Epilogue

At least seven-and-a half thousand Bosnian Muslims missing, presumed dead. Some six thousand of them were the victims of mass executions. That is the dreadful outcome of the events following the invasion and capture of the Srebrenica enclave - an official Safe Area - by the Bosnian Serb army, the VRS. From the very moment that rumours of such atrocities reached the ears of the world, to be confirmed shortly thereafter, these events have evoked strong emotions. The appalling facts have lent an extra dimension to the media coverage and the debate concerning events in and around Srebrenica: humanitarian, moral and political.

This was and remains the case in Bosnia itself, but also in the Netherlands. After all, at the time of the fall of the enclave, Dutch military personnel were part of UNPROFOR, the United Nations' peacekeeping force. From the outset, their deployment was seen by the majority as a positive contribution to the international efforts in bringing peace to the former Yugoslavia and in providing humanitarian aid. In this particular instance, public opinion was no doubt influenced by the idea that the presence of the Netherlands' battalion - 'Dutchbat' - would in itself be enough to protect the Muslim population now under threat. This notion seemed to be confirmed by the official terminology, which featured words such as safe and (in 'UNPROFOR') protection. How tragically different the final outcome would prove.

There have been many discussions about what actually happened, and it is generally accepted that the situation was a very complex one. Nevertheless, the gulf between intention and result continued to influence and colour opinions. How could the international community have failed to prevent this slaughter? Who was responsible for such tragic shortcomings? In the Netherlands, many tried to identify the Dutch politicians, senior officers and civil servants at whose door the blame can be laid, at least in part.

As public discussion continued throughout the second half of 1995, a parliamentary debate was tabled for December of that year, intended to close this particular chapter. It did not do so. The questions which had arisen in the media and in political circles were, and remain, extremely weighty. In many people's view, they were incompletely and inadequately answered at the time, with the result that recurrent waves of public and political commotion have increased in intensity rather than subsided. It was against this background that the call for a thorough and comprehensive investigation was heard in various quarters. In the autumn of 1996, the Dutch cabinet instructed the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation; NIOD) to conduct a full historical-analytical study of the events prior to, during and after the fall of Srebrenica.

This Epilogue forms the concluding chapter of the report of that study. As stated in the Prologue, the report aims to answer its original terms of reference, providing as accurate a reconstruction of events as possible, with expository analysis where appropriate. In other words, it is a factual, historical account which does not attempt to arrive at political conclusions or to pass judgement. Such conclusions are the preserve of the political and public arenas.

To provide a full understanding of the events, the NIOD first considered it necessary to examine and describe the former Yugoslavia itself, since it was here that the origins of the conflict could be found. Moreover, it was here that the readiness to resolve differences by means of brute force and aggressive violence first emerged. In addition, international intervention played a significant part in the way in which the conflict later developed. The role and significance of Dutch decisions and of the physical involvement of Dutch personnel in the events of Srebrenica must - in the first instance - be viewed in the context of such international intervention. The issue of Srebrenica must also be examined from the point of view of Dutch society as a whole: the decision-making process with regard to deployment of Dutch troops, the intent that lay behind the decision, the policy adopted and the provision of information to Parliament and the public must all come under scrutiny. Although allied to the events in the former Yugoslavia, such questions can largely be addressed independently. Indeed, they are of a different order. To put it succinctly: Srebrenica was firstly a tragedy in the Balkans and then became a controversy in the Netherlands.

A certain hierarchy can be assigned to the three levels at which explanations are sought: the Balkans, the international arena and the Netherlands. However, such a hierarchy does not prevent each of the levels being assessed in its own context, with the specific responsibilities of organizations and individuals being recognized. Indeed, this report does so in some considerable detail. It will have escaped no one's attention that this report (with its appendices) is of very substantial proportions. There are two inescapable reasons for this.

First, a full and detailed reconstruction is of immense importance in gaining an understanding of the actual course of events, in all their workaday minutiae. It is precisely the level of detail adopted and the multiplicity of perspectives that have enabled the compilers of this report to contribute further to the considerable body of knowledge which has already been gained from other investigators' research. Second, only such an extremely precise and reliable documentation of events is able to offer a satisfactory historical answer to the penetrating questions (many of which are equally detailed) which have arisen in media and political circles over the course of time.

This being the final chapter of the report, it is seen as desirable to reiterate the main findings of the study, which are presented below. However, the reader is enjoined to exercise some caution in that such a summary will inevitably present only a simplified version of the study's findings. The full text of the report not only offers the necessary evidence and references, it also provides a more detailed and thorough account. Moreover, the summary can present no more than a selection of the many topics covered in the report proper. This selection is determined by what the researchers themselves consider to be the most significant findings, as well as by the questions previously identified as those most urgently requiring an answer.

1. The mass murder of thousands of Bosnian Muslims is a horrifying and probably the most violent episode in the process of disintegration which Yugoslavia underwent in the early 1990s. To understand this process, it is necessary to look further into the past. The 'sides' in the conflict, largely organized according to ethnicity and nationality, both

perceived themselves as having emerged a very long time ago. It was claimed that there have been ongoing conflicts between ancient nations for several centuries, the conflict between Serbs and Muslims (referred to disparagingly as the 'Turks') being the most notable. Although this version is not entirely without basis in historical fact (take for example the Battle of Kosovo in 1389), it is more in the nature of a modern myth.

The idea of the Balkans' ethnic groups being separate nations, each with a claim to its own nation state, actually emerged in the nineteenth century. The fall of the great empires of the region (Ottoman Turkey, and the Hapsburg monarchy with tsarist Russia in the background) was accompanied by an extremely complicated and occasionally violent process by which nations and states were formed. The constitutional unit known as 'Yugoslavia' is a twentieth-century creation. As a state, it was formed after the First World War and was marked by serious internal tensions based on ethnicity and nationality from the very beginning. After the Second World War (which, like WWI, prompted much intercircles violence in the region), Tito's communist regime succeeded in keeping the ethnic tensions more or less under control. However, to do so occasionally relied on severe measures and a specific form of decentralization which had some serious disadvantages. At the same time, there was a marked Serbian dominance in communist Yugoslavia. By the late 1980s, the situation seemed untenable. There were various contributory factors: the death of Tito, the decline of international communism, reduced economic support from the West (partly as a result of the decline of communism), and economic recession with looming poverty, later to become reality for many. The decentralized political structure made it even more difficult to arrive at solutions.

Since this time, successive political leaders have increasingly relied on the ethnic and nationalist loyalties to create, strengthen or maintain their own power position. The most prominent example is perhaps the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, but he is far from the only one. The existing state structure came under increasing pressure. The tendency to resort to violence (and to 'settle the scores' of the recent past in doing so) became more marked. The idea that this is some sort of reflex action intrinsic to 'Balkan Man', a specific type of human being with a strong propensity for violence is, however, unfounded.

It is indeed possible to identify periods in recent history in which there has been an increased incidence of interstate violence in the Balkans, as it is possible to identify such periods in many other regions. But these episodes of heightened violence coincided with phases of weak government control and governments which were perceived as 'foreign' and hostile. This was increasingly the case after 1990, with many people regarding violence as a legitimate means of self expression. Paramilitary groups formed and armed themselves, at first mostly in Serbia. They often had indirect links with the governing politicians. Feelings of hatred and the desire for revenge against other 'nations' of the 'old' Yugoslavia were aroused by a variety of means. The media did their part, either actively spreading propaganda or allowing themselves to be used to stir up memories of the violent past. The Yugoslavia problem can thus be summed up very succinctly as a situation of increasing fear and insecurity, as ethnic tensions escalated due to economic decline.

As a result, the federal Yugoslavian state fell. Devolution from the federation was the overriding ambition of the non-Serbian nationalities, particularly in Slovenia and Croatia. Among the Serbs, Yugoslavia could rely on ongoing support provided the resulting state would be under one their complete control. The alternative would be a 'Greater Serbia', to include all regions in which Serb peoples lived as well as those for which a historic 'title' existed, even if Serbs were in the minority there (as in Kosovo). Generally speaking, the population was ethnically mixed in too many areas to allow any quick and easy division of Yugoslavian territory. Conflict to establish boundaries seemed inevitable, as well as violence which aimed to bring about the 'ethnic cleansing' of whole regions.

The process of further disintegration need not be described in further detail here. However, it is important to examine two questions: in the context of (the former) Yugoslavia, were there certain individuals or groups who could be held more responsible for this process than others, and could the international community (the West in particular) have prevented the disintegration of Yugoslavia?

In answering the second of these questions (which, it must be admitted, is largely a matter of speculation), two possibilities emerge: large-scale financial aid or large-scale preventive deployment of troops. Financial support had been given in the past, but proved to be of little or no lasting effect. It is also doubtful whether such an approach would have loosened the stranglehold of nationalism. The large-scale deployment of troops at an early stage (1990 or 1991) may well have been more effective. However, it is clear that international intervention would have been impossible to achieve at this time. Yugoslavia was still a unified state - on paper at least - the violence had yet to escalate to a level likely to cause international concern, the world community had other things to worry about and in any case considered national sovereignty to be an overriding consideration. In short, the 'world community' decided to wait and see.

We then return to the question of responsibilities in (the former) Yugoslavia. Here too, the picture is far from clear but, taking into consideration all the historical and economic roots of the conflict, the role of the federal republic's political leaders and those of the separate states seems to be particularly prominent. They bore considerable responsibility. It was their decisions which set the tone and which determined the course, time after time. We can single out the Tito administration, which sacrificed much to the party monopoly and which followed a particularly counter-productive policy in tackling the economic and ethnic problems.

The leaders who assumed power on Tito's death failed to arrive at any more creative solutions. Here, we can point to the nationalist leaders, especially Milosevic, who steered the people into extreme nationalism in an attempt to maintain their own positions of power. Important forces in Serbia, such as the Serbian Orthodox church, supported the nationalist policies, whereupon the Greater Serbian ideal became dominant in much wider circles than that of politics alone. The stance taken - and publicly announced - by the Serbian Academy of Sciences in 1986 is particularly notable in this regard. After some hesitation, the Yugoslavian army, itself dominated by Serbs, also adopted this ideal. The prospects of a pluralist Yugoslavia, with equal opportunities for all, dwindled to nothing.

Although considerable responsibility must therefore be attached to the Serbian leaders, we must not assume that they were the only parties responsible. The nationalist ambitions of many Croat leaders, Tudjman in particular, were no less
extreme. Tudjman's attitude towards the Croat Serbs and his claims to Bosnia-Hercegovina did much to fuel the conflict. The Slovenian leaders operated from a relatively homogenous area, with comparatively favourable economic prospects – quite a comfortable position. However, by electing to press for the radical aim of separation, they too shared in the responsibility for the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The role of Bosnia became relevant at a relatively late stage, but by then most of the political leaders were playing their respective nationalist cards, each more fervently than the next. This was fraught with hazard, particularly in Bosnia-Hercegovina since this was the state with a more ethnically mixed population than any other. There were sizeable groups of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. (Despite the usual religious connotations, the term 'Muslim' is used in the Yugoslavian context to denote ethnicity and nationality.) The greatest threat was from the Bosnian Serbs, because they knew they could rely on the support of Milosevic and a significant part of the Yugoslavian army. But Muslims were actually in the majority, so according to nationalist Muslims and their leader Izetbegovic any division of Yugoslavia should entail Bosnia becoming a Muslim state. But the Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs also chose to profile themselves on ethnic grounds in the emergent state. This would profoundly complicate the process of creating a new geo-political structure. The unilateral declaration of the Republika Srpska within Bosnia-Hercegovina was the most notable event, and the most relevant to this report.

In demographic terms, the ethnic mix varied significantly from region to region and from town to town. There were regions which approached some degree of homogeneity, as well as others which were markedly mixed. In Eastern Bosnia, the population was predominantly Serb and Muslim. Villages were usually ethnically homogenous, while the towns and cities (such as Srebrenica) had a clearly heterogeneous demographic make-up, with mixed marriages being common. In such mixed areas, the process of division along ethnic-nationalist lines was likely to lead to serious problems. Violence began to erupt when the more radical parties came to the fore and instigated attempts to 'ethnically cleanse' certain areas. This was particularly noticeable in Eastern Bosnia, with Srebrenica as one of the focal points. One issue is particularly important here. In the analysis of the political process surrounding the disintegration of Yugoslavia, much has been made of the relatively prominent role of ambitions to create a 'Greater Serbian' state, which implies significant responsibility on the part of Serbian political leaders. They must be held accountable for much of the violence which accompanied the process. The excessive violence of the mass murders which followed the fall of Srebrenica, perpetrated by the Bosnian Serbs, might lead us to conclude that the Serbs were responsible for most of the violence. This would be a rather blinkered view. Published statistics concerning the ethnicity of the victims of the war in Bosnia vary significantly, so it is wiser to refrain from making hard-and-fast conclusions. However, all versions suggest a more or less equal propensity to instigate violence. In any case, it is apparent that each of the warring parties was guilty of gross acts of violence at one time or another.

