP units. This would entirely smash their main forces of the 7th Corps, the 15th Lika Corps and close off the second line of communication, that is to say, the way out from Knin in the direction of Gračac and further on towards Bosnia, and this one we already have under control, at Knin, in the direction of Drvar. First we would gain the possibility of advancing on to Jajce, from this side, because we would emerge at the Vitorog mountain, from which we would completely control the area in the

direction of Jajce. From this side we could achieve what would in effect be a linking-up with western Bosnia. And, second, /we would have/ the complete closing off of the southern sector, which would resolve the problem of the southern sector in Croatia.

PRESIDENT:

Gentlemen, I accept your views in principle. There is something still missing, and that is the fact that in such a situation when we undertake a general offensive in the entire area, even greater panic will break out in Knin than has to date. Accordingly, we should provide for certain forces which will be directly engaged in the direction of Knin. And, particularly, gentlemen, please remember how many Croatian villages and towns have been destroyed, but that's still not the situation in Knin today. . . Therefore, we will have to resolve this with UNCRO, this matter as well, and so forth. But their counterattack from Knin and so forth, it would provide very good justification for this action and accordingly, we have the pretext to strike, if we can with artillery, you can . . . for complete demoralisation . . . not just this . . . /as printed/.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Mr. President, at this moment we completely control Knin with our hardware. That's not a problem, if there is an order to strike at Knin, we will destroy it in its entirety in a few hours. With armoured forces, and medium and long-range missile systems. We are positioned at 20 km as the crow flies here from the /? pass/ . . . 20 km away from the centre of Knin. The forces heading towards Knin are 400 good infantrymen from the 3rd Battalion, the 126th Regiment, who are all from this area and they know the area through and through. They have reason to fight here and at this moment it is difficult to keep them on a leash. There is the 1st Croatian *zdrug*, which has 300 infantrymen, which has proved itself in this area at this moment, and in any case, we can count on those infantrymen. There are special units of the Croatian and Herceg-Bosna MUP, which have 350 excellent infantrymen, who have shown themselves to be outstanding in the operation. That means that we have somewhere around 1,000 good infantrymen, trained for assault operations, for quick transfers on this difficult terrain; we can easily take Knin, without any problem.

PRESIDENT:

And you should take into consideration the possibility of a helicopter assault.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, I'm thinking of that. What we are getting here . . . by striking from this direction is that we with all our forces, together with the other part of the 126th Regiment which comes from these parts, then go down the road already cut through in the direction of Uništa, we link up with the road at Uništa, advance in the direction of Svilaje with the rest of the forces and completely cut off this area, from Svilaje in the direction of Uništa and liberate it, and take control of this whole part here . . .

PRESIDENT:

Generals, officers, although we must not do anything in an ill-conceived manner, we must proceed from the fact that we have achieved such successes, from

West Slavonia and now in Bosnia, that we have gained the trust of the people, that we have the goodwill of the army, the support of a good part of international public opinion, while the enemy is utterly demoralised. Therefore, we need to be bold. That means not just having things under control, but taking it as quickly as possible, so he gets a taste of it, and we pay him back. Therefore, no risky ventures like suffering losses to achieve success. Nevertheless, I think that the political situation is so favourable that we should focus on entering Knin as soon as possible.

Ante GOTOVINA:

At this moment, from these positions, we can see, we have this and let us compare it to Sljeme from which we can see Zagreb, that's what the situation is like now.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Mr. President, If I may say so to Ante, I don't believe that he can do it with our existing forces, because in a few days, very soon, he will be in a position of defending himself, and it's highly unlikely that this can . . .

PRESIDENT:

Wait, wait a bit, he is taking as his starting point that's he sets off from the west. What Serbian forces could confront our forces from the Grahovo area, but from the west?

(Several voices heard simultaneously).

Ante GOTOVINA:

I think this is the beginning . . .

PRESIDENT:

We must build our future successes on . . . (papers being shuffled).

Davor DOMAZET:

Mr. President, this operation here, on this level, it truly resolves that main premise which remains . . . and that is what is completely on this . . . /unclear/ . . . Given that General GOTOVINA with the forces he has planned to enter Otrić at that part, and that is one of the key points which are . . . (. . . points to map) . . . you see, here, those crossroads, push through with those forces, and resolve the other critical point.

Ante GOTOVINA:

That's clear. And, there's something else, now we are closer to pushing through to Otrić . . .

Davor DOMAZET:

But, even more, under one /as printed/ – if you look at that section in isolation, not at an operational or strategic level, then it appears entirely different. We say, the forces from the west. I want to ask right away – which forces? If our 4th and 7th Brigades are there, as the main thrust of the assault, that means, that we must this here . . . /as printed/.

Ante GOTOVINA:

If you anticipated advancing on Gračac with the 2nd Battalion . . . of the Guards Brigade, with these units . . . (Z. ČERVENKO: Not at all . . .).

Davor DOMAZET:

No, don't, not that way. This operation is underway and it can /? contribute/ in terms of its offensive and dominant spirit /unclear/. We must come from the west, and we changed from the west; that's why there's no 7th Brigade on these new plans, since it is located here. And together with General MARKAČ's forces and the other forces in the Military District, including the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Brigade, it must complete this first stage of taking the /? partition wall/ as a critical point, then it has a role, this operation, here as it is . . .

Ante GOTOVINA:

At that moment it's much easier to advance from this side to Otrić.

Davor DOMAZET:

It's the only uncertainty, Mr. President, transferring the forces which exist, because the manoeuvre would be truly difficult and it's normal that it's out of the question.

PRESIDENT:

No, there's no transfer from here to the west; that's stupid.

