AIR POWER AND INTERVENTION: THE ROYAL AIR FORCE EXPERIENCE IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA, 1992-1995

By Dr David Jordan

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Abstract: The Royal Air Force's operations in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995 are little-publicised compared to the later intervention in Kosovo in 1999. However, they demonstrated the political utility of air power for states wishing to intervene in complex conflicts and illustrated its potential to play a dominant role in shaping political conditions when the use of force became necessary. This article discusses such success, but also explores some of the challenges that faced the RAF in conducting its operations: commitments to simultaneous No Fly Zones over Iraq engendered overstretch, and budgetary constraints required the Service to 'do more with less'. Ultimately, it argues that the RAF's experience over the former Yugoslavia highlighted the importance of achieving national policy objectives not only in terms of delivering military force, but in securing international influence too. This lesson is likely to remain a constant in the second century of the Service.

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INTRODUCTION

As early as 1994, Professor Eliot Cohen observed that air power was 'like modern courtship, offering gratification without commitment'.[1] It is not unfair to suggest that this is one of the best-known asides about the use of air power thanks to its frequent repetition. Unfortunately, this witticism is often remembered to the exclusion of his principal point that politicians appeared to view the use of air power as a means of managing conflicts at lower human and political cost than might otherwise be the case. Hence, he proposed, air power offered a mechanism by which the post-Cold War 'New World Order' of peace and prosperity could be maintained without deploying large numbers of ground troops. Professor Cohen's thinking was clearly influenced by events during and after the 1991 Gulf War. Air power played a vital part in this conflict, which appeared to be both an exemplar of how this era of peaceful co-existence would be enforced, and an illustration of air power's potential.

Yet the period immediately following the end of the Cold War did not bring with it the peace and stability which many had predicted; rather, the 'New World Order' proved to be disorderly and violent, with significant interventions by the international community throughout the 1990s. As a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the United Kingdom played a notable part in these operations. It did so against a back-drop of defence reductions (dubbed in the UK 'The Peace Dividend') and in an era where the use of air power as the principal tool of intervention became commonplace.

This article seeks to examine the Royal Air Force's (RAF) part in the intervention in the Former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995 where air power was chosen as the tool for international involvement. It observes that although the RAF, along with other British forces, was subject to a series of reductions in strength and funding, the number of commitments and pressures did not reduce. The intervention in Yugoslavia was accompanied by the maintenance of standing commitments and involvement in the enforcement of No Fly Zones over Iraq, (a commitment which endured until the 2003 invasion of that country), in which the RAF played a notable part. Thus, this article seeks to highlight the fact that, while a little-publicised part of the RAF's history to date, its operations in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s illustrated the political utility of air power, and on occasion, its ability to play a dominant role in shaping political conditions when the use of force became necessary. The events between 1992 and 1995 demonstrated Cohen's overall point that nations wishing to intervene in complex conflicts saw the use of air power as an alternative to the deployment of troops, either *in toto*, or with air power being used as an alternative means of delivering military power.

THE NEED FOR INTERVENTION: BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS IN YUGOSLAVIA

The events in the Persian Gulf in 1990-91 had, to some extent, obscured the crisis in Yugoslavia which had been developing over the preceding decade. After the death of

Marshal Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia had been subject to growing political tension due to a resurgence of nationalist sentiment in the six republics which constituted the Federal State. Tito had been fully aware of the challenges to stability posed by unfettered nationalism, and had done his utmost to contain it, cognisant that only firm leadership mixed with an attempt to sate some of the sentiment might prevent disaster. Aware of his power as a unifying figure, Tito's speeches made regular reference to the importance of 'brotherhood and unity' amongst the six republics.[2] Tito's concept was popular, but was inextricably linked to him and his equally-popular Vice President Edvard Kardelj.[3] Without Tito, there was a serious danger that long-held nationalist grievances would come to the fore. As Sabrina Petra Ramet noted, 'the story of Yugoslavia is a story...of the failure of political cooperation'.[4] In the absence of cooperation, Tito used a mixture of coercion, conviction and constitutional change as a means of control, but feared that once he was no longer in power, the federal state would unravel.

In a bid to stop this, prior to his death in 1980, Tito introduced constitutional changes which brought about a rotating presidency of twelve months, with the post to be held by the leader of each Yugoslav republic and the two autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina in turn. While this seemed like a sensible means of ensuring that no republic was perceived to have staged a takeover of the Yugoslav Republic, it in effect ensured that the head of state was hamstrung by a lack of time to achieve anything, or to set any particular direction for the country. The end result was that rather than alleviating any possible tensions between the individual republics, the new system simply helped to exacerbate them. Tito had been predeceased in 1979 by Kardelj – thus the two key unifying figures in the federal state were gone, and the new constitutional system was fatally flawed.[5]

The first flashpoint occurred with protests by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo as early as 1981. These were suppressed by the authorities, resulting in a number of fatalities, but marked the point at which the tensions which would ultimately lead to the collapse of Yugoslavia came to the fore.[6] A burgeoning economic crisis in the mid-1980s added to the tensions, particularly as the wealthier republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, sensed that they were being required to bail out the less well-off republics such as Serbia. This was coupled with a growing resentment of the Communist leadership of Yugoslavia, which was seen to be venal and corrupt. Economic mismanagement culminated in austerity and, in 1987 and 1988, a wave of strikes broke out in protest at the government's failings.[7]

The situation was exploited by an ambitious Serbian politician, Slobodan Milošević, who made several hard-line speeches which aimed to appeal to Serbian nationalist sentiment; these included calls for greater centralisation of the government, which implied a greater level of Serbian control. He further boosted his political power in 1989 through the installation of a pro-Milošević government in the Republic of Montenegro.