2. As the situation in Yugoslavia continued to develop to crisis level, and the fear of violent conflict with far-reaching consequences grew, so the rest of the world became increasingly concerned. Was intervention now appropriate? If so, how, by whom and on what grounds? These questions were most notably asked by the West (Europe, Canada and the United States of America) and by the United Nations. In general, three arguments are used to justify intervention in the type of (then) internal conflict seen in Yugoslavia: to prevent violations of human rights, to provide humanitarian aid where required, and to obviate any risk to world peace and stability. All three arguments were relevant (or potentially relevant) in this case.

In practice, international interventions - whether primarily diplomatic, humanitarian or military - are by their very nature precarious undertakings. There are always extremely complex issues involved, tied up in international politics and national problems and different in every case. At the same time, law concerning interventions is very loosely framed, so each new conflict situation must be considered in a fresh light. The decision-making processes within what we sometimes rather presumptuously refer to as 'the international community' are, almost by definition, slow and faltering. The governments and international organizations concerned have a marked tendency to 'wait and see', postponing any actual decision as they carefully weigh up their own interests and determine their own positions. Intervention is therefore almost always reactive rather than proactive. Preventive action taken before major disruptions occur is largely unheard of.

Once the situation is clearly serious, the force of public opinion may impel governments to intervene on moral or humanitarian grounds. However, there is seldom any deeper analysis of the background to the situation or the main points of dissent, whereupon the measures which would be desirable in this regard are not taken. From the very beginning of an intervention, there are usually internal divisions, considerable restrictions, manipulation on the part of the combatant parties, compromises (which often ignore the actual origins of the conflict), erroneous perceptions of the combatants, and so on. The intervention then takes on an improvisational 'trial and error' character, rather than the purposeful, targeted implementation of a carefully planned programme. An additional factor is that there is a general reluctance to deploy large numbers of troops, particularly where the risk of escalation is seen as high (whereupon there could be casualties among one's own countrymen). The powers that be can be said – without the intention of denigrating their efforts – to simply 'muddle through'. Some observers believe this to be a perfectly acceptable, even desirable, way of managing a situation.

International involvement in the process surrounding Yugoslavia's dissolution clearly bore these characteristics. The tendency to 'muddle through' was dominant until after the fall of Srebrenica. In the first instance, the whole affair was seen to be a European problem, in the sense of the individual European countries and the European alliance in general. Indeed, Europe wished to deal with the problem 'off its own bat', so to speak. However, not only was the Balkans problem itself extremely complex, the circumstances were also difficult. Following the collapse of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s, the security system in Europe lacked direction. There was

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great uncertainty about concepts of defence, about the role of the various organizations (European Union, the West European Union, the European Conference for Security and Cooperation and, in the transatlantic context, NATO) and about the future and identity of Europe itself. Furthermore, none of the individual countries of Europe regarded (the former) Yugoslavia, let alone the state of Bosnia, as a national priority. Against this background, the oft-heard anxious comparisons with Sarajevo in 1914 (the situation that precipitated the First World War) rang hollow.

Europe’s initial efforts with regard to the situation in Yugoslavia are a good example of the ‘muddling through’ approach. Internal disagreements stood in the way of effective concerted action. The manner in which the new states were accorded recognition - eventually forced through by Germany - clearly demonstrates this. Accordingly, the United Nations came to play an important part at a relatively early stage in the proceedings. This was, after all, an appropriate institutional setting for an intervention, having the necessary instruments of international law at its disposal. But there was hesitation here too. The Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, clearly had other priorities. He regarded worrying about problems in the Balkans as a Western preoccupation which resulted in other, more serious, problems elsewhere in the world being neglected.

Moreover, the UN faced a serious shortage of funds at this time. The United States could certainly have brought pressure to bear by imposing conditions on the payment of (outstanding) contributions, but they had taken a rather reticent stance for some time, particularly with regard to the deployment of ground troops. As long as the European countries were apparently unwilling to commit themselves, the United States saw no reason to risk large-scale casualties among its own forces.

The Americans’ ongoing hesitation to play any significant part in resolving the Balkans conflict can be explained in terms of internal politics and positions, the country’s losses in Somalia in 1993-94 and the international situation following the Gulf War of 1990-1991. This situation led to a certain pro-Bosnian (i.e. pro-Muslim) tendency, which would indeed lead to the USA playing a more significant part in the fullness of time, particularly after the fall of Srebrenica, when it would take a far more forceful stance and act with appropriate resolve. Up until that time, the country preferred to act at the diplomatic level, with some contribution of marine and airborne forces. It also contributed by supplying arms and other equipment to Bosnia, sometimes in a clandestine manner.

After lengthy and complex deliberations, the United Nations did indeed send troops to Bosnia: the United Nations Protection Force, abbreviated to UNPROFOR. But this force was limited in size, had few physical resources and was required to work to a very restricted and somewhat unclear mandate. Despite the lack of a clear overall strategy, there was significant activity on two fronts: numerous humanitarian aid organizations had taken it upon themselves to provide local assistance. One of UNPROFOR’s main tasks then became to facilitate the aid efforts.

At the same time, various international negotiators were busy on the diplomatic front, devising and proposing various peace plans. The most significant of these plans was the Vance Owen Peace Plan (in all its various versions). It proved extremely difficult to have the combatant parties agree to any of the peace plans under development, and for a long time there was no success in this regard. A significant obstacle was that there was clearly little international willingness to impose the plans by means of military intervention. When the situation changed in the summer of 1995, it finally proved possible to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement, which effectively ended the war in Bosnia.

During the early days of the conflict, which began in 1992, the Bosnian Serbs and Serbia itself were able to claim military victories. Partly due to the deployment of special troops from Serbia, some seventy per cent of Bosnia-Hercegovina’s territory was taken. The Serbs were unable to take advantage of these military successes when seated at the negotiating table, however. This was largely due to the obstinate, unwavering attitude of the Bosnian Serbs. The Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic had originally taken a very aggressive line, not least with regard to Bosnia. However, during the diplomatic talks later in 1992 he appeared sensitive to the threat of sanctions and seemed prepared to give some ground. The Bosnian Serb president Karadzic was rather less willing to do so. In practice, it was the die-hard general Mladic who determined the position adopted by the Republika Srpska, torpedoing acceptance of the Vance Owen Peace Plan as he did.

The Bosnian Muslims were in a weaker military position but were nevertheless unwilling to consider compromises. In fact, they wished to regain control of the battlefield and their long-term prospects for doing so were reasonably good. After all, we must ask whether the Bosnian Serbs would have been able to maintain their very long and complex front lines in the former Yugoslavia for any length of time. Given this situation, the stubborn, uncooperative attitude of the Bosnian Muslims was hardly surprising. They deliberately sabotaged various rounds of negotiations.

The Bosnian Muslims could take advantage of the fact that world public opinion was largely on their side, and this favour was frequently reflected on the diplomatic front too. The Bosnian Muslims waged the propaganda war very skilfully. They were widely regarded as the oppressed victims of aggression and of the violence now raging in the former Yugoslavia. As a result, they were able to increase their political room to manoeuvre. Peace must not be imposed upon them without justice - a standpoint which the Americans, Germans and Dutch in particular came to endorse. Therefore, the Bosnian Muslims’ obstructiveness in seeking a peace agreement, although irritating, was never punished with any great severity in the diplomatic sphere. The benevolence prompted by their status as ‘victims’ continued to dominate. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Bosnian leaders were never able to take advantage of this situation to gain extra concessions in the Dayton Peace Agreement. Compared to earlier versions of the Vance Owen Peace Plan, later proposals with regard to the division of territory were, in general, somewhat less favourable.

While the Bosnians conducted the international propaganda war with efficiency and skill, the Serbs did anything but. While they may have convinced the Serbian public of the justice of their position and of the hostility of the world at large (thus gaining the status of ‘victim’ in their own eyes), it may be precisely because of this that in the rest of the world the Bosnian Serbs’ created a predominately negative impression and showed little concern for their own ‘public relations’. A notable exception to this rule was the doubt that Karadzic managed to sow with regard to the responsibility for certain contentious assaults. He repeatedly posed the rhetorical question of whether these were indeed Serbian actions (as they

appeared at first sight) or whether they were in fact Muslim actions, disguised to 'frame' the Serbs as the perpetrators. Because this seemed quite plausible in a number of cases, the impression of the Muslims as devious and dangerous gained some ground. It is ironic that the attack on the market at Markale in late August 1995, which led to forceful action against the Bosnian Serbs, may well have been just such a 'decoy' action.

One of the most obvious examples of an improvised response as part of the UN operation was the action taken in Srebrenica by the UNPROFOR commander, General Philippe Morillon, in March 1993. Srebrenica was one of the few places in Eastern Bosnia that the Muslims had managed to hold during the extremely violent conflict between Serbs and Muslims in 1992. In early 1993, the Bosnian Serbs renewed their efforts to take the town. The population, which by now included many refugees from elsewhere, was in an extremely perilous situation.

To make a gesture, and in an effort to dissuade the Bosnian Serbs from taking further action, Morillon decided to visit Srebrenica in person, accompanied only by a small escort party. The townspeople, restless and anxious, took the general hostage. He would not be released until firm guarantees were made with regard to the Muslims' safety. In order to extricate himself from this awkward situation, Morillon declared to the people, in front of the press cameras and hence the world at large, that Srebrenica was 'under the protection' of the United Nations and that he would not abandon the population. He therefore created a fait accompli, which was translated by the UN Security Council into a decree which stated that Srebrenica was henceforth a Safe Area within Bosnia, in which an UNPROFOR unit would be permanently stationed. A Canadian battalion took up this posting in April 1993. (General Morillon's escort party had also been Canadian).

The concept of 'Safe Areas' had already been raised in connection with the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, but it was a new and as yet undefined notion. The UN had a 'safe haven' concept, but this would have required a greater number of troops than were actually available. In searching for ways forward despite the limited resources (based on the belief that 'something had to be done'), the term 'Safe Area' was coined. This remained a vague notion since it was a term sui generis which, even when adopted in the resolutions of the Security Council, remained applicable only to Bosnia.

However, what was clear was that the 'light interpretation' of this option, which came to dominate, did not and could not provide full military protection of the designated Safe Area or its population. It was more of a gesture on the part of the international community, a warning not to attack. The presence of UN troops would, it was hoped, deter any offensive action (to deter by presence). It was a sort of intruder alarm which, if tripped, would alert the world. In that way, the designation of the Safe Area served to warn off potential attackers while also providing the civilian population with a sense of security. As things turned out, any such sense of security was seriously misplaced.

In the autumn of 1993, after much discussion, it was decided that the battalion which the Dutch government had made available to UNPROFOR would be sent to the Safe Area of Srebrenica.

3. Dutch policy with regard to the former Yugoslavia was determined by two main factors. First, there was the desire to play a significant part in the international context. Second, there was the importance attached to human rights and humanitarian aid: moral politics. Apart from these two factors, there was no discernible direct national interest. Policy was also influenced by the fact that during a crucial stage of the developments the Netherlands held the presidency of the European Union. Minister Hans van den Broek approached this task with enthusiasm and ambition but was unable to prevent the larger countries from ignoring or manipulating the Dutch presidency on more than one occasion. Even so, national policy continued to be marked by ambition and compassion. As the country's leaders played increasingly important roles in international politics, the relationship between Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans van den Broek, was certainly not without its tensions. However, both emerged fairly early in the crisis as outspoken proponents of intervention. They had rather more say in cabinet policy than the Minister of Defence, Relus ter Beek.

The prime minister's government function of coordinating and directing the various departments was a secondary consideration. In Dutch government, individual ministers enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy in their own area of policy, whereupon it is neither usual nor indeed possible for the prime minister to overrule them. He is subject to a 'non-intervention clause', as it were. As long as the ministers can manage their own affairs adequately, there is minimal interference from the prime minister or his department. The Yugoslavia issue was no exception. The part played by Ruud Lubbers was primarily based on his personal convictions, his experience and his opportunities for international liaison. The fact that he largely shared the views of Hans van den Broek would have strengthened the latter's position and confirmed the prominent role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Relus ter Beek also agreed with the main points of policy. The problem at the Ministry of Defence was more a question of the extent to which troops could actually be made available in accordance with that policy.