Davor DOMAZET:

Yes, that's why I'm saying it; that's the only change. But, likewise, the Split Military District must raise sufficient forces to be able to support them, because only breaking through to Muškovica resolves the matter, because we must hold the river . . . (That's okay, yes . . .). The remainder of the operation will follow the already mapped out . . .

Ante GOTOVINA:

I guarantee that we reach Muškovica with the forces which we have at this moment.

PRESIDENT:

Let us consider first the reaction to this reply of mine, and to the current international situation. As I've already told you, my ambassador met the NATO Secretary General and he will exert efforts for understanding on our behalf. HFP /expansion unknown/ reply to the reaction to my reply, as of last night. A very stiff letter. The Croatian President has categorically refused, the Croatian authorities fear a possible Serbian attack on Eastern Slavonia. If the Krajina Serbs do not implement the six items of the agreement, we shall witness a flare-up in the region which could lead to the escalation of war. If the agreement is abided by, perhaps there will be no escalation during the next two to three days. This was stated by Richard Holbrooke. And Richard Holbrooke is responsible for this in the State Department. HP /expansion unknown/. The Croatian President said that the offer was not sufficient. He obviously is not very interested in having the UN monitor the activity of his units

while they are trying to advance through Bosnia towards Knin. TUĐMAN also said that he refuses to negotiate with the leader of the Croatian Serbs, MARTIĆ, or any other war criminal. The UN spokesman, Ganes, said, late in the evening, that the next step was up to the Serbs. If they are ready to abide by the agreement, then we shall see some progress. If Bihać is not attacked tomorrow, if humanitarian aid convoys reach Bihać without any obstacles, that means that the agreement is valid. Even before the Croats repulsed the western forces of the Bosnian Serbs, General Ratko MLADIĆ said that the agreement would not change his plans to take back all the territories lost to the Croats within the past few days. Why has KARADŽIĆ issued an order to the chief, MILOVANOVIĆ, and not to MLADIĆ?

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:
Because he is more powerful than MLADIĆ.

Davor DOMAZET:
So, there are conflicts between KARADŽIĆ and MLADIĆ, and MLADIĆ is under MILOŠEVIĆ's influence, while MILOVANOVIĆ is directly under KARADŽIĆ; that's the split between them.

PRESIDENT:
Has MLADIĆ been heard of?

Davor DOMAZET:
MLADIĆ is currently in Mrkonjićgrad, while MILOVANOVIĆ's command post is in Drvar.

Ante GOTOVINA:
Those are two currents, one from Pale, and one from Banja Luka.

PRESIDENT:
Reuters. An astonishing Croatian offensive which has overrun two towns and a huge area, has forced rebel Krajina Serbs to slacken their attacks on the west Bosnian enclave of Bihać, and to agree to talks with the enemy. But in Zagreb, Croatian President TUĐMAN rejects Akashi's proposals. An agreement without any precise deadline for implementation is nevertheless a major concession on the part of the Serbs. However, it is not clear whether this is just a Serbian ploy, in order to gain time to regroup their forces, following General Ratko MLADIĆ's arrival in the area. (Yes, Mrkonjićgrad . . .) AFP and Reuters. British Defence Minister, Michael Portillo, said on departure for Washington, where he will be spending 24 hours in talks on Bosnia, that he did not want to sound melodramatic, but that the Croatian intervention now opens up prospects of open war, in any case between the Croats and the Bosnian Serbs, which give rise to great concern. Radio Korenica, news at 1000 hours. Croatian President TUĐMAN has categorically rejected the latest proposals of the Republic of Serbian Krajina to resolve the current crisis over Bihać, Yasushi Akashi stated last night. The broadcast goes on to relay their proposal. Banja Luka does not report on the President's letter to Akashi but instead only mentions MLADIĆ's threats during his visit . . .

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

MILOVANOVIC is a greater expert than MLADIC, there is no doubt of that.

PRESIDENT:

I wouldn't go into that assessment now, but you have understood MLADIC, it can't be denied that he is . . .

Ante GOTOVINA:

He is a better military commander.

PRESIDENT:

Yes, he is a better military commander, yes, and he is brazen, and he takes advantage. Listen, he, just like KARADŽIĆ and MILOŠEVIĆ, is now using the disunity of Europe, France, England, Germany and the United States and, accordingly, they have exploited that to a maximum. It's another matter that they lack forces now. Listen, the best sign was that after our operation "Flash" in Western Slavonia they didn't succeed in taking the Orasje pocket from us, and they needed it desperately, to have a victory and to create that border on the Sava. So that is a sign of their helplessness, as a whole, which shouldn't be underestimated, but we must also count on that. If they couldn't take Orašje, how could they now endanger us in any area, particularly with a well-planned and outstandingly executed offensive action by us. I think that the idea set out by General GOTOVINA should be taken into account, the fact that the transfer of those forces to the west is absolutely out of the question, but rather their action from that area towards Knin and towards the west. You haven't told me anything about we can do, if things start off in this way about Benkovac? Do they have any forces in Benkovac, or are they up there?

Ante GOTOVINA:

At this moment, all those forces are, according to intelligence from the security service, primarily composed of members of the Benkovac Brigade, from the Obrovac, Benkovac, Đelevske, Kistanje units and were in the area of Grahovo and Glamoč. Their main forces were shattered there. This means their morale is at a low point now, and their return to Benkovac, to those brigades, and an offensive in that direction, are surely questionable. We have sufficient forces for our defence in that area, and a swift offensive by us would certainly compel their forces capable of launching a counterattack to withdraw to the north..

PRESIDENT:

We can go north, but then prepare some smaller units to enter Benkovac. Do you understand that?