By early Spring 1989 his political position had improved considerably, as he had created a situation where, in the eight-strong Presidency of Yugoslavia, he could always rely upon half the votes – Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro.

This was not welcome news for Croatia or Slovenia, where the general sentiment was that they should seek to leave the Federal Republic and establish themselves as independent states. The collapse of the Communist party in the 1990 pan-Yugoslav elections only increased the influence of the nationalist politicians on all sides. Serbia and Montenegro sought a Serbian-dominated state under a centralised government, while the Croats, led by Franjo Tudjman, moved towards the notion of an independent state. The position in Slovenia was even worse for the supporters of a continuing Yugoslav federated state, in that a range of democratising reforms had been passed in 1989, and by the end of 1990 there was a distinct push towards the declaration of an independent Slovenia. This was confirmed in a referendum in December that year, in which 88 per cent of the electorate voted in favour of an independent state, a step which was unacceptable to Milošević and his supporters. Croatia followed suit in a referendum in May 1991, by which point there had already been sporadic ethnic violence between Serbs and Croats. In both Croatia and Slovenia, members of the Serbian population, anxious not to be separated from Serbia itself, became vocal in their opposition to independence, with clear support from Milošević.

This did little to change the secessionist mood in either Croatia's capital, Zagreb, or Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, and on 25 June 1991, both republics declared independence. Even before the Croatian referendum, the deteriorating situation had led to the United Nations agreeing to establish a peacekeeping force – the United Nations Protection Force, or UNPROFOR – under Security Council Resolution 743. UNPROFOR's task was to ensure that conditions existed for peace talks, and to protect three so-called 'safe-havens' which were in Croatian territory, but claimed by the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina on the basis of an unrecognised referendum in which the Serbian population of the areas had voted to leave Croatia.

The declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia were unacceptable to the government in Belgrade, and the federal Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) was despatched to Slovenia in a bid to stop the secession. The JNA was the only federal institution of note remaining and, under the 1974 constitution, was responsible for maintaining the Republic's territorial integrity.[8] The JNA was not the sole defence component, since each republic had its own territorial force. The notion had been that this structure would ensure that the JNA could not mount a coup, but it also ensured that the secessionist states had the basis for their own armed forces.[9] Those in Slovenia proved capable, and after what became known as the 'Ten Day War',the JNA had to admit defeat. The last federal troops departed Slovenia at the end of July 1991, and before the close of the

year, a new constitution had been adopted. Slovenia was recognised as a state in early 1992, first by the European Community and then by the United Nations.

The transition for Croatia was far less smooth, and when the JNA intervened there in August 1991, the fighting was more intense than had been the case in Slovenia. The conflict went on for several months, but by the end of the year, particularly after the unexpectedly long siege of Vukovar, the JNA had reached its culminating point, being short of manpower. The government in Belgrade decided to seek a negotiated peace rather than attempt to escalate the war, being painfully aware of the fact that the Croatian forces were growing in strength. The result was a ceasefire on 3 January 1992, bringing about an uneasy peace which would last for three years before the fighting resumed.[10]

The position was more complicated in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina owing to its multi-ethnic status. The three main groups of inhabitants comprised Bosniaks (around 45 per cent of the population), Orthodox Serbs (approximately 33 per cent) and Croats (17 per cent), and views on the future of the Republic were polarised. An independence referendum called for 29 February 1992 was boycotted by the Serbian population, and the result – a clear victory for secession from Yugoslavia – was promptly rejected by the Bosnian Serbs, led by Radovan Karadžić.

International recognition of the independence of Bosnia was ignored by the Bosnian Serbs, who established themselves under the auspices of the Republika Srpska. Bosnian Serb units, fully supported by Belgrade, embarked upon a campaign to secure territory held by ethnic Serbs. These troops (subsequently the Army of Republika Srpska, known as the VRS) led by General Ratko Mladić, fought against the mainly Bosniak Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) and troops from the Croatian Defence Force (HVO). The relationship between the anti-Serb sides was tense, and by October 1992, the ARBiH and HVO were fighting each other for territory, as well as fighting against the Serbs.[11]

The international community was in many ways taken by surprise by this turn of events. As Mark Almond remarked, attention turned to Yugoslavia only 'once the guns had begun to fire', and it was not surprising that the response was initially patchy.[12] The United Nations had imposed an arms embargo under UN Security Council Resolution 713 on 25 September 1991, but this passed a considerable advantage to the Serbs as the JNA was well-equipped and thus overmatched its Bosnian opponents.

In the United States, Congress took the view that the arms embargo should be lifted. This view gained some support from the Democratic party during the 1992 Presidential Election, but once President Clinton was in office, he came to the view that the policy was not helpful. Although he was not unsympathetic to the idea, Clinton felt that a

unilateral lifting of the embargo, accompanied by NATO air attacks against the Serbs (so called 'lift and strike'), would create a position where the Serbs would be less able to dominate their neighbours, causing more fighting and possibly serious political difficulties with key European allies.[13]

There was considerable reluctance on the part of the key European states to become involved in the war. In addition, there was a sense in Washington that the war was something for Europe to address, rather than call on the United States for help. The US and British governments initially felt that no good would come of intervention, and although the United States' frustration meant the notion of 'lift and strike' endured, the objections from the European Community and Russia meant that it was difficult to envisage it being implemented. The British government was wary of the implications of intervention in terms of long-term commitments to peacekeeping. Though supportive of peace plans from the United Nations and the European Community (EC), the even-handed approach that Prime Minister John Major's administration sought to adopt caused considerable controversy, both at the time and subsequently.[14]

The view that an even-handed approach should be adopted was difficult to sustain in the face of media coverage of events in Bosnia, particularly when the VRS surrounded Sarajevo in early May 1992 and placed it under siege. Media coverage of the besieging forces firing artillery and mortars into the city, as well as sniping against civilians, caused international outrage, and on 26 June, the UN Secretary General, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued an ultimatum to the Serbs that they permit UNPROFOR to operate the airport at Sarajevo. UNPROFOR units moved into Bosnia and took over the airport, without any VRS opposition, on 29 June. The siege of Sarajevo would last for four years, and marked the first significant intervention by the RAF in the former Yugoslavia, under the auspices of Operation Cheshire, an air mobility operation. A cynical air power historian might wearily observe that it is entirely unsurprising that little popular literature exists to describe this long-running commitment for the Hercules C1/C3 fleet of the Lyneham Transport Wing.