In the public debate about the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the humanitarian crisis which seemed likely (in what was, after all, part of Europe and just a couple of hours' flying time away), the many aspects of the entire question were examined in detail. The likelihood of success and the risks of intervention were critically discussed at all levels – official and political, and in military circles as well as in the media – often with a considerable degree of idealism. Besides those ordinarily concerned with journalism, politics and military matters, commentators from other sectors of society joined in the debate, sometimes with a high degree of enthusiasm. Joris Voorhoeve, director of the Clingendael Institute, and the MEP Arie Oostlander proved themselves to be firm proponents of intervention. On a number of occasions, Mient-Jan Faber, the secretary-general of the Ecumenical Peace Council (IKV) called for affirmative action, while also sounding a note of caution. It may be said that among journalists (and sometimes among the individual publications or television programmes) various forms of political activism were to be seen. It is difficult to quantify the degree to which this influenced public opinion. Opinion polls of the day suggested overwhelming support for the pro-intervention lobby, but attempts to mobilize great masses to take part in demonstrations failed conspicuously.

It is certainly not the case that the public debate, in which politics and publicity were inextricably bound together, was marked by any unanimous approval of intervention on moral grounds. Objections were raised, and risks pointed out. On occasion, the dissenting voices were those of senior military personnel, among whom opinion was very much divided. The Minister of Defence, although not the ultimate authority in the matter, continued to support the broad outlines of cabinet policy. The armed forces fully accepted and respected the authority of the politicians, and accepted that the deployment of Dutch troops on an international mission could be seen to be in the interests of national defence. It could then be argued that any expenditure involved was fully justified. 'An honourable mission, not simple but certainly possible', became the motto under which all parties rallied.

Despite the many differences and nuances of opinion, the summer of 1992 saw a situation in which the proponents of military intervention on moral grounds, who were overwhelmingly in the majority, came to the fore. News footage from the Balkan region did much to support their case, a memorable example being the pictures from the camp at Omarska. With hindsight, a number of doubts concerning the authenticity of these pictures can be raised. It was established that the footage was not actually of a camp at Omarska, but was shot near Tnopolje. There was no 'compound' in the sense of an area fully enclosed by barbed wire. The emaciated, semi-naked person depicted had been specially selected from a group among whom there were others who represented an entirely different version of events. The association with 'concentration camps' and hence with the persecutions of the Second World War had already been made by the press, but had failed to attract very much attention. Yet these Omarska pictures now served to persuade the world of the evil deeds perpetrated by the Serbs. They managed to focus attention on the problems of the Balkans, for the time being at least.

In the Netherlands too, the Omarska pictures renewed interest in the issue of Yugoslavia. The Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs and Defence interrupted the annual recess and returned hurriedly to The Hague. It urged the cabinet to push through the interventionist policy. Ironically, this was entirely unnecessary. The cabinet, and Lubbers and Van den Broek in particular, were already thinking along these lines. When Van den Broek was appointed to the European Commission, his successor Peter Kooijmans was also a supporter of this policy, partly due to his experience in Yugoslavia itself, where he had been sent as an expert on human rights law. It was therefore very easy to satisfy Parliament's need for information and to allow the necessary debate to take place. The Lower House and the parliamentary commissions were given fairly detailed information, occasionally of a nature that required sessions to be held in camera. It was widely hoped that Parliament would be able to reach something approaching consensus concerning the implementation of the policy, and this was indeed the case. The cabinet could therefore feel justified in its desire to have the Netherlands play a part in international efforts to resolve the Yugoslavia problem. At the same time, however, the critical and controlling role of Parliament had been quite seriously undermined, a conclusion later supported by the Bakker Commission when it considered somewhat broader issues. Of course, there were dissenting voices here, just as there were in the media. But unlike those in the media, they represented nothing more than an undertone which was constantly in danger of being disenfranchised on the grounds of 'insufficient moral awareness'.

As stated above, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister Lubbers had taken the lead from the very beginning. So it was that the foundations were laid in 1992 for the decision to send the Luchtmobiele Brigade (Airmobile Brigade) to Bosnia, a decision actually ratified in 1993. Internationally, the Netherlands was one of the first countries to call for some form of intervention. In 1992, the problem was that the Netherlands itself could send only support units to the former Yugoslavia; it was not in a position to send a fighting battalion and its efforts to persuade other countries to do so met with little success.

At this time, the entire Dutch armed services were undergoing a major reorganization from which the Airmobile Brigade would eventually emerge as a new type of flexible, versatile unit. This was a significant factor in the general debate. In the international context, the Netherlands could hardly refuse to make troops available once a suitable unit was actually in existence. On the domestic stage, the fact that the Netherlands could now 'show what it was made of' was a logical argument. After all, what was the Airmobile Brigade actually for, if not for precisely this type of operation? The cabinet needed little persuasion. Despite some clear misgivings on the part of the Chief of the Defence Staff, General A.K. van der Vlis, the Commander of the Land Forces, General Couzy, and others, the cabinet wished to play a part and so it was that in 1993 the cabinet unhesitatingly made a battalion available to the UNPROFOR mission in Bosnia. The Netherlands thus became one of the largest providers of troops to a peacekeeping mission which appealed to the hearts and minds of many. It was believed that the country had risen in the esteem of the world. Ambition and compassion seemed to go hand in hand.

The decision to send troops can be seen as confirmation that policy based on moral considerations had gained the ascendancy over a supposed policy based on realism and pragmatism. Human rights and the rule of international law had been proclaimed matters of national interest which should determine national policy. The opposing 'realist' policy relied on a somewhat narrower, less exalted definition of national interests, concentrating on the immediate security of the country, its resources and people.

It should be noted that this appraisal relies on a very specific view of moral politics, described by Max Weber as the Gesinnungsethik (ethics of conviction), in which morally pure intentions and the absence of ulterior motives are central. The alternative is the Verantwortungsethik (ethics of responsibility), in which the politicians responsible for decisions must consider the practical effects of those decisions, no matter how morally high-minded they may be. The latter variant, incidentally, does not exclude intervention: the question is then whether there would be foreseeable humanitarian crises or violations of human rights if there were to be no intervention.

Such an analysis, based as it is on the benefit of hindsight (although a similar analysis would have been possible in 1993), leads us to conclude that the political stance in combination with public opinion had a profound effect. In essence, the Netherlands made available an entire battalion - known in the UNPROFOR context as 'Dutchbat' - completely unconditionally. It was due in part to the absence of conditions that Dutchbat could be sent to Srebrenica on a mission which other countries would decline to undertake for various reasons.
In practice, this resulted in Dutchbat being sent:
- on a mission with a very unclear mandate
- to a location that was described as a Safe Area but where there was no clear definition of what that actually meant
- to keep the peace where no peace existed (on the contrary: the warring parties were trying to involve the UN troops in the fighting)
- without obtaining in-depth information from its Canadian predecessors in the enclave
- without adequate training for this specific task in these specific circumstances
- effectively deprived of the means and capacity for obtaining intelligence so as to gauge the warring factions’ political and military intentions
- with an unfounded trust in the willingness of the upper echelons of the UN leadership to deploy air power in the event of difficulties
- without any clear exit strategy.

This Epilogue will return to a number of these points in due course. All are examined in detail in the main body of the report. For now it is sufficient to conclude that those concerned were banking on the relationships in the region stabilizing or even improving. Of course, in 1993 it was absolutely impossible to predict that the mission would meet difficulties as serious as those of July 1995. However, there were already disquieting signs of events and developments which could have been relevant to the position of Dutch troops in Srebrenica. Policy nevertheless remained unaltered. The many people involved in formulating that policy, and in particular its active protagonists, therefore bear considerable responsibility in that they omitted to take into account the possibility of the conduct of the combatants getting out of hand.

4. The first Dutch battalion, Dutchbat I, arrived in the Safe Area of Srebrenica in March 1994. In July of that year, it would be followed by Dutchbat II which in turn was relieved by Dutchbat III in January 1995. Dutchbat III remained until the fall of the enclave. These Dutch battalions were at the disposal of UNPROFOR, the United Nations peacekeeping force in Bosnia and operated within the hierarchical scheme of UNPROFOR from the moment of their arrival. The United Nations therefore assumed formal and material responsibility for the actions of Dutchbat. Direct Dutch responsibility was formally limited to matters of personnel and some logistic considerations.

In practice however, Dutch authorities, both military and political, were involved in Dutchbat's activities. They encouraged and - whenever possible - materially supported Dutchbat's humanitarian efforts. Furthermore, given the prominent position that the Netherlands had taken in terms of the sheer number of troops it had supplied to the UN mission, Dutch officers came to fill senior positions in the relevant hierarchical levels of UNPROFOR (Sector North East in Tuzla, Bosnia-Hercegovina Command in Sarajevo and the Headquarters in Zagreb).

The authorities in The Hague, like their counterparts in the other countries supplying a substantial number of troops, were therefore assured of first-hand information. This information was carefully collated and regularly discussed in the Defence Crisis Control Centre (situated in a bunker under the Ministry of Defence building in The Hague) and by the army's crisis staff elsewhere in the city. Communication between the two groups was not always all it could have been, which was unfortunate in terms of Dutch internal relationships, but of little or no consequence to the events in Bosnia. Contact between The Hague and Bosnia was largely limited to an exchange of information and words of encouragement. In accordance with the formal command structure, The Hague refrained from any attempts to influence UNPROFOR decisions. The only exception, which (despite appearances) actually had no effect in the end, concerned the provision of Close Air Support and will be discussed in Section 7 below. However, The Hague did contact senior UN and UNPROFOR officials in an attempt to have improvements made to Dutchbat's situation in Srebrenica when this had become a source of concern.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Bosnia, and especially in 1992 and 1993, Srebrenica had seen very turbulent times. Although it had long been a town with a mixed population - which previously had not led to any marked problems - Srebrenica and its environs saw a number of particularly fierce battles during the conflict between the Serbs and the Muslims in Eastern Bosnia. The outcome of those battles was, in effect, an area under siege by the Bosnian Serbs, comprising the town itself and various outlying villages. Within the enclave were the remaining Muslim population from the town itself together with a large group of Muslim refugees from elsewhere. In fact, given the size of the town, this second group was altogether far too large.

There were various convoluted feuds and frictions between factions in the town population: between townspeople and peasants, between the original inhabitants and the refugees, between soldiers and civilians, between rival groups and among individuals within these groups, between the poor and the rich (especially the black market operators and other profiteers referred to as the local 'Mafia'). These conflicts were fuelled by the serious lack of resources and the harsh living conditions. As the prospects gradually became even more bleak, the people's resilience waned. This was particularly so after the departure of the local military commander Nasir Oric, who had been the only person to have earned, and enforced, a certain supremacy among the leaders. Many people felt a strong desire to leave the beleaguered enclave. The Bosnian government objected, seeing a mass exodus as a sign of capitulation and of submission to ethnic cleansing.

In the Netherlands, there were high hopes for Dutchbat. Little attention was given to the many restrictions and uncertainties arising out of the situation on the ground, the mandate, the rules of engagement or the general reticence inherent in the official UNPROFOR strategy. Besides expecting Dutchbat to provide effective protection to the population, the authorities in the Netherlands had remarkably high ambitions with regard to humanitarian aid. In this respect, however, UNPROFOR had a very limited and mostly facilitative mission.
Nevertheless, Dutchbat was for some time closely involved in providing medical care in the enclave, under the auspices of Médecins sans Frontières. (This is examined in greater detail under point 9 below.) There had been little thought, or in any case public discussion, regarding the consequences of such emphasis on humanitarian work, which conflicted with the narrow UNPROFOR mandate. Neither had much thought been devoted to the consequences of the approach to local problems or the contact with local people and their representatives.

Inevitably, the gulf between the expectations and what UNPROFOR could actually achieve in Srebrenica led to disappointment. The situation in the enclave was often very different from that which had been imagined. The agreed demilitarization was not to materialize, for example. Rather than being able to undertake a reasonably pleasant and worthwhile task as part of a peacekeeping mission, Dutchbat was caught up in the skirmishes between the ABiH and the VRS (the Bosnian government forces and the army of the Republika Srpska). In other words, Dutchbat had been sent out on the basis of ambition and compassion, but inevitably became bogged down by the 'muddling-through' scenario that characterized the UN mission.

Furthermore, the Dutchbat presence did not seem to have the desired effect in persuading local military commanders to discontinue hostilities. In fact, as time went on the VRS actually intensified its siege of the enclave by intercepting supply convoys, including those intended for Dutchbat. Movements of Dutchbat troops into and out of the enclave were subjected to increasing restrictions. This was all part of a strategy which aimed gradually to create an unacceptable humanitarian situation, whereby the enclave would eventually fall into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs after all. Dutchbat was isolated. For its part, the ABiH did not shy away from carrying out nightly raids on villages outside the enclave itself, the motive being to replenish their own supplies as well as exacting revenge or providing a display of military force under orders from above.

It is obvious that Dutchbat did not just overestimate its own problem-solving ability at first, but was also ill-prepared for the actual situation in the enclave. In general, the preparation and training undertaken in the Netherlands before departure had covered the military aspects adequately. The Airmobile Brigade wished to be an elite (‘red beret’) corps. However, the mission was only partly a military (‘green’) one. Primarily, the task was one of peacekeeping, for which the blue helmet of the UN was the appropriate headgear.