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, it's clear, those are local units.

PRESIDENT:

We must be daring, in a situation of general demoralisation. Listen, with the experience you have, and I have it from the war, with the experience you have – in a situation of general demoralisation where they can no longer rely on getting help, one must be daring, and so forth.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, from that combat plan, which has already been approved, all of this has been provided for, that means, those forces which are in defensive positions have been designated . . . favourable situation, they shall set off to . . . /as printed/.

Davor DOMAZET:

. . . like forces in pursuit, the precise directions have been given to them, very small forces, where they will go deep within.

PRESIDENT:

Does anyone here have any new proposals or views as to when we can undertake such an overall operation? And you must plan it out. What DOMAZET has set out, but this has to be articulated in detail, what are the points, which are the axes from which we must take those points in order to completely vanquish the enemy later and force him to capitulate. But I've said, and we've said it here, that they should be given a way out here . . . Because it is important that those civilians set out, and then the army will follow them, and when the columns set out, they will have a psychological impact on each other.

Ante GOTOVINA:

A large number of civilians are already evacuating Knin and heading towards Banja Luka and Belgrade. That means that if we continue this pressure, probably for some time to come, there won't be so many civilians just those who have to stay, who have no possibility of leaving.

PRESIDENT:

Is an attack on Knin possible without /? hitting/ the camp which UNCRO, UNPROFOR has there . . .

Ante GOTOVINA:

At this moment, we can engage in extremely precise operations at Knin, according to a plan, without aiming at the barracks in which UNCRO is located.

Davor DOMAZET: (We have all the photographs and know exactly...).

In those southern barracks, and his forces are to the north /as printed/. Therefore, we can fire with great precision without /it/ coming in the line of fire . . . a little to the south of of Knin, that has been precisely . . .

Ante GOTOVINA:

At this moment, all of our weapons are guided, directly guided.

PRESIDENT:

This means that it nevertheless requires a bit, accordingly, our main task is not to link up in the direction of Bihać but . . . and that nevertheless requires a change in our present plans. How much time do you need to complete the plan and perhaps regroup your forces? Will this require regrouping forces?

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

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Two days, no longer.

PRESIDENT:
General CRNJAC, what?

Miljenko CRNJAC:

Mr. President, I also think we would need two or three days to regroup our forces, because this is now something new, General GOTOVINA is planning the 7th and 4th . . . that means that forces must be brought in deeper. Another thing, we don't know, I didn't know until now where the 5th Corps would be operating. If it engages in operations in the direction of General GOTOVINA, the situation changes immediately both with respect to myself and towards NORAC. Anyway, the 5th Corps is part of our plan, whether it engages in operations towards Slunj /? or/ towards Staff Brigadier NORAC. Now the 5th Corps would most probably have to go with them, and arrange for it to engage in operations towards Kulen Vakuf, that is to say, that it engages in action down . . .

PRESIDENT:
How many men do DUDAKOVIĆ and the 5th Corps have?

Ante GOTOVINA:

He has 15,000. (He does?) Yes, yes, he does; he has another 10 /thousand/, but he has no weapons to arm them with, and that's the problem. But he does have 15,000.

PRESIDENT:
All right, he can at least go through the motions of an operation towards the west and south.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:
It would be best if he were to go south.

Davor DOMAZET:
No, no, Kulen Vakuf is his, and let him go from the Bosnian side of the border.

PRESIDENT:
I know, but that does not mean, if he advances on Kulen Vakuf, with a brigade . . . he cannot go there with just a company. (He will join those things).

Miljenko CRNJAC:
Yes, that's right, this should be agreed on, but the forces which would come where the 7th was planned will need two to three days to familiarise themselves with the area, terrain, and so forth, at least that's what I think.

Mirko NORAC:
You haven't been listening; where the 7th will come, the 7th will come from the other side /as printed/; it's the same thing, and we are not changing anything on the other side, this is coming, and nothing is changing, no forces. This is the easiest

manoeuvre and the fastest, but it is the same, the goal is the same. Ante, we have understood each other immediately. (Yes, the objective is essential). Yes, it's coming to the same place, but from the other side.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, from the other side, but from this side it's much closer than a transfer. (We have no more . . .).

Mirko NORAC:

We have this here (they leaf through the map).

PRESIDENT:

What is MARKAČ's task here, who will take Ljubovo? (NORAC).

Mirko NORAC:

Mr. President, in keeping with the tasks and combat plan, we have undertaken absolutely everything. That means that we have absolutely regrouped all forces and brought them to the waiting areas, grouped . . . and demobilised units, and established this, each brigade, brought in units, and demobilised units and brought them into the waiting areas /as printed/. Only the 1st Brigade, which should arrive during the day or tomorrow, has not been regrouped. As far as I'm concerned, I need a maximum of one to two days for this part. This means that I am absolutely prepared for the execution of the operation in its entirety, in one part of the link up, and with the 5th Corps, and two auxiliary routes, in the direction of Čanak, Trnavac, outside Koreničko vrelo, outside Korenica. And my second auxiliary route is Ljubovo, where I would take control of the airport. This means that I might /? need/ a maximum of one more day which would be necessary to do it that way, although all my units are ready.

PRESIDENT:

You would have to go with the auxiliary forces towards Bihać, while with the main forces you would go south to Knin and Korenica.

Mirko NORAC:

No, no, my main direction of attack, in keeping with the combat plan is Glibodor, Lička jesenica, Saborsko, Drežin grad, while my auxiliary routes are to the south of the Plitvice lakes.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

And his brigades, and he has MARKAČ here in this direction, because he's acting in coordination with MARKAČ.