THE RAF AND OPERATION CHESHIRE

The request for support to Sarajevo led to the British government agreeing to deploy a Hercules to Zagreb to join a multi-national effort with Italy, Canada, France, Germany and the United States. The presence of the UN in Croatia was not well-regarded by all locals (UNPROFOR was known as 'Serbprofor' by some Croats), and the potential threat to the aircraft involved was demonstrated by a failed attempt to shoot one down as it took off from Zagreb.[15] In August, one of the RAF Hercules flights received indications that a Serbian radar had locked on to it, while on 3 September 1992, an Italian G222 carrying aid was shot down by a surface-to-air missile.[16] Although the dangers of the approach to Sarajevo could not be reduced other than by the use of defensive aids and the aircraft's

approach profile, it was possible to address the dangers of operating from Zagreb by relocating the airlift to the Italian airfield at Ancona. A more structured operation was established, with the creation of a Joint Air Operations Centre, which contained a UN Representative as a member of the staff. Liaison officer posts from all the participating nations were established at the headquarters of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to coordinate the airlift with the requirements of the UNHCR. The arrangement highlighted one notable issue with the humanitarian effort in that if an aircraft was threatened by one of the warring parties, all that could be done was a *post facto* protest from the UNHCR if the source of the threat could be readily identified.[17]

During 1993 there were greater efforts to engage participating aircraft, with some being damaged by small arms fire. Aircraft were also regularly tracked by the radars of surface-to-air missile sites, a source of particular concern after the loss of the G222. The hazards were highlighted again in 1994, when a German C.160 Transall only avoided being shot down thanks to the swift reactions of the crew to defeat the threat. The award of a Distinguished Flying Cross to one of the participating Hercules aircrew illustrated how hazardous humanitarian operations could be, even when fully authorised by the United Nations. Heavy fighting around Sarajevo airport in April 1995 caused a temporary cessation of flights, which would resume after the ceasefire arranged in September. By the end of Operation Cheshire in July 1996, the RAF had delivered over 26,000 tonnes of supplies, giving the British government a degree of influence in operations that was far beyond its initial desire to engage in the bitter Yugoslav conflict.[18] In many ways, Operation Cheshire marked a considerable escalation in Britain's role in the war. Although the operation was presented as a humanitarian airlift, it was, in effect, a declaration of support for the Bosnians, and the Serbians might have taken the view that while the operation was supposedly conducted under the auspices of the UN, it was, in fact, a demonstration of partiality:

> In practice, [the UN's] studied impartiality was highly misleading. It was always going to be difficult to confine UN actions to the conflict's symptoms without taking any steps to address its causes. When sieges of population centers [sic] were so central to one side's strategy, breaking them could never be a neutral act. Over time the actual role of the UN operation became more overtly to sustain the rump of a Bosnian state.[19]

Nevertheless, the Serbs allowed the breaking of the siege, quite possibly influenced by concern over just how far their efforts to disrupt the flights would be allowed to go before provoking NATO nations into action.

DEEPER INVOLVEMENT

Although the British government was reluctant to become more deeply involved in the Yugoslavia crisis, even by the middle of 1992 it had become clear that this was

neither politically acceptable, nor was it in keeping with the view that Britain's position as a permanent member of the UNSC bestowed a certain responsibility on it to participate in peacekeeping operations and that the humanitarian airlift alone would be insufficient.[20]

The events of the spring and summer of 1992 saw increasing reports of 'ethnic cleansing', where those of other ethnic groups were murdered or forced from their homes. This was particularly prevalent in Serb areas, although not exclusive to them. The media coverage meant that the British government's preferred option of not becoming too deeply involved in a complex and difficult conflict became unsustainable. The duty of chairing the EC had recently been assumed by the UK (which saw the task rotate between member states), and Prime Minister Major took the opportunity to call a joint EC-UN international conference on Bosnia, held in London in August 1992. This created a War Crimes Commission to examine the extent of the atrocities, and led to the Serbian leaders giving pledges that they would withdraw their heavy weaponry from around Bosnian towns and cities so that the artillery pieces could be placed under UN supervision, and the sieges of several locations would be lifted. The conference agreed that one option which should be implemented was a No Fly Zone (NFZ) over Bosnia, although there was no immediate mechanism to enforce it.[21]

Within a month, hopes that the conflict might be brought under control were dashed. Serbian forces were again shelling Sarajevo and other towns which were supposedly no longer being targeted. It was becoming clear that without any credible threat of action to enforce the terms agreed at the London Conference, the war would continue. There was little will in either Washington or European capitals to commit large numbers of troops in a bid to separate the warring parties and to begin peacekeeping.