During preparation and training, scant attention had been devoted to this ‘blue’ peacekeeping aspect and the troops' understanding of local problems and relationships was therefore inadequate. Apart from two brief reconnaissance missions, there was little or no attempt to obtain information from the Canadians whom Dutchbat relieved. The training programme included little information or reflection on the situation of the population, the cultural background and the experiences of the people during the civil war. Stereotypes, preconceptions and prejudices were allowed to develop even during the training programme itself.

All in all, this did not serve to ease relationships between Dutchbat and the local population. In fact, although Dutchbat enjoyed relatively frequent contact with the people, by the time Dutchbats II and III were in place, such contact was deliberately limited. This encouraged an inward-looking mentality and reinforced the troops' stereotyped prejudices regarding the people in the enclave. (Even Dutchbat I had not been exempt from such stereotypes.) As a result, there has been talk of an anti-Muslim attitude on the part of Dutchbat. This is a false premise in that it refers to an attitude specifically directed against Muslims. It is beyond dispute that many Dutchbat members had a negative opinion of the ‘population’ as a whole. However, the things that shocked and disappointed them had little to do with the fact that the population of the enclave was largely made up of Muslims. Their findings corresponded with those of other observers who found themselves among other groups of refugees in a similarly desperate situation: loss of self-esteem and dignity, loss of energy and initiative, a lack of solidarity, occasional neglect in terms of hygiene, a possible tendency towards criminal behaviour, demotivation and general demoralization. Without a proper understanding of the forces at work here, it was easy to generalize. Incidental events were quickly assumed to be the norm, and the major differences and individualities of the people were ignored. They were all tarred with the same brush: a phenomenon that has frequently been seen during peacekeeping missions and is recorded in the literature.

A further complication was that, in their skirmishes with the VRS, local ABiH troops had no compunction in flouting all rules (such as the agreed demilitarization) and employing a variety of ‘dirty tricks’, such as shooting at the VRS from a position close to that of a Dutchbat unit, which would then be in danger of being caught in the VRS’ return fire. This ensured that Dutchbat was not particularly moved by accusations that they (or indeed UNPROFOR in general) had provided insufficient protection to the population. The VRS’ blockade tactics also played a significant part in frustrating Dutchbat ambitions. The interception of convoys led to constant shortages, to relief and leave being delayed, to the men having to live on emergency rations and to a wide range of other hardships. This too was injurious to the relationship with the people, as opportunities to provide emergency humanitarian aid were inevitably reduced. The accusations levelled at Dutchbat by the VRS - that they had not been sufficiently impartial and had actively supported the ABiH - were likely to have the same effect as accusations coming from the ABiH, i.e. none whatsoever.

The situation faced by Dutchbat was frustrating and demotivating. Dutchbats II and III in particular became mentally and physically exhausted during the course of their tour of duty. The Bosnian Serbs’ blockade and the mounting problems with political and military leaders in the enclave resulted in the men’s attention being focused on the moment of their relief rather than on the task in hand.

Immediately after the arrival in the enclave of Dutchbat III in early 1995, there was a confrontation with the ABiH, an incident which became known as the Bandera crisis and which helped to set the tone for further contact with the Muslim forces. In the spring of 1995, the VRS stepped up their blockades considerably, greatly affecting Dutchbat III. By early July, the battalion’s strength had been reduced by about one third, with those who remained having to survive on emergency rations. There was a severe shortage of diesel fuel, resulting in serious restrictions of movement.

Besides the supposed ‘anti-Muslim’ attitude, there would later be accusations of misconduct and (particularly in the case of Dutchbat III) of right-wing extremism. These phenomena are said to be mutually dependent. The report describes in

some detail what actually happened. A brief summary will be sufficient here. As previously stated, the alleged anti-Muslim attitude would have been linked to the perceptions of the actual political and social situation in the enclave, rather than any discrimination based on religion or ethnic background. The allegations of such prejudice are also contradicted by the many reports of good personal relationships between Dutchbat troops and the local population, and by the manner in which members of Dutchbat, even in the chaotic circumstances of the fall of the enclave, attempted to assist the Muslim population.

There is no demonstrable link between any alleged anti-Muslim sentiments and the (infrequent) reports of misconduct. Furthermore, apart from a few isolated incidents of smuggling or prostitution, such misconduct rarely involved the local population itself. Also, a number of the reported incidents had nothing whatsoever to do with Dutchbat, but with other Dutch troops elsewhere in Bosnia. Despite the impression that has subsequently been allowed to form, Dutchbat III was not known for any excesses of bad behaviour.

However, it is true that within one particular Dutchbat III unit there were men who displayed what may be described as extreme right-wing tendencies. The relevant company commander did not take sufficient countermeasures and the senior officers of the battalion were not adequately apprised of the situation. In fact, rather than any politically articulated right-wing extremism, the incidents seem to have been more in the nature of unacceptable displays of machismo and racism, directed at fellow members of the battalion, whether female or coloured.

The conclusion with regard to the general performance and conduct of the battalions must be that they had to do their work while in a state of frustration and demotivation. Dutchbat III was the most seriously affected in this regard, and was therefore the most inward-looking. However, this does not imply that the Dutch battalions, even the third, were necessarily dysfunctional. From the time of their arrival in March 1994, they carried out their task according to a set operational concept: observation and patrol of the demarcation line, together with the facilitation of humanitarian relief efforts. That the overall effect was not that envisaged is not a direct result of the subsequent demotivation, but rather due to the lack of adequate resources and to the UN and UNPROFOR response to the demeanour of the combatant parties. In the deteriorating circumstances, Dutchbat was ever less able to perform the task assigned. Soon after his appointment in mid-1994, Minister of Defence Joris Voorhoeve, himself a committed proponent of intervention in the early 1990s, had to admit that the situation in Srebrenica rendered the mission impossible. Voorhoeve had rather more opportunity than his predecessor, Relus ter Beek, to play a role in determining the cabinet's policy on Yugoslavia. In terms of international diplomacy, the Netherlands had little influence. The new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans van Mierlo, was less inclined to play a prominent part in Yugoslavia than his predecessors Van den Broek and Kooijmans had been.

The new prime minister, Wim Kok, explicitly chose not to interfere politically in the matter despite a significant interest in the Balkans crisis and a close personal involvement. However, even more than his predecessor Ruud Lubbers, he chose to remain in the background in terms of policy and the implementation of that policy. Once the decision regarding the deployment of Dutch troops had been made, there was indeed little need to take an active role until July 1995, when all those in any position of responsibility were once again very much involved in all the various aspects of the crisis. Even then, it was predominantly Voorhoeve who was responsible for the policy concerning Srebrenica.

In general terms, Voorhoeve pressed for the UNPROFOR presence in Bosnia to be strengthened. From a more specifically Dutch angle, he wished to see improvements made to Dutchbat's difficult position in Srebrenica. However, there were few options open to him. His first aim was the internationalization of the UNPROFOR presence in Srebrenica, with a contingent from some other NATO country being stationed there alongside the Dutch battalion. Secondly, he wished to see Dutch responsibility for Srebrenica ended on 1 July 1995. He was unsuccessful in the first of these aims. For a long time, he regarded the second as the responsibility of the UN. Only in early May 1995 did the Dutch cabinet itself begin to look for a replacement for Dutchbat.

Given the widespread reluctance to send troops to Srebrenica, after an extended period of unsuccessful lobbying of the UN a solution emerged quite suddenly: Ukraine would take over the task. However, it would be impossible for the transfer to be effected by the target date of 1 July 1995, whereupon Dutchbat III (whose men were eagerly looking forward to returning home) was required to remain on duty for several more weeks. Events then took an unexpected turn. Shortly after 1 July, the VRS launched an attack which was at first intended to reduce the size of the enclave. Later, it became an all-out offensive designed to capture the enclave in its entirety, resulting in the mass murder of fleeing civilians and military personnel. There was now no question of Dutchbat being relieved. The only option was withdrawal.

5. In the late spring of 1995, UNPROFOR faced yet greater problems. The ceasefire which had been agreed between the warring factions was due to expire on 1 May. However, hostilities had been resumed well before then. The Bosnian Serbs' military position was relatively strong, but was likely to prove difficult to maintain over time as this would require major military efforts and considerable manpower. The VRS had to be active on many fronts.

The ABiH strategy was therefore one of a number of limited small-scale actions, including some undertaken from within the enclaves in Eastern Bosnia, designed to tie up as much VRS manpower as possible. This prevented the VRS from concentrating on Sarajevo, the focus of the war in Bosnia. There was also a propaganda element at work. The VRS often retaliated with disproportionate force against ABiH provocation. This did nothing to improve the international reputation of the Bosnian Serbs, as the Bosnian Muslims were usually aperceptive to the perceived position of the underdogs. This could well have come to play a part in the complex political manoeuvres regarding the future map of Bosnia, as could the actual physical division of the region on the ground.
performance of their tasks and which made life in the enclave increasingly difficult for all concerned. In particular, the interception of the convey carrying various supplies for Dutchbat (food, medicines, military equipment and fuel, as well as personnel to relieve those going on leave) resulted in serious problems. Although it was obvious to all levels of UNPROFOR that the 'Safe Areas' concept was a thorn in the side of the Bosnian Serbs and that they wished to reclaim these areas as their own territory, no one actually imagined that a full-scale assault on the enclaves would be forthcoming. Indeed, it was believed that the Bosnian Serbs would not seriously consider such a move because of the negative impact it would have on world opinion and political relationships. The strategy of the VRS under General Mladic (who was known to disagree with president Karadzic on a number of issues) was generally seen as a combination of retaliatory action to the ABiH sorties and scattered attempts to win small areas of territory. The gradual creation of an untenable humanitarian situation inside the enclaves would eventually lead Srebrenica itself (which UNPROFOR thought could not be defended) to fall into Bosnian Serb hands.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, there were no indications that the increased VRS activity in Eastern Bosnia in early July 1995 was intended to do any more than reduce the size of the Srebrenica Safe Area and cut off connections with Zepa. The main road to the south of the enclave, which had been a VRS objective for some time, would fall completely and irrevocably into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. The battle plan was drawn up on 2 July; the attack itself commenced on 6 July. This proved so successful, and there was so little resistance, that on 9 July it was decided to press on and try to conquer the entire enclave. This proved all too possible, there being very little resistance worthy of the name. On 11 July, a triumphant Mladic and his VRS troops stood in the town of Srebrenica. The Safe Area had fallen. The ABiH and the majority of the male population were now on the run. The rest of the population, exhausted and desperate, set out for the Dutchbat compound in Potocari. Dutchbat itself was a defeated battalion, now in the power of the VRS. It must be asked whether it was possible for Dutchbat, or UNPROFOR as a whole, to have done more to avoid this situation. In particular, could they not have made a greater effort to stop the VRS, using all the military resources at their disposal? Various factors were at work. Firstly, it is evident that the balance of military power was such that, without outside help, Dutchbat would have had little chance against the VRS. It had already been established that the enclave would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to defend in the current circumstances. Furthermore, due to the VRS strategy of attrition and obstruction, Dutchbat could no longer be regarded as a fully operational battalion (in terms of manpower, supplies or moral). The battalion's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Karremans, had said as much in early June and the Force Commander, General Bernard Janvier, had also reached similar conclusions. Moreover, active defence of the enclave with military means did not fall under the mandate, the UN policy or the rules of engagement then in effect. The instructions from Zagreb and New York implied that troops were to be extremely cautious in the use of military means: 'to deter by presence' (rather than with arms) was one of the terms in which this concept was expressed. The rules did not explicitly exclude an armed response, but required that this should be a last resort and only in self defence. There were frequent exhortations from above to avoid conflicts and to prevent incidents from escalating. The hostage crisis following the bombing of Pale had recently demonstrated that serious problems could easily develop. General Janvier actually went to New York to present a case, albeit unsuccessfully, for withdrawing the military presence entirely from the enclaves in Eastern Bosnia.

In fact, it is possible to sum up the situation as one in which the use of military means would only have been as appropriate had the safety of the peacekeeping forces been under threat, i.e. if they came under direct fire. This continued to apply to the situation in Srebrenica after 9 July. On the instructions of the UN headquarters in Zagreb, Dutchbat took up so-called blocking positions. Besides acting as a signal to the VRS to discourage any further advance, this could also be seen as an effort to coerce the 'smoking gun' which would be necessary for firmer action on the part of UNPROFOR. But the VRS did not allow itself to be provoked and moved outwards around the blocking positions, whereupon Dutchbat had little option but to withdraw.