PRESIDENT:

General, this sort of plan would be in keeping. I think that we need to make some small modifications, that would be in keeping with the plan, advancing on Bihać and cutting off the enemy is important for us. But the main thing now is the auxiliary route, the auxiliary task – advancing on Bihać. The main thing now is to strike the adversary and take the area.

Mirko NORAC:

Mr. President, just another suggestion, if you permit – then I could head towards Lapac, lead this part of the forces being regrouped, which is regrouping the 1st Brigade, lead them from the direction of Ljubovo downward, via Debelo Brdo and towards Lapac. That way we can close off that direction, and the forces of the 5th Corps of the BH Army would link up with the forces of the Military District and cut off that part. But we must block off Korenica in that event.

PRESIDENT:

Yes, yes, I think so too. Yes, what?

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

In the event that this is done within, I don't know, 48 hours, they won't have time to pull out. (Yes, we're closing him in then). Yes, we're closing him in then. (Intermingling of voices). Yes, then it goes a bit to the south of Bihać, so this road remains. And they have time to pull out. (If we penetrate more deeply ...).

Davor DOMAZET:

General GOTOVINA is going in an easterly direction and reaching this point here. We take Velebit and place Gračac under supervision and establish communication, and leave room here. The plan does not have to be fundamentally modified, only a certain direction, and this is where we cut off, this part to the north and south of Plitvice. We thereby create conditions to free Slunj as a corridor, as such, so that the 5th Corps will be able to advance in both directions. I think that no major modifications are needed now, only the final preparations which will take two to three days.

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Mladen MARKAČ:

Mr. President, allow me to add something regarding my task in this plan on a micro-level related to Mr. NORAC – we will head out from Velebit – here is Sv. Rok and this is the Obrovac road – we come down from Velebit (this blue part) and have the task of getting there, blocking Gračac off and freeing ...

PRESIDENT:

When you say you're going to block Gračac off, bear in mind that there can be a state of panic in Gračac, you have to enter as quickly as possible and report that you have entered, as well as all of you who will be involved, because that will have a psychological effect in such situations. The psychological effect of the fall of a town is greater than if you shell it for two days.

Mladen MARKAČ:

The 7th Brigade was in our operative plan – we were supposed to create favourable conditions for putting in more forces, and at the same time the Croatian Army would head towards Obrovac and Muškovci. Thus, at the same time as we're doing this, an area is being opened up. However, with what Mr. NORAC has said now, it means that the task has not been changed ...

PRESIDENT:

When you start heading towards this point, they will leave Obrovac by themselves.

MLADEN MARKAČ:

There is no change in the task, except that Mr. NORAC is heading upward. That means that we are going to drive them into a pocket here and from that point we can head towards NORAC, while NORAC can head towards Lapac, and we have practically evacuated the entire area. Everything fits in and to all practical purposes we gain with this plan proposed by Mr. GOTOVINA, in practical terms the entire area is placed under . . .

PRESIDENT:

Please understand, gentlemen, the situation in their ranks. Ante, they abandoned Glamoč when? Two days before we went in, and Grahovo itself, and what the situation will be there after these Croatian victories. And they're so stupid, they're saying the Croatian Army is being led by U.S. generals and NATO aircraft. It's a general psychosis of demoralisation. But we must not allow ourselves to make a mistake and have them inflict unnecessary losses upon us, do you understand me?

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Mr. President, in Ante GOTOVINA's sector we must be careful, we cannot suffer a defeat here. What they are intending to do must not at any price /as printed/.
..

PRESIDENT:

At this moment they have no forces . . .

Davor DOMAZET:

The longer we wait . . .

And as I said, the forces they are preparing, I said that even under the most favourable conditions they couldn't engage them all, they couldn't do it in less than four to five days. This means we have two days of preparations, and we are three days ahead of them.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

It is realistic to expect that when this is cleared and their forces pulled out, then they can prepare after ten days. In that time we will clear the entire area.

PRESIDENT:

We need Thursday instead of Tuesday . . .

(Voices: Thursday morning).

But before then they should provide us with a pretext, and provoke us.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

We should ask sMARKAČ to do that.

Mladen MARKAČ:

. . . and we accuse them of having launched a sabotage attack against us and of intending to head towards Maslenica, of intending to go over Mt. Velebit to the

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road from Karlobag to Starigrad, that they want to cut it off, and that's why we were forced to intervene.

Davor DOMAZET:

I think it would be best to do it in the following way. They are using Udbina airport, we can organise an explosion as if they had struck with their airforce and in this manner we can disguise all our axes, while opening up for ourselves . . .

PRESIDENT:

And here they're carrying out a counterattack against Grahovo, our forces have repelled it and are going forward.

The same should be done up there in the north with Kostajnica . . .

Vladimir ZAGOREC:

Mr. President, we must open up a pocket for them. When they start to flee they will have to flee somewhere, they won't go towards Knin or Kostajnica, we must open up a pocket where they will flee – Dvor na Uni.

Ante GOTOVINA:

The patriarch visited them. He said a prayer, held a liturgy at Dvor na Uni and went to Knin. He changed /his plans/. He was supposed to go to Banovina, but he changed /his plans/ and went to Knin.

PRESIDENT:

Is it true that Arkan is with him?

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, they are guarding him, Mr. President.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

I wish to ask the President to tell us specifically what happens if they begin to shell Osijek. Should we do anything over there, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT:

I want to repeat what I said, we must now allow ourselves to be provoked so as to provide them with a pretext for Yugoslavia to enter the war, do you understand?

Vladimir ZAGOREC:

That would be a reason for us to head down there.