While the British government could make justifiable references to the amount of aid being delivered, the political climate meant that it was almost inevitable that British forces would be committed on a remit beyond that of Operation Cheshire. Indeed following UNSCR 776 in September 1992, it was agreed that British troops would participate in what was known as UNPROFOR2. This brought with it the deployment of helicopters (from all three services) in support of the troops. The hope was that Lord (David) Owen and Cyrus Vance would succeed in bringing about some sort of agreement between the various sides in the civil war.[22] The subsequent Vance-Owen plan was issued in January 1993 and, following negotiations, was accepted by Radovan Karadžić on 30 April. Hopes that it might bring about peace foundered when the plan was rejected by the Republika Srpska National Assembly in May, a decision confirmed by a referendum in Republika Srpska territory the following month. Cyrus Vance had resigned by this point, and had been replaced by the Norwegian politician and diplomat Thorvald Stoltenberg who worked with Owen in a bid to come up with a new plan.[23]

In the interim, the vague hope of the London Conference that air attacks on the Bosnian Muslims would end had not been realised: without an enforcement mechanism, the plan had just been ignored. This led to UNSCR 781 on 9 October 1992 which banned military flights. Once again, though, enforcement was singularly absent from the Resolution, which instead called upon UNPROFOR to monitor flights and to report violations.[24]

Frustration at the failure of what was known as Operation Sky Monitor led to the UNSCR 816 on 31 March 1993. This noted the non-observance of the ban on military activities and called upon member states to take 'all necessary measures' to close airspace over Bosnia to military aviation. This task was taken on by NATO under the auspices of Operation Deny Flight.

Any thoughts that the Vance-Owen plan might be enforced by the UN were rejected at the Washington conference between Britain, France, Spain, Russia and the US on 22 May 1993. The conference agreed that the plan was unworkable, and instead, Bosnia's Muslim population would be concentrated in safe areas which would be protected by UNPROFOR troops.[25] UNPROFOR's rules of engagement limited them to self-defence, which meant that the troops were unable to protect the population of the safe havens. This was a significant issue which would, in due course, lead to tragedy.

The United States, in particular, had not abandoned notions of 'lift and strike' and seeking to coerce the Republika Srpska towards accepting peace proposals, but found that its allies were still unconvinced. An element of coercive force was introduced, though, with the decision under UNSCR 836 on 4 June to authorise the use of air support for UNPROFOR. Control of the strikes was to prove complex and frustrating. Assets were held under a 'dual key' arrangement whereby attacks had to be approved by both NATO and UN Headquarters in New York. This proved incredibly unwieldly, and the UN command and control function was devolved to the Secretary General's special representative, Yasushi Akashi. Even this was problematic, since all requests for support went to the UN Air Operations Centre in Kiseljak, from where they would be passed to Akashi. He then considered the request, and if approved, the authorisation to attack would come in the form of a request to NATO for the delivery of close air support, whereupon NATO would issue orders for the strike to be carried out.[26] It is difficult to think of a less timely means of providing air support.

THE RAF DEPLOYS

The RAF's contribution came in the form of the Tornado F3 force. Eight aircraft were deployed to Gioia del Colle in Italy in a commitment which was to last for two years. This occurred as the size of the Tornado F3 force was reduced under defence cuts, while the ongoing commitments to both national Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) and QRA in the Falkland Islands remained at the same level. Each F3 squadron was committed to a three-month period in which it would maintain the RAF's contribution before handing

over to another unit. The F3s maintained daily Combat Air Patrols (CAPs) in a bid to ensure that the NFZ was maintained.

The growing fear that UNPROFOR troops were at risk of being overmatched by the Serbian forces also led to a decision to commit close air support assets. This saw the deployment of elements of the RAF's Jaguar GR1 force from Coltishall. The Jaguar force had recently handed over the Iraq NFZ commitment to the Harrier force, but any thoughts of a return to normal training routines and addressing any skills fade which had occurred had to be put to one side as orders came to deploy twelve aircraft to Gioia del Colle under the auspices of Operation Hampden.[27] The scale of the detachment should not be underestimated. Although the fast jet component inevitably gained the most media attention, support helicopters also played an integral part in UNPROFOR operations, while the sustainment of the RAF's detachment at Gioia began with thirty-six C-130 loads of personnel and equipment necessary for a deployment of uncertain duration. Once again, the whole force was used to provide the assets and personnel for the detachment, with the Jaguars' duties again being to provide a reconnaissance capability in addition to being able to deliver weapons against ground targets if called upon to do so. The Jaguar force might fly up to eight sorties a day, although unlike the Tornados, the Jaguars operated only during daylight hours. All the operations were conducted through NATO's 5th Allied Tactical Air Force (5ATAF), which would authorise any close support missions which were required by UNPROFOR units.[28] As noted, the tasking chain proved to be particularly cumbersome and frustrating, with political considerations over the use of air attacks sometimes ensuring that the ability to deliver timely attacks was all-but negated as the situation on the ground changed long before any attack could be carried out.

Most of the Jaguar deployment's routine saw a split between being airborne and ready to provide CAS (about 60% of the tasking) and reconnaissance (for the remainder). On some occasions, aircraft came close to delivering weapons against threats to UNPROFOR units, although shows of presence were frequently sufficient to dissuade the threat from developing further, or to bring about a cessation of firing on the UNPROFOR positions.[29]

The deployment further highlighted the problem that detachments to support specific operations could lead to skills fade amongst the pilots, with low-level flying, weaponeering and air combat training all suffering as a result of the nature of the deployment over Bosnia. Meanwhile, other commitments – such as deployment for arctic training for the Jaguar force – also had to be met with stretched resources. By November 1993, the government felt compelled to halt the major defence restructuring that was underway, and announced a further review, which was to become known as 'Front Line First.'[30] The review was, in many ways, disappointing, as the solutions it produced might have been summed up as 'Second Line Second', since

supporting functions and resources were reduced and restructured, creating further difficulties in sustaining the Front Line, which did not benefit as much as might have been the case. As Colin McInnes later observed:

> Neither [Options for Change nor Front Line First] was a comprehensive review, looking at the totality of defence policy and programmes; nor did either take a perspective extending much more than a few years into the future. Further, defence budgets proved vulnerable to regular and unplanned cuts as the economy weakened and pressure to contain public expenditure grew. The period 1990–7 was therefore characterized more by a rolling review than by stable planning.[31]

This hardly helped when it came to taking on a series of deployed commitments. This was particularly true for the RAF, which had spent most of the period between 1945 and 1991 operating from well-found Main Operating Bases (MOBs), and the transition to what was essentially long-term expeditionary warfare proved to be a notable challenge. This began a cycle where aircrew saw a number of their skills reduce as they flew operations over Iraq and Bosnia, and then had to work up to regain them once the deployment was over, in case these skills were required elsewhere. The experience of the RAF (and, for that matter, the Fleet Air Arm) during the 1990s is a key demonstration that multiple commitments of air power require a robust force structure which is able to accommodate a proportion of aircrew (and their support) being deployed without there being a deleterious effect on overall capability.

By April 1994, the situation in Bosnia had, if anything, deteriorated. USAF F-16s had shot down four Serbian aircraft violating the NFZ on 28 February, and while this had a salutary effect on Serbian fixed-wing activity, there were considerable difficulties in tracking low-flying helicopters using terrain to make locating them on radar difficult. Although the Tornado F3 force developed a high degree of proficiency at locating and following helicopters violating the NFZ, the ROE were never met to the necessary degree for an engagement to be prosecuted.[32] The Serbs continued with their operations with little regard for the UN or UNPROFOR, although the deaths of 68 civilians in Sarajevo when a Serbian mortar shell struck a market briefly seemed to offer the prospect of action being taken against the besieging forces. NATO declared an exclusion zone around Sarajevo for heavy weapons, and threatened to attack Serb forces if they did not withdraw.[33] Compliance with the NATO demands brought the end to the shelling of Sarajevo, but any thoughts that this would moderate the VRS's approach were soon abandoned.

A threat to the safe haven at Gorazde led to a UN ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs that action would be taken against them if they continued their attack. During the Serb attack on 16 April 1994, a pair of Sea Harriers from HMS *Ark Royal* had been tasked to provide air support. The target – a tank – was in a wood and difficult to locate, and

while attempting to find and engage it, the Sea Harrier flown by Lieutenant Nick Richardson was hit by a SAM, and he was forced to eject. He was safely recovered in an operation which called upon the services of a French helicopter to recover both him and the Special Forces team he had been attempting to support.[34] The incident also highlighted some of the frustrations about the provision of air support through the UN tasking chain, with Richardson reporting that the UNPROFOR commander, General Sir Michael Rose, expressed his 'anger and frustration at how he had been prevented from handling Gorazde the way he would have liked by the bureaucrats at the UN.'[35] Rose's frustrations were a reflection of the dilemma the UN faced. Unwilling to be seen to be taking sides through effectively providing air support to one of the warring parties, the decision-making process to authorise strikes was laborious and doubts as to the possible outcomes of attacks seemed to have frequently dissuaded the UN from granting approvals.[36]

As the UN 'wandered about in a conceptual void', apparently unwilling to turn peacekeeping into peace enforcement, the utter disregard shown by the Serbs towards the UN Safe Havens and the apparent lack of willingness to respond robustly increased the number of questions asked about the way in which the UN was dealing with the crisis.[37] This, in turn, led to calls for NATO to be given the task of imposing peace. This was not an attractive proposition at that time for a number of NATO states, anxious not to become embroiled in the seemingly open-ended commitment which might result.

Nevertheless, the operational tempo for the Jaguar detachment further increased, with extra taskings for CAS and reconnaissance sorties. 5ATAF's procedures had developed so that a considerable emphasis began to be placed upon the presence of airborne Forward Air Controllers to direct strike assets against ground targets. The importance of being able to deliver weapons accurately against targets in the midst of a confused situation on the ground was fully understood by NATO and the UN. The concern that an air attack might accidentally strike civilians, or cause serious collateral damage was ever-present, particularly amongst UN officials, and it was appreciated that both parties in the civil war would be more than ready to make use of such accidents for their own propaganda purposes.

Still the situation worsened, and by the start of November 1994, the fighting in and around the so-called Bihać Pocket in north-west Bosnia had become serious. The Bosnian Serbs were using surface-to-surface missiles, which was a source of particular concern to UNPROFOR, but it was an air attack on Bihać on 19 November which brought about a dramatic – if brief – escalation in the air activity.

The attack, which was a violation of the NFZ (and illustrated the challenges of enforcing an air exclusion zone), had been conducted by two Serbian Orao attack aircraft from

the air base at Udbina. The UN concluded that this could not go without response, and requested that NATO attack the airfield. The raid on Udbina was a true coalition effort, involving British, American, Dutch and French assets, with the RAF providing four Jaguars. Two Jaguars were detailed with the job of attacking the airfield with 1,000lb unguided bombs, while the other pair carried out post-strike reconnaissance for analysis of the damage caused by the raid.

The value of the attack at Udbina is open to debate. It certainly ensured that the Bosnian Serbs were clear that there were limits to the UN and NATO's tolerance of breaches of the NFZ, but it did little to ameliorate the general behaviour towards UNPROFOR troops on the ground. The VRS response was to take over 300 members of UNPROFOR hostage. An unwillingness to risk the lives of the those in Serb hands saw a scaling back of air operations, and the release of hostages. Unfortunately, the response gave the VRS and the Karadžić regime the impression that while there were limits to the UN's tolerance of their actions, there was also a limit to how far UN was prepared to go in risking the lives of its personnel.