When the surprise attack was launched, Dutchbat saw little reason to undertake any active defence on its own initiative. The death of one Dutchbat soldier, Raviv van Renssen, at the hands of Bosnian Muslims and the continued absence of the requested support from outside (other than one very minor air raid) did not lend weight to the argument in favour of any departure from the established UNPROFOR strategy. The question of whether powerful military defensive action would have been appropriate can be asked in passing. In terms of strict military theory, such an action would - given the balance of power - have been doomed to failure. However, there were factors at play other than the balance of military power. On a political and psychological level, it might not have been unthinkable that the VRS (that is, Mladic) would have shied away from a conflict in which UNPROFOR casualties would fall. That would have seriously harmed the reputation of the Bosnian Serbs. The decision to carry on into Srebrenica itself was largely due to the absence of any resistance of note. Such considerations can therefore be seen to have played a role in the Bosnian Serbs' planning. This takes us into the realm of speculation and 'what if', and it is of little value to explore this territory further. It is impossible to say whether another battalion, in a different state of readiness and/or with a different background would have reacted any differently or fared any better. However, it is known that Dutchbat did not consider any alternative approach, nor was there any encouragement from above to do so. In the given situation, it would not have been reasonable for Dutchbat to act on its own initiative, or on the urging of Dutch authorities, in a manner which departed from the official UN line. If any initiative for alternative action was to have been forthcoming, it should have come from the higher echelons of UNPROFOR or from those with overall responsibility at the UN, which is where policy was determined. But those higher levels viewed even Close Air Support with some trepidation, let alone the option of more forceful military action on the ground. The attack on Srebrenica therefore reflected the nature of the entire policy on Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia: one of reactive improvisation and 'muddling through'. Srebrenica fell into the hands of the advancing Bosnian Serbs despite its enjoying the status of a Safe Area and despite the presence of Dutchbat.
6. The rapid fall of Srebrenica (and shortly thereafter of Zepa) and the minimal resistance offered aroused much indignation. It has often been suggested that this course of events was the result of secret 'deals'. This, it is claimed, offers the only logical explanation. Why did the ABiH in the enclave put up so little resistance? Why was there no assistance from the ABiH outside the enclave? Why was UNPROFOR so reluctant to deploy air support? If some sort of secret agreement had been made, this would provide a ready answer to each of these questions. Moreover, it would largely serve to explain the presumed excessive belligerence or compliance on the part of the partners in such a deal.

Two types of agreement have repeatedly been suggested. Naturally, both involve the Bosnian Serb leadership (usually in the person of Mladić) as the party who would accept possession of Srebrenica (or one of the other enclaves). The other party to the agreement would be the Bosnian Muslim government (primarily Izetbegović) and/or UNPROFOR or the UN itself (in concrete terms, most often General Janvier). There is absolutely no evidence to support such notions and it must be concluded that it is extremely unlikely that any such agreement was ever made.

Such accusations are particularly loaded when levelled at the Bosnian authorities, implying that they mistreated and betrayed their own people in Srebrenica: as long as the enclaves served a public relations purpose, due care was exercised. But when Orić's actions started to cause problems, he was withdrawn from the enclave never to return. According to this line of reasoning, the enclaves and their people were exploited to provide publicity and discredit the opponent. The herding together of refugees in dreadful conditions on the unsheltered airfield at Tuzla, while much better facilities were available elsewhere, was also part of this propaganda programme, it is claimed. But in fact the population of Srebrenica had been abandoned, left to their fate. A number of comments must be made with regard to these claims, which took the form of deeply held convictions in some quarters.

The suspicion that the enclave was deliberately given up may have its roots in irritations regarding the Bosnian government's priorities (which were unmistakably centred on Sarajevo, then under siege) and with the manner in which political and diplomatic negotiations were being conducted. The complex process of the former Yugoslavia's disintegration was, after all, not only characterized by violent conflicts, but also by considerable political and diplomatic discussion. This sometimes took the form of a public meeting (usually with an element of propaganda to manipulate public opinion) and sometimes that of secret meetings behind closed doors. On the political level, it was a question of seeking feasible and mutually acceptable solutions, compromises which all sides could at the very least live with, and therefore mutual concessions (in more or less equal balance).

Clearly, the meetings behind closed doors involved various options being raised in order to gauge the reactions of those present. It is certainly not impossible that deals were prepared and certain tacit agreements were made. There are many indications that the possibility of a territory exchange was mooted on more than one occasion, and that the territory concerned included the enclaves in Eastern Bosnia.

This is only logical. The existence of the enclaves was seen as undesirable by all sides. Moreover, as we have established, they were not the first priority for the Bosnian government. However, during those negotiations of which something is known, the Bosnian government consistently refused to give up the enclaves because this would be an indefensible betrayal of the Muslim population (not only in Srebrenica but elsewhere as well). In the specific case of Srebrenica, it is entirely unclear what the territory to be exchanged would have been, or what other benefit might have fallen to the Bosnian Muslims. Accordingly, while conceding that Srebrenica was certainly used for the purposes of propaganda and that the enclave was not among the Bosnian government's highest priorities, it remains unproven - and is moreover extremely unlikely - that there was ever a specific 'deal' in which Srebrenica would be sacrificed.

A more specific allegation was levelled against General Janvier, the United Nations' most senior military authority in the former Yugoslavia. It has been alleged that on 4 June 1995, during a secret meeting in Zvornik with the Bosnian Serb commander Mladić, Janvier promised that no further air strikes would be carried out if the French hostages were to be released immediately. This would indeed explain Janvier's objections to the use of air power during the attack on Srebrenica. In failing to provide air support, Janvier - aware of the vulnerability of the troops on the ground - was effectively handing the enclaves to Mladić on a plate. It could therefore hardly have been a coincidence that Mladić claimed this very prize just weeks later.

However, this hypothesis is also unable to stand up to critical inspection. In the circumstances which obtained on 4 June, there was a general feeling among UN personnel that air strikes would be irresponsible while the Bosnian Serbs were still holding hostages. This required no 'deal' at all: Mladić would have understood this without Janvier spelling it out for him. It was also perfectly clear that air strikes represented a particularly risk-laden weapon while UNPROFOR ground troops were still in the sort of situation in which Dutchbat found itself in Srebrenica, a sitting target for the VRS. Furthermore, the commencement of air strikes would have represented the end of the 'peacekeeping' mission.

Janvier flew to New York and there advocated a change of policy. If UNPROFOR withdrew from the eastern enclaves, he pointed out, this would enable firmer action to be taken. Because the existing political relationships made this impossible, he was forced to adopt an extremely cautious approach, not least due to the inevitable 'muddling through' scenario in Zagreb. However, no document has ever emerged in the UNPROFOR/UN circuit that suggests that air strikes were expressly excluded. In fact, there is evidence to show that Close Air Support was most definitely an option under active consideration. Even though the wisdom of certain of General Janvier's decisions regarding the battle for Srebrenica is questionable, it is untenable to state that he had entered into the sort of agreement described here.

Another version of the story centres around a 'mental deal', i.e. one in which no formal agreement had been made but in which there was an apparent understanding. Although this notion seems even more elusive, at first sight it also appears to have a more plausible basis. It posits that the two generals would have sounded each other out with regard to their mutual expectations and the relevant ensuing conduct. And yet, on closer examination we come up against the same objections: there is absolutely no hard evidence to support the notion of such a deal, while various facts and events specifically refute the idea. Janvier could not be said to have acted according to any deal, and neither for that matter could Mladić. The assumptions which could be made during the hostage crisis certainly did not apply during the attack on Srebrenica.

itself. In the light of the foregoing, we can also dismiss Milosevic's claims that Jacques Chirac had told him that there would be no air strikes as extremely improbable. In fact, the arrival of Chirac as president marked a somewhat harder mood in France. Even if Janvier was taking his instructions from the French authorities (a possibility which cannot be excluded), then he would still not have found any encouragement from Chirac to enter into a secret agreement which effectively gave Mladic a free hand. No matter how disastrous the UNPROFOR/UN policy for Srebrenica eventually proved, it could be explained in the context of the extremely difficult position which then obtained.

7. At the time of Dutchbat's presence in the Srebrenica enclave, there was a general expectation that, if required, there would be a 'robust' use of air power. From the very beginning, even during the decision-making phase in the Netherlands, this had been an important argument for those responsible in both the military and political spheres. If things went wrong, there was always air power to provide protection to 'our' troops. Many retained their confidence in this *ultimum remedium* to the bitter end. However, they had overestimated the possibilities of air power itself, and more especially the willingness to deploy air power. Such deployment can never be a purely military decision; it is influenced by various political considerations. The specific circumstances in Eastern Bosnia only served to complicate matters. This was recognized by some at the time. The pressure which was required to have Boutros-Ghali make any firm statement on the issue during his visit to The Hague in early 1994 could be regarded as a signal, albeit one that some failed to notice. Indeed, during a visit to the air force base at Villafranca in Italy shortly before he stood down as Prime Minister of the Netherlands in 1994, Ruud Lubbers stated how very reassuring the situation appeared. Agreements had been made between the UN and NATO regarding possible deployment of air power, so a very substantial number of military aircraft had been made available. Nevertheless, various problems remained and showed no sign of being resolved. One of those problems was the highly complex procedure required to mobilize air power. There was a remarkably bureaucratic request procedure within UNPROFOR, with various levels at which any application had to be considered. Matters were made even more complex by the so-called *double key* system, under which both the UN and NATO had to agree to the deployment of air power. This would have been no problem had there been any unity of vision, but there was not. The UN was extremely cautious with regard to the use of air power because it wished to maintain impartiality within the conflict and to continue humanitarian help under the mandate which focused on peacekeeping. Air strikes would inevitably change the nature of the mission. The safety of the UN troops on the ground was also a major consideration. Under American pressure, NATO turned to a type of action which could more accurately be termed peace *enforcement*. The credibility of the organization and concern for the safety of the pilots were prime factors. NATO thus took a far less cautious approach to the use of air power than did the UN.

In late May and early June 1995, the question of air power once again became acute as a result of the hostage crisis following the air strikes on Pale and the shooting-down of an American aircraft by Bosnian Serb defences. The hostage crisis raised fresh doubts concerning the usefulness of offensive air strikes during a peacekeeping operation, particularly among senior UN officials. During a meeting of the Security Council, Boutros-Ghali and Janvier even went so far as to propose a plan for withdrawal from the eastern enclaves. This would reduce UNPROFOR's vulnerability and enable more robust action to be taken against the Bosnian Serbs. Given the political relationships within the Security Council, however, this was not possible. Here again, the dilemma was that although the UN was clearly in an untenable situation, it could not permit itself to abandon the enclaves.

The downing of an American F-16 only served to increase NATO's desire to neutralize the Bosnian Serb air defence system by means of air strikes. The UN did not wish to endorse such action for fear of being seen to have abandoned its impartiality. Nevertheless, various measures were taken to improve pilot safety and these further complicated the airborne operations: there would be no more air support without an escort to suppress air defence fire. Subsequent operations therefore involved a far greater number of aircraft. As a result, there was a longer response time and it was no longer possible to offer round-the-clock air support.

Air strikes (which had hitherto been unlikely anyway) were now all but precluded. Under the rules of engagement, Close Air Support explicitly continued to be possible but under very strict conditions. Only if 'our' forces were under direct attack would Close Air Support be allowed. A 'smoking gun' was required. However, due to the roundabout procedures, the response usually came too late to be adequate. In practice, no one really knew when or if air support should be requested or authorized.

At first even the commanding officer of Dutchbat, who requested air support on a number of occasions, was in doubt regarding the likely effects. Fearing possible reprisals, he preferred concerted air strikes to neutralize all VRS firepower around the enclave in one fell swoop, but this was something that he did not have the authority to request. During the attack on Srebrenica, only one airborne action took place, which was limited in extent, came at a late stage in the proceedings (11 July) and had little or no effect.

Dutchbat and Bosnia-Hercegovina Command in Sarajevo made various requests for air support, or at least prepared such requests. They did not reach Janvier until the evening of 10 July, by which time Akashi had already authorized Janvier to allow such a request. Against the advice of the majority of his staff, Janvier chose not to do so because he feared that the encroaching darkness would hamper an effective, targeted action. Earlier requests from Dutchbat had been blocked by Sarajevo because they did not follow the procedural 'form', did not meet the conditions for the provision of air support, or because it was seen as desirable not to jeopardize the Bildt negotiations. By contrast, on 9 July Sarajevo itself requested air support without any prompting from Dutchbat. The request was not considered by Zagreb.

Dutchbat and Sector North East forces in Tuzla expected blanket air strikes in the early morning of 11 July. This misconception was born of a combination of factors: lack of familiarity with the circumstances outlined above (which precluded air strikes on the grounds that they would undermine the peacekeeping nature of the operation), inadequate
knowledge of procedures, the number of aircraft required (a large number indeed, even for Close Air Support) and the broad and extremely varied list of targets that had been submitted. Nevertheless, the expectation was so great that Karremans went out of his way to inform the Muslim leaders in the enclave and urged them to avoid any vulnerable locations. This was one of the factors which led to the Muslim leaders' decision not to offer any further resistance but to organize an escape attempt to reach Tuzla.