PRESIDENT:

We're not capable of doing that. It would be stupid to simultaneously advance on eastern Slavonia and Baranja. We would lose the support of those friends who are supporting us with restraint. If they shell Osijek, they will compromise themselves politically before the world, and what could we fire on, some village?

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

We have no adequate objective.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Only Beli Manastir, nothing else, not even close.

PRESIDENT:

Only if we can hit a battery, nothing but that.

Gentlemen, you know, the decision to proceed has its political, economic, financial and other aspects. What it means is that it costs us directly, and mobilisation and everything taken together both indirectly and directly. Tourism will probably not only not increase but the tourists who are now here will leave. But that's why we can't mess about. We're going to settle the matter of the south and north, do you understand? Next year, we will have Croatia and tourism, and furthermore, we are liberating forces to tailor the Croatian borders in Bosnia, demarcation. Therefore, the fact that we are adopting these decisions now and implementing them is of immense historic significance.

Zvonimir ČERMENKO:

Another point, Mr. President, if you permit. I would appreciate Mr.

ZAGOREC here saying clearly if he is capable of providing us with logistics support in terms of all the resources we request. I know the quantities of what we have, but this is essential.

Vladimir ZAGOREC:

We can extend logistical support to one part – you have the inventory. However, the amount of ammunition used up at Glamoč and Bosansko Grahovo was relatively large. I am now only interested in this and I urge all commanders to take into account the amount of ammunition expended in these operations. We have reserves for some five days. However, attention should be paid to artillery. For example, 100 mm is being used for T-55 tanks much more than 130 mm or 122 mm for artillery guns.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, this operation was very much a tank battle.

Vladimir ZAGOREC:

Yes, tanks were perhaps used more as guns, because we have this artillery ammunition.

Ante GOTOVINA:

It is such a hilly terrain, that the 130 mm and 122 mm guns, and the rocket systems are not being used so much since this is not a plateau but more of a tank fight, which implies a rapid breakthrough.

Vladimir ZAGOREC:

In a couple of days, 3,000 to 4,000 100 mm shells were fired.

PRESIDENT:

Gentlemen, I said this to all of you, and especially to some generals, that in this war we are really using up ammunition as if we were Russians or Americans. Therefore, use smaller units, engage in sabotage operations and use surprise, strike

with smaller infantry forces and even helicopter assaults where they are unexpected, but where a far greater impact can be achieved – it is clear. If we had enough, then I too would be in favour of destroying everything by shelling prior to advancing.

Vladimir ZAGOREC:

Mr. President, I guarantee that we'll have everything, or rather, we have all the supplies, but I'm just asking everyone again to cut back, and use resources much more realistically. This is unpopular, I don't just give away everything that's asked for, because once given it's used up . . .

PRESIDENT:

But tie everything together and make an assessment as to where supplies need to be given, while all of you should stop wasting and start saving. As far as we are concerned, GRANIĆ is now going to a meeting with Velayati, and we will attempt to solve it that way as well.

* ~~Davor DOMAZET:~~ Ante GOTOVINA:

The minister knows the area. The bunkers are heavily reinforced. Had we sent the infantry forward, we would have had hundreds of dead, but we advanced frontally, with a tank assault . . .

* ~~Ante GOTOVINA:~~ Vladimir ZAGOREC:

We're landing with aircraft, both our own and Muslim aircraft. However, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that we have not received a single cent since that meeting. All this in the past six months, as the minister knows very well, was just based on words, from the S-300 missiles on.

PRESIDENT:

KAŠPAR, you'll connect me with the Prime Minister when we conclude our conversation.

* ~~Ante GOTOVINA:~~ Vladimir ZAGOREC:

I told you last time that the debt was 70 million dollars; now it's a bit bigger. It's not a problem, but at least we should give something.

PRESIDENT:

The problem is clear.

(Interjection: There won't be other problems).

Just a few words with respect to propaganda. In the next two days, I think this is what we should do, advocate our victory. I think that in propaganda terms we have not exploited the situation sufficiently. I heard, there was talk of 200 to 250 dead, and that ŠORIĆ repeated it. Ante GOTOVINA told me they had 317 dead. Therefore, in order to increase morale in the ranks in Knin, announce the numbers, 300 or 350, show the three tanks you have captured and which are in use.

Davor DOMAZET:

The Grahovo Brigade alone acknowledged 400 casualties, dead and wounded .

..

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(Interjection: 1st artillery battalion /? captured/).

PRESIDENT:
That should be said.

Davor DOMAZET:
We have equipped the 3rd HVO Brigade with the captured artillery.

PRESIDENT:
Publicise that in order to improve the atmosphere in our ranks and, of course, in theirs, and in the world. Look here, that world, even our friends, as far as our operations are concerned, were labouring under the impression that the Serbs were so superior that we were helpless, from Maslenica onward, since we /? dismissed/ UNPROFOR. They kept warning me that we would suffer a defeat. Now we have reassured them a bit, but make that information public – tanks, artillery batteries, losses, that means, from today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, have this constantly repeated on TV and on the radio and that they are attacking, that they are attempting to /as printed/ by attacking, that their pull-out is just a manoeuvre, that they haven't abandoned the areas they conquered in Bihać and so forth.

Dr. MIROSLAV TUĐMAN:
Should the information be relayed over the radio as to which routes are open for them to use to pull out?

PRESIDENT:
Yes, that should be said, not the fact that the routes are open, but that it has been noticed that civilians are getting out by using such and such a route.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:
Can we say this at some point at the beginning of the operation? Can we publicise the fact so they know that the civilians are using these routes to withdraw?