The raid also held a lesson for the RAF in that despite the importance of Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) being demonstrated in the Falklands Conflict and then again in Iraq, the development of the capability had been slow. The demand for precision drew the RAF's senior leadership to the uncomfortable realisation that the Service's lack of a self-designation capability for the aircraft on Deny Flight was starting to have an adverse effect upon perceptions about the Service's contribution.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, therefore raised Urgent Operational Requirement 41/94 in June 1994, with the aim of increasing the range of aircraft which could be deployed with a laser designation capability. While the Tornado GR1 force was becoming ever-more capable in the PGM delivery role through the provision of TIALD designator pods, neither the Harrier nor Jaguar fleets were so equipped. The demands on the Harrier force both in terms of commitments (including to the Iraq NFZs) and integration of new equipment on the relatively new Harrier GR7 variant meant that the decision was taken to integrate the TIALD pod onto the Jaguar as a means of fulfilling the UOR.[38] The integration of the TIALD pod with the Jaguar went smoothly, and by early 1995, when the Jaguar detachment to Gioia had been replaced by aircraft from the Harrier force, the Jaguar/TIALD combination was ready for deployment. Two TIALD-equipped Jaguars were kept on 48 hours notice to deploy to Italy if required to support the delivery of PGMs by the Harrier force.[39] Nevertheless, the need to use a UOR to obtain TIALD capability on the Jaguar force perhaps gave a broader and still relevant illustration of how tenuous the RAF's – and thus national – influence might be if capabilities germane to the contemporary operating environment are not developed and maintained.

DELIBERATE FORCE

Throughout April and May 1995, fighting intensified, and Sarajevo was bombarded once again. NATO requested permission to attack the Serbian artillery positions, but concerned that the Serb response would only escalate the situation further, agreement was not forthcoming from the UN. Continuing Serb action led to a decision that some response was required, and the UN finally agreed to a request from the new UN Commander in Sarajevo, Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith, to act. Ammunition supply bunkers in the hills around Pale, were bombed on 25 and 26 May by USAF and Spanish aircraft.[40] This coincided with a preliminary visit to theatre by the TIALD Jaguars, which almost saw them being called into action.[41] The VRS commander, General Ratko Mladić, responded by attacking the safe area at Tuzla, causing 71 deaths, and taking yet more UNPROFOR personnel hostage. An attempt to take Gorazde was thwarted by a small force of the Royal Welch Fusiliers and Bosnian troops, and the Serbs moved on to Srebrenica, where a number of war crimes were committed, including the massacre of most of the male population.

By this stage, the patience of a number of governments, particularly the British and French, had been pushed too far, and at another conference in London on the Yugoslav crisis, they declared that they would move from the more passive status of peacekeeping to peace enforcement. This effectively reduced UN influence, and saw the creation of a so-called 'trip wire' which would lead to major air operations against the Serbs if triggered. A Rapid Reaction Force, including elements of the Royal Artillery, supported by the RAF Chinook force was also despatched to bolster the forces in Bosnia.

While this was taking place, the Croatians launched a major offensive – Operation Storm – against the Serbs, retaking almost all the territory which had been lost in the fighting in 1991. President Clinton despatched a new peace envoy, Richard Holbrooke. Holbrooke was attempting to promote a new peace plan when, on 28 August, a mortar attack on Sarajevo left at least 37 people dead. Admiral Leighton Smith (Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe) and General Smith – who was standing in for the UNPROFOR commander General Janvier while the latter was on leave – made preparations for the NATO response. General Smith ordered the UN forces at Gorazde and Zepa to leave, with the former making a dash for friendly territory, whereupon he 'turned the bombing key.' The RAF's Harriers were to play a significant role in what followed, namely Operation Deliberate Force.[42]

Operation Deliberate Force, coupled with serious reverses to their campaign in Croatia, came as a serious shock to the Serbs. Serbian air defences were attacked, with the first bombs falling on an SA-6 SAM site near Sarajevo early on the morning of 29 August, with a series of major attacks following throughout the day.[43]

The TIALD Jaguars were given notice to deploy on 29 August, and began supporting operations the following day, when the two Jaguars and four Harriers attacked an ammunition storage depot near Sarajevo with PGMs.[44] Twenty five sorties were eventually flown by the Jaguar/Harrier combination, with two dozen Paveway LGBs being delivered. The Jaguars also used their TIALD pods on a number of occasions to locate targets which the Harriers then struck with unguided 1,000lb bombs.[45] This was followed by a bombing pause on 1 September, which was intended to give the Serbs time to withdraw from around Sarajevo. They chose not to do so, suggesting that the level of coercion required to break their will was higher than NATO had assumed.

By 10 September, Serbian positions throughout Bosnia had been subjected to renewed attacks, although the main weight of effort had fallen in eastern Bosnia. A strike against the major radar and communications hub near Banja Luka (Bosnia's second city) using Tomahawk missiles was planned for 11 September, but before this was launched, an attack by Jaguars (including from the French Air Force) and Harriers toppled the communications mast north of Tuzla.[46] This cut off Mladić's ability to communicate with many of his troops, just as a major Croat offensive against Banja Luka was beginning. This placed the VRS at a serious disadvantage, and the Croats made good progress. The attack on the communications site gave a good demonstration of the flexibility of the assets involved, since some of the strike package had been diverted to provide CAS to UN forces, but when not required to deliver weapons, had continued its pre-planned mission.[47]