Decisions with regard to the deployment of air power were made in the UNPROFOR line, with Akashi and Janvier at the very top. Authorities in The Hague had no formal role in the chain of command, although 'The Hague' (the DCBC and crisis staff) followed events very closely, especially in those tense days and hours. There were also many telephone calls to Dutch officers in the various UNPROFOR command divisions (Zagreb, Sarajevo and Tuzla) and sometimes even to Dutchbat officers. However, the discussions in The Hague were not intended to influence any UNPROFOR decisions.

An attempt to do so was made on only one occasion, at a particularly crucial moment. On 11 July, The Hague concluded that the second air support action planned for that day to stop the VRS advance would endanger refugees in and around the Potocari compound and the Dutchbat soldiers who had been taken hostage. Attempts were therefore made to have this operation called off, with Minister Voorhoeve contacting Akashi directly. This intervention proved to be unnecessary, since the decision to take no further air action that day had already been made by the time Voorhoeve's request reached Zagreb. However, the NATO aircraft which were already over the enclave remained in the air and there was no ban on future missions. The Dutch intervention had no actual significance, but Akashi did later use the request from Voorhoeve to justify his actions, saying that he had no choice but to comply. This enabled him to avoid saying that it was the UN itself which had withdrawn air support and which was not planning any further action. His excuses provoked a politically-tinged exchange of words, while the NATO commanders on the one hand and Akashi and Janvier on the other chose to blame each other for the course of events. NATO was of the opinion that insufficient air support had been requested and that it had been requested too late. The UN took the view that everything had proceeded strictly 'by the book'.

Wherever the truth of the matter lies, confidence in air power, which had originally been so great, emerged from the battle for Srebrenica in tatters. This was partly due to expectations having been too high. The Security Council's refusal to countenance UNPROFOR's withdrawal from the untenable position in the eastern enclaves without offering an alternative solution was another factor. In the circumstances, senior officials could see no other option but to exercise the greatest possible caution with regard to the use of air power. In doing so, they dashed once and for all any illusions that the Dutchbat commanding officer may have had with regard to the use of air power and its ability to extricate him from his extremely precarious situation. The enclave became a sitting target for the VRS.

8. The Bosnian Serb army's attack on Srebrenica in July 1995 came as a surprise to all concerned. Even the intelligence agencies had acquired no information whatsoever about the possibility of such action. To explain this, it is necessary to examine in closer detail the role played by intelligence during the war in Bosnia. In general, the United Nations as an organization holds a negative view of intelligence, not wishing to take any active involvement in gathering information. Accordingly, peacekeeping and other missions (which due to the often extremely complex situations in which they must operate have a significant requirement for information concerning the intentions of the combatant parties) are entirely dependent on the information that member states are willing and able to supply. This was equally true of the UNPROFOR mission and the troops which took part.

When the violent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia first erupted, the position of most intelligence agencies in the area was weak. This gradually improved, with the Americans quickly emerging as the strongest presence, thus setting the tone in the region. The USA did not at first take part in the UN mission with ground troops (which is always a strong motive for increased intelligence activities) and had other priorities in world politics. Nevertheless, the country was very much more involved 'behind the scenes' than official accounts would lead one to suppose.

By means of background support ('logistical patronage') the Americans were very closely involved in secret supplies of arms to the Croats and Bosnian Muslims (which were illicit in the light of the arms embargo in force at the time). These supplies took the form of covert operations conducted through third party countries such as Iran and Turkey: the so-called 'Croatian Pipeline' and the 'Black Flights' to Tuzla. These apparent double standards on the part of the United States can be explained in terms of the complex international relationships in place at the time. Following the Gulf War, the Arab world expected the Americans to support the Muslims. At the same time, the US did not wish to be seen to be in open conflict with European states over the Balkan situation. There were also various background considerations, such as internal political relationships. Both Congress and the media urged the government to support the Muslims.

Intelligence is usually very cautiously shared with others, particularly if there is no 'fit for tat' exchange system in place. This placed the Netherlands (and Dutchbat) in an awkward situation. To carry out its task in the enclave required good and current information. However, there were few opportunities for the Dutch to acquire this directly. As a small country, the Netherlands is not a prominent player in the field of intelligence-gathering. The Militaire Inlichtingen Dienst (Military Intelligence Department; MID) is small and at the time of the Balkans conflict there were various 'tribal disputes' between the Central Organization and the various units of the armed forces. Moreover, the MID had been tardy in switching its attentions from East-West relationships to the focal points of conflict in the 1990s (in this case Bosnia).

Among the military, administrative and political leaders of the Netherlands (including Parliament itself) there was very little interest in gathering intelligence and there may even have been a negative attitude. This became particularly apparent when the Americans, who were having difficulties developing a good intelligence apparatus in Eastern Bosnia, repeatedly put a proposal to the Netherlands which could have made a considerable contribution towards strengthening the Dutch position. The CIA asked the Netherlands to smuggle a number of 'Comint' briefcases into the enclave. These contained equipment which could intercept radio communications in the region. In exchange, the Americans offered to
share any information obtained. However, the senior command of the Dutch Army refused these requests every time, saying that it was too risky, in conflict with official UN policy and of doubtful benefit. This denied the MID and Dutchbat an opportunity to develop ears (and possibly eyes as well) in Srebrenica. It would have become possible to listen to the military communications of both the VRS and the ABiH in and around the enclave.

The CIA might also have been willing to share photographs obtained by spy satellites or reconnaissance aircraft (as they did with the Canadians). In any event, a stronger position in terms of information would have contributed to better protection for Dutchbat, while the MID would have been able to advise senior military officials and the ministry more effectively.

The Netherlands's own intelligence activities were limited. The MID had access to few resources and Dutchbat was never particularly active in gathering information by means of human intelligence (interviews, interrogations, informers). This was particularly true in the case of Dutchbat III, which deliberately minimized contact with the civilian population. Even the JCOs who were in the enclave were restricted in their movements by the battalion command. All in all, it is hardly surprising that Dutchbat was taken completely by surprise by the VRS attack on the enclave (as were all the other organizations concerned), and more especially by the fact that it was carried through to become the full-scale capture of Srebrenica.

The surprise for the entire international intelligence network was the result of the general weakness of the UN's own intelligence position as well as the late stage at which the attack was planned. The decision to penetrate the enclave itself was taken on 9 July. Obviously, it is impossible to gather information about something which does not yet exist. But we may ask whether it would have been possible to anticipate a full-scale attack on one or more of the enclaves, based on a general analysis of the VRS' strategy and tactics. We then soon notice that the attack did not fit the pattern of past action. Although it was clear that the Bosnian Serbs had set their sights on the eastern enclaves, there was also a firm belief that they would not go so far as to attempt to seize Srebrenica or any of the other enclaves in which there was a UNPROFOR presence. The concept of such a full-scale attack was seen as far too audacious and hence excluded from Western perceptions.

Nevertheless it seems remarkable that the intentions of the VRS and the preparations for the attack went unnoticed. Likewise, the delay in finding out about the mass executions which followed the fall seems inexplicable. Surely the satellite photographs must have provided some indication? Although it is important not to overestimate the abilities of the intelligence agencies in this regard, the Americans did indeed register various untoward activities. It was the failure to inform the relevant organizations quickly and fully enough that led to assumptions and accusations, particularly those levelled at the Americans themselves, that the whole affair had been handled with considerable cynicism: people knew but chose to keep quiet.

There is, however, absolutely no evidence in support of the claims that Washington sat watching the executions take place 'in real time', and there is indeed a plausible reason for the information having been made available only later. There is always some delay in processing intelligence, particularly that gathered by technical means. The analysis and the formulation of the results in the form of a report (usually issued to a restricted number of people) will also take time. Priorities may also play an important role, given the enormous amount of material available and the limited capacity for analysis.

Srebrenica had a low priority in the American and UN perspective. As far as the war in Bosnia was concerned, the focus of attention was Sarajevo. And after Srebrenica (which served as a warning) attention was diverted to the other enclaves, which were now seen as being in acute danger. It turned out that a limited number of aerial photographs were available. In August of that year, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright presented some of these to the UN Security Council. However, it was only when reports of mass executions became more frequent and more insistent that specific evidence was sought among the pile of photographic material that had lain unanalysed.

There were also a number of ABiH 'intercepts' of VRS communications which contained strong indications of coded orders being issued to execute ABiH soldiers or at least to make preparations for doing so. No information regarding these events was available at the time. When General Krstic stood trial before the Tribunal in The Hague in 2001 these communications were entered as evidence. The NIOD has also had the opportunity of scrutinizing the intercepted messages and considers them to be genuine. However, the claims of the ABiH that these represent real-time intelligence is untenable. First, the extremely limited analysis capacity available to the ABiH rendered it unlikely that the messages could have been processed and analysed so soon after their interception (apart from an incidental 'lucky shot'). Second, if this information was available, why did the ABiH fail to act upon it? Could there have been any better way to influence world opinion and to alert the responsible authorities in order to save a large number of Muslims from certain death?

In short, the fall of Srebrenica was accompanied by a 'collective intelligence failure' in that there were far fewer recorded observations of events than would have been technically possible. Furthermore, the photographs which had been taken were allowed to lie unused and unanalysed. Because the decisions had been taken so late and had a partly improvisational character, opportunities for gathering adequate intelligence were inevitably limited. However, the course of events is also symptomatic of the negligible attention for intelligence matters on the part of the UN and in the Netherlands, and of the low priority accorded to Srebrenica in intelligence work, particularly by the Americans. A systematic, concerted information-gathering effort would have placed Dutchbat in a far better position with respect to intelligence. It would probably have been possible to gain a better insight into the relative value of the various warnings and stories doing the rounds. Because no intelligence apparatus was in place, and because many of the stories had proved to be unsubstantiated, little attention was paid to them: the 'cry wolf' effect.

9. Medical services have always occupied an unusual position within the armed forces. There is unavoidably an uneasy

http://www.srebrenica.nl/en/content_epiloo.htm

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balance between military necessity and desirability on the one hand, and questions of medical ethics on the other. By the very nature of their work, medical personnel are set apart from the regular military apparatus, with doctors and other specialists frequently outranking those to whom they are formally answerable. This was the case within Dutchbat. In the difficult situation in which Dutchbat found itself (and in which the VRS obstruction of the convoys also caused problems for medical personnel) these tensions became particularly apparent, leading to several conflicts and incidents which later became the focus of much public attention.

For as long as there were no marked difficulties with supplies, the Dutchbat medical services played a supporting role in providing humanitarian aid within the enclave. Médecins sans Frontières was active here and the Dutch doctors assisted in the local hospital and elsewhere under the auspices of that organization. Such contributions to humanitarian efforts, by Dutchbat in general and by the medical unit in particular, were seen as highly worthwhile and desirable by both the Dutch government and the Dutch military authorities. However, there was some conflict with the rules of the UN, which allowed no more than help in situations of acute need. At first, even if Dutchbat knew about these 'rules' it took little notice of them. When the UN line organization started to query the requisition orders for medical supplies, medicine and other equipment were supplied directly from the Netherlands.

Only when during Dutchbat III's tour of duty the supplies became so limited that the question arose of whether there would be enough to treat Dutch personnel did problems become acute. This was only one of a number of difficult questions which emerged at the time. Around the time of the fall of the enclave in particular, the accumulation of problems led to the aforementioned conflicts and incidents. For example, Médecins sans Frontières came into conflict with the civilian administration of the town - the Opstina - concerning the local staff working for them. The Opstina wanted to decide who could and who could not be employed by the organization, while MSF wished to maintain full control and suspend further assistance. The Dutchbat medical unit did likewise in a show of solidarity. This did not go down at all well with the local authorities, while the people themselves felt that they had been abandoned. The tensions were also fuelled by personal differences between senior Dutchbat officers and some of the doctors, for which no satisfactory solution could be found.

There were further problems in connection with the relief of the surgical team, which (unlike Dutchbat as a whole) worked on a three-month roster. The new team (KHO 6) had been prevented from entering the enclave for some time. When they eventually managed to do so in July 1995, the existing team (KHO 5) was unable to leave. So it was that two surgical teams were in Srebrenica at the time of the attack. The inexperienced new team had formally taken over, but the other was still present. There were differences of opinion between the surgeons regarding the manner in which they should work given the circumstances which obtained, and these differences were based on questions of medical ethics. KHO 6 had stricter views regarding assistance to non-military personnel than did KHO 5. The various tensions combined in such a way as to create an even more chaotic situation.