PRESIDENT:
Yes, it should be said that they have set out with passenger cars, and so on.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:
But you will close off certain routes, and tell them which direction to head in, so we have as little to do as possible.

PRESIDENT:
Where is that crossing?
(Dr. M. TUĐMAN: Where the Serbs are).

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:
Here, it is even easier to see on this motoring map. It is Kulen Vakuf, the Serb/s/, it's just like I said.

PRESIDENT:
Is there a route further on?

Ante GOTOVINA:

Yes, it leads to Bosanski Petrovac, towards Drvar, here, as you can see.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

It should be said that it is not possible to pass through with tanks and guns.

PRESIDENT:

Is there anything else that needs to be clarified in principle?

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

I have a question. GOTOVINA, MARKAČ, how much time will you two require to link up?

Ante GOTOVINA:

After me, four days are necessary from two sides.

Mladen MARKAČ:

Eight to nine days in total, if General GOTOVINA has four days of work, that is to say, to get down, to carry out the operation, we anticipate four days to arrive outside Gračac.

PRESIDENT:

That's not eight days. You should start out simultaneously, which means four days.

Mladen MARKAČ:

It's a question of kilometres, Mr. President. We're doing everything on foot. The infantry is on the road and there is no communication.

(President: How many kilometres is it?)

18 kilometres from the current position to Gračac.

PRESIDENT:

You don't need four days for 18 kilometres.

Mladen MARKAČ:

It's the configuration of the terrain; they on foot. The distance is the same to the border.

Ante GOTOVINA:

We have shortened it from this side, and I am exactly 20 kilometres from Otrić.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Are you meeting up with him in Gračac?

Ante GOTOVINA:

No, in Otrić.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:
That's why I'm asking.

Ante GOTOVINA:

But he shouldn't wait for me in Otrić. When I arrive at Otrić, I will have broken off all physical communication. I work independently of that. When he cuts off, he's cut off all communications, there's nothing left, and we have reached Gračac, we have entered Gračac. There is no need to link up. This is Otrić, he is in Gračac, and the matter is resolved; that is the objective of the operation. They shouldn't enter this area, so the operation evolves . . .

PRESIDENT:

You will reach Otrić and come down here on the left hand side and see what the situation is like in Knin, /? extend/ assistance in destroying a part and, if possible, go in.

Mladen MARKAČ:

Mr. President, as soon as we take Čelavac as a communications centre and to all practical purposes the nerve centre of that part, their communications system will be finished and there will be total chaos.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Mr. President, I would like to ask, DOMAZET, please explain to me how these communications centres will go, in what order, in which phases?

Davor DOMAZET:

In the first strike, which would be the onset of the operation, we head out to the command post of the 18th Brigade in Bunić which creates conditions . . . for their system and enables the forces – Ljubovo is reached and placed under supervision.

Second, Čelavac is in that same strike, we're going to Čelavac for the purpose of leaving him only part of the communication between Knin and through Petrova Gora, to listen in to them, we shall do that by aircraft.

(Interjection: You mean from Plomina when you say Knin?)

From Plomina to Plješevica and we have it so we /? can? listen in to operative-strategic communications, and the destruction of Čelavac, we will take down all operative and tactical communications in the area of the 7th and 15th Corps. After that, when the operation in the northern part is launched, we shall go to Petrova Gora, we likewise leave Zrinska Gora so that we will be listening in to only one part of /their/ communications and finally, it ends with Zrinska Gora.

PRESIDENT:

What about their mobile /as printed/ with which they might perhaps-/? launchers/ . . .

(Interjection: You are thinking of anti-aircraft defence . . .)

PRESIDENT:

Surface to surface.

* —Ante GOTOVINA:— Davor DOMAZET:

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They can't, they have an organised position in Maja (?) and of course they can, together with Arkan, from that area – we know those positions, so we shall try to neutralise them with our artillery, and if we see from electronic reconnaissance that they are moving, then we will head straight for them with our aircraft.

PRESIDENT:

That's what I'm thinking, you shouldn't forget that.

Ante GOTOVINA:

No, that's what we planned.

PRESIDENT:

Listen, in this entire operation, where we have to cut off communication between them and take key positions, I would be very glad to see an airborne attack on some positions which are important, and where they don't have a large concentration of forces. I haven't heard of any, do you have them?

Ante GOTOVINA:

We have according to the plan, because if you look at the map here, you cannot push through the armour, only on the second day, which means, you cannot after the first 24 hours, the engineers will be working there, but inserting groups with a helicopter landing, when we land we shall take these main peaks and there we'll facilitate the advance of the engineers and behind the engineers the anti-armour forces. I have only 24 hours to push through the road and join those two roads, to advance directly by road to Otrič. Thus, in the first 24 hours we will only use the infantry, artillery attacks and landing operations in the areas. You can see this on the map, it is this ridge. Later, when we have freed up forces, we can land inside Ravni Kotari, and when we have come out on Otrič with our other forces we are approaching him from a more southerly direction.

PRESIDENT:

Maybe you should land on the Knin fortress to protect UNCRO there.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

We don't have enough helicopters.

PRESIDENT:

The more daring you are, the greater the success.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

Then 20 men can fit in a helicopter.

Ante GOTOVINA:

We have a Hercules in Šepurine.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

Let me give you a Cessna as a guide.

PRESIDENT:

Over the next two days, clearly regroup, but let the Army rest a day earlier.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Mr. President, we have reviewed what we are going to do, and the question that now remains is what if?

First, what if they shell Osijek and Vinkovci and refugees start fleeing towards Zagreb? That means that a Government Staff should exist which will organise shelter. We must plan this ahead of time.