Attempts by General Janvier (now returned from leave) to negotiate with Mladić failed, and the attack on the hub at Banja Luka was launched, with the site being struck with Tomahawks. Further attacks by US Navy and USAF aircraft against communications sites in western Bosnia left the VRS forces there without communications, and they began to break and run. By 12 September, NATO had exhausted the list of authorised targets in eastern Bosnia, but the Serbs foolishly fired an artillery barrage against UN troops in the vicinity of Tuzla, which prompted a significant attack on the ammunition storage dump at Doboj, which was utterly destroyed.[48] It was clear that the Serbs had been left in serious difficulties as a result of the Croatian offensive and Deliberate Force. Richard Holbrooke was sent to Belgrade to speak to Milošević, in a bid to see if he might influence Karadžić and Mladić . The weight of NATO's air attacks had taken all the Serbian leaders by surprise, and Milošević concluded that the VRS position was hopeless. He informed Mladić that he would no longer support the VRS unless Mladic agreed to withdraw from around Sarajevo. Mladić's analysis of his position was gloomy, and he agreed to a ceasefire and the withdrawal of those heavy guns which had survived the bombing and Rapid Reaction Force counter-battery fire.[49]

An initial deadline to withdraw weapons lest further attacks be launched had to be extended by 72 hours when it became clear that the VRS forces had suffered serious

losses to their logistics chain and were literally incapable of moving their weapons. The UN airbridge to Sarajevo had been closed since April 1995 because of the heavy fighting around the airport, and began again on 15 September, seeing a resumption of Operation Cheshire. Air operations continued, in order to monitor Serb compliance with the ceasefire, and there were some instances where Serbian positions were engaged. Holbrooke's efforts culminated in the Dayton Peace Accords, under which NATO provided an Implementation Force (IFOR) to create the conditions under which the agreed peace settlement could be implemented. IFOR took over from UNPROFOR on 20 December 1995, itself handing over to a Stablisation Force (SFOR) a year later. The RAF continued to contribute, with support helicopter operations taking on even greater importance as IFOR established separation zones between the former combatants and worked with Special Forces units tasked with detaining persons indicted for war crimes. Although there was some tension which occasionally looked like escalating into renewed fighting, by the time of elections in September 1997, peace had largely returned.

CONCLUSION

When considering the RAF's contribution to operations in the Yugoslavia crisis, attention invariably focuses upon the final instalment in the fighting which came during the Kosovo crisis and NATO's use of air power to force a conclusion to Milošević's repressive policies in the province of Kosovo. This has sometimes been to the detriment of looking at the long and often frustrating period between 1992 and 1995. Yet it is a useful subject area to consider, given some of the factors which affected the RAF during the period.

The first conclusion which might reasonably be drawn is that the deployment of the RAF's combat air assets illustrated the importance of possessing depth, both in terms of the numbers of airframes and the personnel available to support an enduring commitment. Supporting Deny Flight as well as the Iraqi No Fly Zones was a significant challenge for an air force which was expected to contribute to control of the air, reconnaissance and sometimes attack missions. 'Skills fade' became a serious issue for aircrew, and the tempo of operations meant that there were potential issues with retention as experienced personnel became tired of what became known as 'overstretch.' Defence planning and policy, as noted by McInnes, was not as coherent as it might have been. The key driver of attempting to reduce defence spending was not matched by a sensible analysis of the commitments the armed forces were required to carry out. The concept that the British armed forces might 'do more with less' may perhaps be said to have had its origins in the intervention operations of the 1990s. Standing commitments were joined by intervention operations, including an open-ended requirement to maintain two No Fly Zones (three if the northern and southern components of the Iraq NFZ are treated as separate entities), placing significant demands on the RAF and its personnel.

The second, frustrating, conclusion for the historian is that although other RAF assets such as the support helicopter and transport and tanker fleets were an important part of the efforts in Yugoslavia, little source material highlighting this can be found beyond occasional references to the participation of, for example, Chinooks, VC10s and Hercules. This is highly regrettable, since it means that it is difficult to reach a full understanding of the RAF's contribution, as a key element of the era is likely to be under-researched until the archives open in the 2020s, and possibly not even then.

In difficult circumstances where international consensus was lacking, and the UN was perceived to be weak and vacillating, the use of air power played a significant role in bringing about peace. This is not to claim that air power did so independently, but to illustrate the value of 'joined up' planning and a willingness to employ force in a clear, effective manner; where UNPROFOR was seen to fail, NATO was considered by observers to have succeeded, hinting at the need for a willingness to use force in some circumstances.

The Yugoslav intervention illustrates how ongoing RAF operational commitments after the Cold War left the Service attempting to rebalance against continual deployments and contingent operations (long before the phrase 'return to contingency' became popular). This, in turn, highlighted the importance and relevance of the RAF to achieving national policy objectives, not only in terms of delivering military force, but in securing international influence, a function likely to remain a constant in the second century of the Service.

NOTES

[1] Eliot A Cohen, 'The Mystique of US Air Power', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1994; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1994-01-01/mystique-us-air-power (accessed 12 October 2018); President George H W Bush, Speech to Congress, 6 March 1991; Lawrence Freedman, 'The Gulf War and the New World Order,' *Survival*, Volume 33 No. 3, (1991), 195-196.
[2] Vesna V Godina, 'The outbreak of nationalism on former Yugoslav territory: a historical perspective on the problem of supranational identity', *Nations and Nationalism* Volume 4:3 (1998), 413-416.
[3] Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milošević* (London: Routledge, 2002, 4th edition), 4, 6.
[4] Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 4.
[5] James Gow, 'Deconstructing Yugoslavia', *Survival*, 33:4 (1991), 294; Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 6.
[6] Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 6.
[7] Ibid, 7.
[8] Gow, 'Deconstructing Yugoslavia', 294. Yugoslav People's Army is the translation of Jugoslavenka Narodna Armija (JNA), thus 'JNA' is used.