The problems affecting the incoming transport of medicines, in combination with the heavy claims on supplies caused by the long-term intensive care of a seriously ill woman (who eventually died) led to the introduction of a system whereby a supply would be set aside for the treatment of Dutch military personnel only. This 'iron ration' placed severe restrictions on the already minimal assistance which could be provided to the civilian population when the tension mounted during the attack. Some chose to act according to their own conscience. The death of Private Raviv van Renssen illustrates that the ethical problems were far from imaginary.

When no further Dutchbat casualties fell, a greater degree of assistance was provided in the days following the fall. In the meantime, a seriously wounded woman (close to death according to some accounts) had been brought to the compound at Potocari. She was allegedly turned away, an occurrence which made the situation even more harrowing for all concerned. The burning question was whether the elementary principles of medical ethics were being observed. Reporting on these events was limited in the days following the fall and after the withdrawal of Dutchbat. Accordingly, the provision of information to higher levels was not good, and this hampered a thorough examination of the issues even where this was seen to be necessary. Because some regarded the issues as important in the extreme, irritation tended to escalate. When the debriefing report failed to offer satisfactory answers, some of those involved decided to seek publicity. The process of examining the facts was then very much accelerated; opinions were publicly aired in an atmosphere of general dissatisfaction with the policy of the Ministry of Defence and of the army.

After this politically charged public attack there followed investigations by medical authorities: first by the Inspectorate of Military Medical Services and later by the (civilian) Inspectorate of Public Health. Both studies concentrated on the ethical aspects of individuals' actions. Both inspectorates concluded that the decision to suspend humanitarian help and to prioritize assistance to the Dutch military personnel was justifiable, although it was accepted that there would be differences of opinion regarding the ethical demands placed on a military doctor. Personal conflicts were highlighted as contributory factors in the incidents.

Two observations may now be regarded as particularly cogent. First, that these personal conflicts served to divert attention away from the humanitarian aid that Dutchbat had provided over and above that permitted by UN rules, and thus from the major problems that Dutchbat experienced in this regard due to the actions of the VRS. Second, it is notable how little thought those involved in these disputes (medical staff and other army personnel, particularly the battalion staff) had apparently devoted to the ethical questions in the military context, and to how badly prepared they were. After all, the essence of the problem was nothing new.

10. The tragic nadir of the events described in the report was the mass murder of thousands of Muslim men, committed by units of the Bosnian Serb forces. The majority of the victims were Muslim men who had attempted to escape from Srebrenica to reach Tuzla on the night of 11-12 July 1995, a bid initiated by the 28th division of the A&FR. Other men, mainly of combatant age, and a small number of women joined the party. They were in fear of attack by the Bosnian

Serbs who now had the upper hand, and they were perfectly justified in such fears. The 28th Division had faced major problems since Orić's departure in April: lack of leadership, little cohesion, internal conflicts and poor morale. Such problems would become acute during the march to Tuzla. The decision to break out of the enclave and to refrain from further resistance was made independently of the UN or UNPROFOR. Furthermore, it was a decision which was not approved by the 2nd Corps of the ABiH in Tuzla.

The decision to withdraw active resistance and to discontinue action against the VRS was probably influenced by Karremans' announcement of the previous evening that large scale air strikes were imminent and that it would therefore be wise to avoid potential targets, particularly in the south of the area. However, Dutchbat had nothing to do with the decision to leave the enclave altogether or the activities further to that decision. Dutchbat heard about the movement only when the column was already on the road to Tuzla. The march and the ensuing mass executions were events outside the battalion's field of vision. The conclusion that Muslims had been killed 'under the very eyes of Dutchbat' is therefore inaccurate.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the executions were carried out by Bosnian Serb units. Neither can there be any doubt that they were subject to careful planning and organization. The hypothesis which holds that they were spontaneous, the result of a reprisal action which 'got out of hand' does not hold water: the sheer scale of the murders is simply too great to allow such a scenario. Only certain smaller incidents can possibly be regarded as spur of the moment killings. Unfortunately, it is as yet impossible to provide an unequivocal answer to the question of how the decision to carry out these executions was made, by whom and with what motive. It is, however, possible to propound a plausible reconstruction of the main events.

It seems improbable that the mass murders were planned very far in advance, at least not in the exact form and extent that they eventually took. Despite all the atrocities and violent incidents of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the detailed planning of a mass murder on this scale was never the norm. Indeed the orders for the capture of the enclave specifically stressed the necessity of observing the rules and conventions of warfare. While such enjoiners may have been included purely 'for formality's sake' and can thus be taken with a large pinch of salt, there is no indication that the mass executions had already been planned.

It seems more likely that the Bosnian Serbs had reckoned on the immediate surrender of the ABiH troops and the deportation ('evacuation' would no doubt have been the term used) of the entire population after the 'screening for war criminals'. The military personnel would then be transported to prisoner of war camps.

It seems very likely that the decision to conduct mass executions, for which no written order has ever been found, was taken after 11 July, once it became clear that the escape led by the 28th Division rendered it impossible to proceed according to the original plan. There were also other motives in the background, such as the strong desire to reserve the area for Bosnian Serbs, 'cleansing' it of Muslims. A number of previous incidents had shown that killings were part and parcel of such actions, although the scale of the events following the fall of Srebrenica was exceptional. Feelings of hatred, which had reached a peak in these times of war, were also a significant factor. Mladić's triumphant speech, in which he "gave Srebrenica as a gift to the Serbian people for all the many humiliations they had suffered down the centuries at the hands of the "Turks"", underlined the feelings of enmity that existed.

In the specific case of Srebrenica, revenge would also have been a very strong motive: revenge not only for the events of a dim and distant past, but also for those in Eastern Bosnia (and not least in Srebrenica itself) during the early days of the war in 1992 and 1993. There had been much bloodshed then, and the violent sorties of the ABiH had continued to cause much bloodshed well into the spring of 1995. It was no coincidence that, shortly after the fall of Srebrenica, former Serbian inhabitants of the town were seen looking for certain individuals with whom they had a score to settle.

In addition to these motives of ethnic cleansing, hate and revenge, there was the 28th Division's organized breakout of 12 and 13 July. This was a complete surprise to the VRS, which came at a highly inconvenient moment and caused considerable annoyance. It may even be regarded as the unintentional and unforeseen trigger of the mass murders which followed. Mladić had only just proclaimed the conquest of Srebrenica complete, announcing at the same time that the attack on Zepa could now commence. In that context, the breakout was extremely inconvenient. Suddenly, it was necessary to enter into combat to the north of Srebrenica, while the large number of captives and prisoners of war made matters even more complex.

We therefore see an accumulation of motives and problems which prompted the fateful decision to get rid of the Muslim men once and for all by killing them. Nevertheless, the executions would have been impossible without planning and organization. Such planning was not undertaken far in advance and relied on a certain degree of improvisation to solve a 'problem' which had unexpectedly arisen. There are, however, many indications that a central order was given, whereupon special troops were deployed at first. Later, regular VRS units, the Drina Corps in particular, became involved in dealing with the men of Srebrenica.

From the military point of view, the column which slowly wound its way through a heavily mined area and thick forests was easy prey for the dominant Bosnian Serbs. Its vulnerability was heightened by the fact that most communication between the eastern and straggling column was conducted by radio and could easily be intercepted. The column was quickly located and fired upon. Large numbers of casualties fell during the skirmishes which broke out on several occasions as the column attempted to cross main roads. Of the active military personnel who died, it can be said that they were killed in action. This is certainly not so in the case of the many victims, both military and civilian, who were taken prisoner. It was in the taking of prisoners and the subsequent treatment of those prisoners that the Bosnian Serbs showed minimum restraint. Harrowing scenes unfolded. At various locations, including Kravica and the Dom Kultura in Pilića, the Muslims were slaughtered with bestial savagery. The men who had been separated from the women when the population of Potocari was deported to Tuzla were also among the victims of these actions. As stated at the beginning of this Epilogue, the final tragic toll involved at least 7,500 Muslims gone missing from Srebrenica, of whom some six thousand perished during the mass executions.
Epilogue

It is clear that by this stage, mass murder was the conscious intention of the Bosnian Serbs, as no attempts were made to interrogate prisoners to identify possible 'war criminals', no preparations were made to make prisoner of war camps ready for occupation, no preparations for prisoner exchanges were made, and no food or drink was organized for the prisoners. Identity papers were destroyed, and no attempt was made to separate military personnel from civilians. Logistic problems prevented the prisoners being taken to the rather remote execution sites at any great speed. (The fact that the men were transported to these sites is a very strong indication of premeditation.) In the absence of food and water, the delays served to increase the prisoners' suffering. Only after the deportation of the women and children from Potocari did buses and trucks become available to deal with the men.

Even among the Bosnian Serbs themselves, it was eventually realized that this had been an excessive outburst of violence, as shown by the attempts to obfuscate the (extent of) the killings. Bodies were exhumed and re-interred at even more remote sites. This time, however, the activities could not escape the ever-vigilant eye of the spy satellites and reconnaissance aircraft. During the executions themselves, the Bosnian Serbs' incautious use of open radio connections (which in the days leading up to the attack on Srebrenica they had so carefully avoided) allowed a number of communications to be intercepted. These could be used as evidence before the International Yugoslavia Tribunal. However, the very first reports of the events came from those who, through the carelessness of the executioners, had been able to escape death. They were then able to recount their dreadful experiences and bear witness to the mass slaughter that had taken place.

The lack of any written order and the contradictory accounts (or tight-lipped silence) of the leading political and military figures accounts for our inability to pinpoint exactly who was responsible for the decision to carry out the executions. But it is not difficult to identify those who were most closely involved. Everything points to a central decision by the General Staff of the VRS. There is no evidence to suggest any political or military liaison with Belgrade, and in the case of this mass murder such a liaison is highly improbable. Somewhat more difficult to determine is whether there had been any liaison with senior political figures in Pale. As Commander in Chief, Karadžić was the person to give the formal order to separate Srebrenica and Zepa. It was he who approved the capture of the entire enclave. But whether he had a hand in the subsequent events is unclear. Karadžić's poor relationship with Mladic suggests that there would not have been intensive communication between the two.

In any event, the main responsibility lies in military circles, in which Mladic clearly played a central role. This much is beyond all doubt. He maintained a visible presence during the days in question and was very clearly in charge. However, this does not mitigate the responsibility of other Drina Corps officers or those of the special units. The two successive commanders of the Drina Corps, Krstić and Zivanovic, attempted to shift the blame onto each other. This proved impossible, just as it is impossible to absolve the commander of the Bratunac Brigade, Vidoje Blagojevic, the commander of the Zvornik Brigade, Vinko Pandurevic, his deputy, Dragan Obrenovic, or the staff officer in charge of these operations, Dragan Jokic.

The same must apply to the group of confidants and advisors which Mladic had gathered around himself: Tolimir (deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence and Security for the General Staff), Baraš (head of the central security department), Popovic (head of security for the Drina Corps) and Keserovic (commander of the General Staff's Military Police). One Bosnian Serb source described them as 'a group of murderers around the paranoid Mladic, whom they followed like faithful dogs'.

11. While the executions were being conducted to the north of Srebrenica - outside Dutchbat's field of vision, it should be stressed once more - Dutchbat faced a very dramatic situation in Potocari. The fall of the enclave marked the end of the battalion's military task, but an important humanitarian one remained. Nevertheless, the desirability and possibility of immediate withdrawal from the area were considered at many levels. At first, opinion was divided, but it was gradually realized that there could be no withdrawal without the people of the enclave itself. The civilian population could not be left to the mercy of the Bosnian Serbs; the safety of the refugees weighed just as heavily as that of the peacekeeping forces.

All inhabitants of the enclave were identified refugees. They had proceeded en masse to Dutchbat compound at Potocari on 11 June. Their journey had been a perilous one, there having been sniper fire. The approach of the Bosnian Serbs had caused panic. Several tens of thousands of Muslims would await deportation in Potocari for two or three days, living under extreme conditions of chaos, crippling heat and shortages of food and water. Some men were separated off some time before the VRS transport operation. Others were parted from their families as they walked together towards the buses and trucks, after which they were transported separately to the execution sites. Some were killed at Potocari itself. In this chaotic and stressful situation, demanding as it did frequent improvisation, most Dutchbat troops can be said to have done what was within their power to help the refugees. Of course, there were individuals who buckled under the stress and who succumbed to inactivity, mental absence or other forms of dysfunctionality. But others were deeply affected by what they saw and what they feared; they took action both during the march to Potocari and upon arrival at the compound. The Dutchbat forces in the blocking positions and the OP-M troops actually formed part of the refugee column.