PRESIDENT:

With the Prime Minister /get together/ a senior Staff for this. From a military viewpoint, the task /is/ just to attack their batteries.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

We know that, but what I'm talking about is when they start shelling, we might have up to 100,000 refugees. Panic might arise. They might shell him so heavily that a stampede might occur overnight. Now, the way they are deployed, we must be organised in such a manner so as not to provoke panic here. Otherwise they will have achieved a counter-effect. That's one thing.

PRESIDENT:

And stop them in the Đakovići area. Don't let them get any further.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Second, we must give clear /instructions/ to the commanders on the ground, Mr. President, about how to react if UNCRO becomes involved, which is not excluded. Last night I, the Canadians, the way they behave, they're capable of it /as printed/. Things of that sort will happen. We must give them clear instructions. That's one thing.

Second, I was thinking, Mr. President, that would be one staff. Another staff would /be for/ relations with UNCRO, someone who would be a permanent liaison, someone who would be in touch with us and resolve things with them, for us to get instructions, because matters will evolve too rapidly for us to start looking around for them and calling them. That's the second problem as I see it.

And third, Mr. President, I am not sure, Ante, you said that this operation is evolving as it should, provided that we obtain two brigades from the BH Army to head on up.

Ante GOTOVINA:

It would be a good thing if . . .

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

It would be unrealistic to expect that, if we had them, you won't get them in two days, you might get them in two weeks and the question is what would you get. That's one point.

Second, their /? drive/ to Kulen Vakuf, it's not realistic that they will do it, because then ABDIĆ could take advantage of the opportunity and he can liberate a bit, just enough for a provocation, but he cannot do anything else.

PRESIDENT:

My message should be relayed to ABDIĆ, that he should not only remain neutral, but also cooperate with the Croatian forces.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

But it's not ABDIĆ who's commanding the units, Mr. President, it's the Serbs. And while ABDIĆ is resolving those problems . . .

PRESIDENT:

Let ABDIĆ get rid of those Serbs then.

Ante GOTOVINA:

Mr. President, four days, that is to say, two days after the operation commences, we will have two Muslim brigades, if it turns out like that /as printed/.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Wait a bit, we're not launching an operation "if", Ante, "if", that "if" is welcome, but we must know precisely what we can achieve.

Ante GOTOVINA:

You've noticed that I haven't placed the arrow in the direction of Kulen Vakuf. I said that this would be my request.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Wait a minute, but that means that they can pin you down with a counterattack so you are unable to attack.

Ante GOTOVINA:

No, but I will have to free part of the forces to protect the flank.

PRESIDENT:

They cannot pin you down, they can't, they don't have the forces to pin down all our forces, that's a fact. The question is whether he can undertake offensive action towards the west, depending on what you will obtain, but you must solve that with fewer forces.

Ante GOTOVINA:

It would be ideal if the 4th Corps headed towards Kulen Vakuf and if we dispatched two brigades in the direction of Kulen Vakuf.

Dr. Miroslav TUĐMAN:

You must take into account that if this is postponed for two days, that means that they will have four or five days until the end of the operation, they will have time to transfer these forces and you will be subject to an attack over there. That's their only chance to weaken the pressure on Knin.

Therefore, it will be necessary to determine, there will be pressure and you must count on that.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Third, Mr. President, let me just finish. Can we have your agreement, provided that we will face risks if we lose? I think that it would have a psychological effect on them if we, after the first day of the operation at Benkovac and Obrovac, take the risk of throwing leaflets which could /? cause losses/, but we would know in advance that it is something we have risked, but we would call on them in your name, whatever kind of leaflet we make, after the first day of the operation. We would point out the routes which they could use to pull out, and formulate them in such a manner to double the confusion such as it is. But we must take a risk then and find the people to do it, and I believe that there are those who would take the risk of doing it.

PRESIDENT:

A leaflet of this sort – general chaos, the victory of the Croatian Army supported by the international community and so forth. Serbs, you are already withdrawing, and so forth, and we are appealing to you not to withdraw, we guarantee ... This means giving them a way out, while ostensibly guaranteeing them civil rights, etc...

Dr. Miroslav TUDMAN:

If I may say so, it is evident that they tend to listen more to the radio and television instead of reading leaflets. It's better to use radio and television ...

* See
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PRESIDENT:

Use radio and television, but leaflets as well.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Use leaflets, but drop them among them. Instilling the feeling among them that you have succeeded, that you are above them, that you are dropping leaflets, this will provoke something.

PRESIDENT:

I agree, it also proves our strength. Good, we'll go along with it.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Another matter, Mr. President. In that case, would we not need someone from your office, in order to re-establish this staff for propaganda. We established this staff in Posušje, but now this is being returned to Zagreb today, and we need someone from your office to be the contact person. Perhaps Ms. RAJAKOVIĆ, she should be on the spot in Zagreb, for it to function like last time.

PRESIDENT:

This is a question to be dealt with, what you just said and also in reference to UNCRO, and this means ŠARINIĆ. What I'd like to know is whether it is safer to coordinate and manage affairs from Brioni or Zagreb.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

In psychological terms it would be very bad if you were to coordinate from here, Mr President, because of the population. Many people might take advantage of it, you know, the troops are being killed while you ... it could be seen in that context.

On the other hand, knowing your lack of caution, perhaps it is better to remain here than in Zagreb. We come to an agreement on this, but you should coordinate activities from Zagreb. I think that's much better.

PRESIDENT:

In political terms, it is absolutely better.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

That's one thing; the second point is that there will be the ambassadors, Mr. President, Galbraith and all the rest who will be there . . .