[9] Ibid, 298-299.
[10] James Horncastle, 'Croatia's bitter harvest: Total National Defence's role in the Croatian War of Independence', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Volume 26:5 (2015), 754-758; Norman Cigar, 'Croatia's war of independence: The parameters of war termination', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Volume 10: 2 (1997); 34, 36-40.
[11] In addition to the sources noted above, the preceding paragraphs are further distilled from several sources, particularly Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin, 1996; 3rd edition); Mark Almond, *Europe's Backyard War* (London: Mandarin, 1994) and Christopher Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course and Consequences* (London: Hurst & Co, 1993).
[12] Almond, *Backyard War*, 185.
[13] See letters from Merrick S Baker-Bates, the British Consul General in Los Angeles, and Maryann Zovak to the *Los Angeles Times*, 11 August 1995 **http://articles.latimes.com/1995-08-11/local/me-33911_1_bosnian-muslims-serbs-lift** (accessed 15 October 2018).
[14] Ibid, 243-45; Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London, Allen Lane, 2001), 4-6. Both Almond and Simms are damning in their assessment of the British government's reluctance to intervene, particularly because of concerns that to do so would almost inevitably lead to having to take sides. The European Union came into force in 1992, after the Maastricht Treaty, succeeding the European Community.
[15] Christopher Bellamy, 'Croats Cool as British Convoy Rolls into Split', *The Independent*, 31 October 1992.
[16] Robert Fisk, 'UN Fears Aircraft Was Shot Down by Missile', *The Independent*, 4 September 1992.
[17] Group Captain DKL McDonnell, 'Humanitarian Airlift', *Royal Air Force 94*, **http://www.ukmams.co.uk/Humanitarian.html** (accessed 11 October 2018).
[18] **https://www.rafbf.org/news-and-blogs/rafs-longest-running-airlift-helped-save-people-sarajevo** (Accessed 11 October 2018).
[19] Lawrence Freedman, 'Why the West Failed', *Foreign Policy*, No. 97 (Winter, 1994-1995), 63.
[20] Stuart Croft, Andrew Dorman, Wyn Rees & Matthew Uttley *Britain and Defence 1945-2000: A Policy Re-evaluation* (London: Longman, 2001), 42.
[21] Joyce Kaufmann, NATO and the Former Yugoslavia: Crisis, Conflict and the Atlantic Alliance *Journal of Conflict Studies*, **https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/4355/5009** (accessed 14 October 2018).
[22] Lord Owen, previously David Owen, had been the UK Foreign Secretary from 1977-1979 as part of the Callaghan administration; he left the Labour Party in 1981 and was one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party. Upon the merger of the SDP with the Liberal Party in 1988, Owen led a 'rump SDP' for two years prior to its disbandment in 1990. He was made a peer in 1990, and was appointed as the EU co-chairman for the conference on former Yugoslavia in August 1992, succeeding Lord Carrington.

Cyrus Vance had been US Secretary of State between 1977 and 1980. Following his departure from office after Ronald Reagan won the 1980 US Presidential election, he was frequently asked to serve on various diplomatic missions. In 1991, as the UN Secretary General's Special Representative, he proposed a peace plan for the former Yugoslavia, but this was rejected by the Krajina Serbs. He then became the UN Special Envoy to Bosnia, where he and Owen attempted to broker peace. He resigned from the position in April 1993.
[23] Thorvald Stoltenberg served as Norwegian minister of defence and Minister of Foreign affairs in two Norwegian governments. His tenure as foreign minister (1987-89 and 1990-93) was interrupted by service as Norway's ambassador to the UN, and becoming the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, although he held these two posts for less than a year. He was appointed as Cyrus Vance's replacement.
[24] United Nations Security Council Resolution 781, 9 October 1992, **https://undocs.org/S/RES/781(1992)** (Accessed 11 October 2018).
[25] Kaufmann, 'NATO and the Former Yugoslavia' (note 10).
[26] Barbara Starr, 'Deny Flight forces poised for Bosnia strikes; *Jane's Defence Weekly* 14 August 1993.
[27] Hampden (sometimes referred to using 'Grapple', the codename for the British Army's contribution) was the British contribution to peacekeeping operations in the Former Yugoslavia.
[28] Martin W Bowman, *SEPECAT Jaguar: Tactical Support & Maritime Strike Fighter* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007), 184-186.
[29] Ibid, 187-188.
[30] House of Commons Debates (hereafter, *Hansard*), 30 November 1993, Column 928; *Front Line First: The Defence Costs Study* (London: Ministry of Defence, 1994.
[31] Colin McInnes, 'Labour's Strategic Defence Review', *International Affairs* Volume 74 No.4 (1998), 824-825.
[32] Reuter et al, *Tornado F3*, 142.
[33] Kaufmann, 'NATO and the Former Yugoslavia'.
[34] Nick Richardson, *No Escape Zone* (London: Sphere, 2001).
[35] Ibid, 298.
[36] See Hikaru Yamashita, 'Impartial' Use of Force in United Nations Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, Volume 15:5, 615-630; Freedman, 'Why the West Failed', 63-64.
[37] John Gerard Ruggie, 'The UN and the collective use of force: Whither or whether?', *International Peacekeeping*, Volume 3 No. 4, 4.
[38] Andy Evans, *SEPECAT Jaguar* (Marlborough: Crowood Press, 1998), 155.
[39] Bowman, *Jaguar*, 200.
[40] Tim Ripley, *Conflict in the Balkans 1991-2000* (Oxford: Osprey, 2001).
[41] Evans, *Jaguar*, 157.
[42] Tim Ripley, *Operation Deliberate Force; The UN and NATO Campaign in Bosnia, 1995* (Lancaster: CDISS, 1999), 244.

[43] Ripley, *Conflict*, 28-29.
[44] Bowman, *Jaguar*, 200.
[45] Evans, *Jaguar*, 161.
[46] Ripley, *Deliberate Force*, 284.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ripley, *Conflict*, 32.
[49] Ibid.

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