PRESIDENT:

They'll get their backs up.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

They've done their job, they will stay. When we take all this into account, Mr. President, it is my estimate that we cannot set out before Friday.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Mr. President, I wish to return once again to the fact that the existing plans have been drawn up, and they are clear, preparations have been carried out, and our objective should be the first stage and then we should see, at that stage, what should be done further.

PRESIDENT:

Nothing, why further?

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

There is no first stage. We're going to go.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

We're going all the way. That will be the turning point.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

If, in psychological terms, you have a first stage, and then stop . . .

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

No, we won't stop, you didn't understand me, Minister.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Mr. President, I also wish to suggest that however capable MARKAČ is capable of goading them into causing provocation, they might fire on him somewhere on Mt. Velebit. This will not serve as some form of cover. NORAC should provoke something together with him; they can perhaps fire two shells at Gospić or somewhere. I think it should be an inhabited place; the area MARKAČ will be in, that is under Mt. Velebit, they could be firing all day.

Everyone is inside; NORAC is inside, and MARKAČ is inside.

PRESIDENT:

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He doesn't have to go in . . .

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

But he also has an axis; they are not fools, Mr. President, the hardware has come a long way. UNPROFOR is recording the axis and we don't now if they will let them through.

PRESIDENT:

Let them record it, when we finish up in four or five days.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Good, but why would /?we/, when we have the right way of carrying this out.

NORAC:

. . . use mortars in that area throughout the night or the day, and fire several missiles.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

And last, Mr. President, if it were ŠARINIĆ, who's already in contact with the main commander here, they would each at their own level have to establish some kind of contact to tell the ones over here how far ahead they should give it /as printed/.

Mladen MARKAČ:

. . . they didn't want to give it on time; this time we should just give them an hour, just enough to take cover.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

We met with understanding over there. There was an Argentine, I gave him two, and he reacted in one. That's what I would do here, Mr. President, Hrvoje or whoever should give the one who is in charge two, and they should give one /as printed/.

PRESIDENT:

Then, gentlemen, this is what we'll do. On Thursday I will come to Zagreb, I will also tell ŠARINIĆ, we will be in Zagreb, the negotiations will be held in Geneva on Thursday, and you use that time to prepare everything. That is to say, tonight you can just let them know, and then tomorrow or the next day . . .

(Interjection: Provocations tomorrow and the day after).

Yes.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

And for Friday, I think that GOTOVINA should be the most aware of this, that the Guards *zdrug* and all those who are supposed to go, they are all on leave already.

PRESIDENT:

What, should we?

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

Let them go home, I don't think so. We can put them up so they can rest for two days. That's not a problem.

Miljenko CRNJAC:

I have a proposal for the second day, Mr. President. We don't know when the operation will take place, but I suggest that the commanders of the Military District come to the Main Staff so we can agree on the time and space for an operation. We should agree on this and we should know it.

PRESIDENT:

Wait, today is Monday, and you meet on Wednesday.

Mladen MARKAČ:

We will organise it.

PRESIDENT:

But on Wednesday, you can agree on that right away, on Wednesday in the Main Staff and at what time.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

They have communication links, they don't have to agree now.

PRESIDENT:

It's better to agree on that now, rather than resorting to communications.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:

Mr. President, we have an operations team which knows what it's doing. Therefore, CRNJAC, we would have called you even if you hadn't mentioned it now.

PRESIDENT:

I know, but it's a good idea for you to meet again in order to coordinate matters.

Kinkel has promised that Germany will support us, but we have to inform them ahead of time.

The main problem will be with UNCRO, with those Japanese bugs. It is their proposal, Akashi argued it with them for five hours, and then submitted proposals that UNCRO would deploy towards Bihać to stop us and would place observers on Dinar.

Gojko ŠUŠAK:

But they are insulted, Mr. President, he's speaking of the borders of Bihać and the Serbian Krajina; there's no Croatia in the agreement. I wouldn't go to Geneva.

PRESIDENT:

Hold on, I'm going to Geneva to hide this, and not to talk. I won't send a Minister but the Assistant Foreign Minister. That's on Thursday.

So, I /want/ to hide what we are preparing for the day after. And we can rebut any argument in the world about how we didn't want to talk, but that we only wanted what . . .

The Russians will do everything possible in the United Nations to influence Zagreb, to restrain Zagreb. That the Croatian offensive, primarily that the Croatian Serbs desist from their offensive against Bihać. The Russians are also against action

by the Bosnian Serbs, and this would complicate matters and lead not only to a diplomatic but to . . . /as printed/.

* Reuters, Moscow. High Russian representative in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.../inaudible/ said today that Russia is going to present the issue of the Croatian offensive in Western Bosnia before the Security Council. Russia is considering the development of the situation in Western Bosnia. If it continues, they shall do everything they can that the Security Council retaliate against Croatia and so forth. Ok, ok.,

So, you're meeting on, we said, Wednesday, when, at what time?

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:
We'll get to that.

PRESIDENT:
When? Arrange things now.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:
Mr. President, we see the problems that we have, I will easily inform them about them. We meet almost every day.

PRESIDENT:
You in the Staff, that's another matter, but /I'm talking about/ meeting with the commanders.

Zvonimir ČERVENKO:
All right, then it's Wednesday at 1600 hours.

PRESIDENT:
So agree in principle, in the spirit of what we have now discussed. I tell you, it's better if you arrange things now.

(Interjection: Wednesday, 1000 hours).

Each of you should draw up programmes for yourselves and coordinate them in the Staff. Then coordinate how things are going to evolve not only from day to day but from hour to hour.

You will stay for lunch for half an hour and then you can go.

/Meeting ended at 1240 hours/.

* See (D)
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