In these conditions, any prejudices or preconceptions about the local population did not stand in the way of practical and moral support. Nevertheless, some, including a number of refugees, have later accused the Dutchbat forces of cowardice and indifference, even citing instances in which refugees had deliberately been run over by motor vehicles. It is not possible to determine the extent to which such incidents did indeed occur, if at all. However, they must be regarded in the context of the chaos and panic which prevailed on 11 July. It is important to note that, in addition to criticism from refugees, there have also been several expressions of appreciation for the personal demonstrations of support and compassion on the part of Dutch soldiers.

The VRS was now firmly in charge within the enclave. General Mladic comported himself in a triumphant and intimidating manner, although on several occasions, when there were news cameras in the vicinity, he adopted a charming and benevolent demeanour. His propaganda offensive seems to have been successful in that it persuaded many Dutchbat soldiers that the VRS would treat the civilian population correctly. However, the VRS’s off-camera manner relied on threats and intimidation. This was witnessed by some Dutchbat forces and some experienced it at close hand as they were robbed of their weapons and equipment. It was also clear that some of the Serbian former residents of Srebrenica were here looking for specific individuals. Their motive was unmistakably revenge. The VRS announced its intention to screen the men for any ABiH military personnel and especially for ‘war criminals’. This indicated a desire to ‘settle the score’ for past events.

In and around the compound it was the battalion’s second-in-command, Major Rob Franken, who made most of the decisions and who issued the orders. This was in keeping with the division of responsibilities which he and his commanding officer, Lt. Col. Karremans, had agreed between themselves and which they had observed all along. At this time, Karremans was concerned primarily with maintaining contact with his superiors and with The Hague, and was responsible for conducting the ‘negotiations’ with Mladic. In this situation, Major Franken would inevitably face countless very complex dilemmas.

There could be no question of protecting the civilian population by armed force. Not only did the VRS have far superior firepower, but the presence of such a large number of refugees in close proximity rendered effective action impossible. In effect, this was a hostage situation in which any violent resistance would inevitably have led to a bloodbath. There was no doubt as to the main task: the priority was to evacuate the population from the compound. This was, after all, the desire of all concerned, albeit with varying motives. The Bosnian Serbs under Mladic had made it clear that they aimed to rid Srebrenica and the surrounding area of Muslims and to ‘cleanse’ the region to become exclusively Serb. It is very difficult to attach any credibility to the option that was put to the population in public: stay or leave. The refugees themselves were keen to leave. The longer they had to wait, the more desperate they became. When buses appeared, there was a virtual stampede as people rushed to claim a place. This prompted Dutchbat to intervene in an attempt to control the crowd. It was also the intention to prevent the refugees from being handed over directly to the VRS soldiers. To Dutchbat it was clear that the Muslims had only one option: to leave. It then became Dutchbat's responsibility to supervise and to cooperate in the evacuation, even if this meant assisting the process of ethnic cleansing. There were, however, differences of opinion regarding the extent of permissible involvement.

Major Franken therefore faced no dilemma in terms of whether to cooperate in the evacuation of the population. The shortage of food and the rapidly deteriorating state of public hygiene made evacuation necessary. Food supplies were almost completely exhausted and there was a well-placed fear of epidemic disease breaking out shortly. In short, a humanitarian crisis loomed and rapid evacuation was essential. As he was later to admit, Franken recognized that there was a risk of the prisoners being mistreated by the VRS. He had chosen not to express his fears to avoid panic, which would inevitably lead to an immediate crisis. Furthermore, he did not imagine that the maltreatment would go as far as mass extermination, merely that the VRS would not observe the usual conventions, whereupon casualties might fall as in some earlier incidents during the Bosnian conflict. Accordingly, Franken’s every decision was informed by considerations of whether the proposed action would jeopardize or hamper the evacuation.

This is the basis upon which he made the decision not to attempt to stop the separation of the men from the women (although Dutchbat forces did not take an active part in this process, as far as can be determined). "We accepted that the men faced an uncertain fate, and that they might indeed come to suffer the most appalling conditions," Franken later said. In fact, under the usual rules and conventions of warfare, it was neither forbidden nor unusual for able-bodied men to be segregated from the rest, in order to determine whether any were active military personnel who could then be taken as prisoners of war. Neither was it unusual for cooperation to be offered in the drawing up of lists, which could be used for a variety of purposes, including establishing the later whereabouts of the people on those lists or regulating movements through the combat zone.

Other decisions by Franken which later gave rise to controversy can also be viewed in this light. They included the manner in which local ‘friendly’ personnel were to be included on the lists for safe access to the compound. Later, the fate of the Numanovic family was to receive much international attention. In general, UNPROFOR was aware of how strict the VRS controls on the movement of personnel were, and the importance attached to the relevant documents. There would inevitably be VRS checkpoints; Franken considered the risk of people being discovered with questionable papers (or no papers at all) far too high. This would bring the others in danger. That is why he refused to allow the brother of the Dutch interpreter Hasan Numanovic to be added to the list of people to be allowed to leave with Dutchbat. Numanovic’s father could have joined the party, as he had participated in one of the discussions between Karremans and Mladic as a representative of the refugees and was thus entitled to safe conduct. But he chose to remain with his family and, it was later discovered, was killed along with his son. His wife also died. In at least one case (the electrician Mustafic) someone who was actually entitled to be on the list was omitted. This was due to a breakdown of communications within the battalion, which had fatal consequences.

When faced with such impossible dilemmas, the rules offer little assistance. Franken made his decisions in the knowledge that, whatever he did, some sections of the population would remain at risk. His intention was to avoid a humanitarian crisis which would envelop the entire population. This approach would inevitably have far-reaching consequences for the men present, who were very much in the minority. Franken knew that the consequences might be serious and very unpleasant, but he could not have foreseen that they would include mass murder.

By this time, Karremans had been forced into the position of UNPROFOR’s negotiator with Mladic. As the commanding officer of UNPROFOR troops in the enclave, he was in the first instance the designated person to take on this responsibility. However, it would have been appropriate for UNPROFOR to send a representative from a higher echelon, one of equal rank to Mladic. (Indeed, this option was tried, but for the first several days Mladic refused all cooperation in
such a process.) The higher authorities at UNPROFOR subsequently proved unable or unwilling to press the issue. Karremans thus became the person upon whom Mladic could exercise his tried-and-tested intimidation tactics. He manipulated the Dutch officer with a combination of threats and promises. For the cameras, a false impression of close and friendly cooperation between the VRS and Dutchbat was created: Mladic and Karremans were shown drinking a toast to each other. Karremans was the weaker party all along, due to Mladic's superior rank and his status as 'victor'. The colonel stood little chance against Mladic and in essence there was little or no negotiation: it was simply a question of instructions being issued.

The enclave was to be evacuated: that much was agreed. Mladic made the false promise that Dutchbat would be permitted to undertake the evacuation according to a set plan. The most sensitive point during the discussions was the Bosnian Serb demand that all able-bodied men should be screened for the presence of war criminals before being allowed to leave. Karremans raised a weak protest, but for a long time he (as well as Major Franken) remained under the erroneous impression that after the screening most men would be able to join the rest of the people going to Tuzla and that the others would be transported to prisoner of war camps. In any event, it is unlikely that any more forceful protest would have swayed Mladic, now in the flush of victory. Reneging on the promises, the VRS began its own deportation of refugees on 12 July. The Dutchbat attempts to escort and supervise the convoys were only partially successful.

Karremans had made it very clear that his battalion would not leave the enclave until the last of the civilian population had left.

Besides being the scene of 'ethnic cleansing', Potocari was also the setting for local reprisals, the extent of which is extremely difficult to gauge. Allowing a large margin of error, it is likely that between one hundred and four hundred men were killed in the immediate vicinity of Potocari. This figure is far higher than that suggested by the Dutchbat reports of July 1995, which must prompt the question of why these reports were so limited when they concerned events that were taking place extremely close at hand.

One possible answer is that, with only a few exceptions, the VRS and the irregular troops working alongside them tried to keep their activities hidden from Dutchbat, the UNMOs and the representatives of the MSF. This is also why many Dutchbat personnel could later describe only suspicions of there having been something terribly amiss. However, there are indications that some of them had more than mere suspicions. That they never reported their misgivings may be explained by the enormous stress under which they were working. This led to a mental withdrawal, a narrowing of vision and, in some, serious psychological problems following their return to the Netherlands. For some, concern for their own survival may have weighed more heavily than concern for the Muslim men who had made life so difficult for Dutchbat in the preceding months. However, the operative word here is 'some': this was by no means the case for all Dutchbat personnel. For whatever reason, the battalion's internal communications broke down on 12 and 13 July 1995, the days on which the men removed from the general crowd were murdered. Given the chaos that prevailed, it was extremely difficult to determine exactly what was going on in and around Potocari on those days. The battalion command was therefore unaware of the events taking place, including those which involved any violation of human rights. Nevertheless, the reports that did come through were alarming enough in themselves: on two separate occasions, groups of nine or ten bodies were observed (although at the time it remained unclear whether this was the aftermath of two executions or a single group execution), and there were also indications that interrogations being conducted in a house near the compound involved the use of physical violence. At the time, these reports were regarded as isolated incidents and were reported as such to the higher levels of command.

Even if the failings of the internal humanitarian reporting can, to a certain extent, be explained, it remains unclear why the battalion command did not make more effort to determine the true nature of the events. But even though Major Franken had a sense of foreboding, he and Karremans evidently had other things on their minds. Even in the week following the evacuation, when things were rather more quiet, they made no attempt to obtain information relating to any serious violations of human rights. During subsequent interviews with the NIOD, Karremans and Franken both expressed surprise on this point. Their responsibility for these omissions is shared by those at higher levels within the organization, who furthermore had access to information from areas other than the enclave itself. The reports from Tuzla, for example, gave particular cause for concern.

12. When examining the dealings of the Dutchbat III battalion command in detail, particularly those of Karremans and Franken, it is difficult to look beyond the image that has subsequently formed. Karremans has been the target of much criticism, and this is hardly surprising. He was the commanding officer of a battalion which allowed the enclave to be taken by the VRS with no resistance whatsoever. Even if instructions and orders from above were followed to the letter, the battalion's actions do not reflect favourably upon them. There then followed the mass murder of a large section of the population to whom they were supposed to offer some degree of protection (even though everyone realized that such protection was more symbolic than anything else), whereupon the picture becomes even more dismal. Despite the fact that the executions took place beyond Dutchbat's field of vision, the unfavourable impressions became very difficult to rectify. Karremans in particular came to stand in a very poor light in most people's eyes.

Karremans' reputation also suffered serious damage as a result of his less-than-expert media approach. He rarely displayed any great aptitude for communication, and at the press conference in Pleso he failed to make any forceful impression. His earlier statements of respect for Mladic as a military leader proved difficult to retract, while his famous 'no good guys no bad guys' summary found little favour. The press conference is considered in further detail under point 13 below. When footage of his negotiations with Mladic became available, the impression of weakness was confirmed, without anyone stopping to ask about the context of the clips so frequently repeated on television, or whether they were representative of the talks as a whole. The ongoing media attention served to create the impression that the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces in general and the army in particular had entered into some sort of conspiracy of silence,

http://www.srebrenica.nl/en/content_epiloog.htm

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which did not serve to help matters. It was presumed that an alleged cover-up was intended to hide all the mistakes that had been made. This implicated Dutchbat and hence the battalion’s own senior officers first and foremost. Nevertheless, it is not possible to hold the media or individuals’ media performance entirely responsible for the impressions that were formed. Karremans was also subject to considerable criticism from ‘insiders’, even before the fall of the enclave. Observers who were not under his command questioned Karremans’ actions before and during the posting in the enclave. A number of Dutchbat personnel also expressed criticism, although usually only after the mission was completed, during the debriefings for example.

To make a fair and balanced analysis of the battalion command’s performance, we must take into account the extremely difficult circumstances under which they were required to operate. Fairly soon after its arrival, the battalion had to deal with the Bandera crisis, which rendered the relationship with the ABiH particularly precarious. Increasingly, the VRS applied a strategy of blockades, which not only cut off supplies to the civilian population but also manipulated military operations with its system of permits for incoming and outgoing convoys. It placed the entire mission in doubt, creating a feeling of confinement (and of being a potential sitting target), while seriously diminishing the resources (and later manpower) required to function effectively. Karremans’ statement that he did not regard his battalion as fully operational was accepted by his superior, General Janvier, as accurate. Had the proposed relief of Dutchbat III proceeded according to plan, i.e. in late June or early July 1995, an assessment at that point may have been more positive. Of course it would still have been possible to indicate certain problems, such as a strong introspective attitude as the result of being caught between the combatant parties and due to the lack of contact with the world beyond the enclave. Yet in general terms we can state that the battalion and its commanders showed courage in managing to keep their heads above water under difficult circumstances. This is the impression that emerged during the first days after the fall, when Minister Voorhoeve actually considered awarding some form of decoration to the battalion, or more specifically to its commanding officer.

There is a certain danger that the shortcomings which existed will take on disproportionate importance (especially in comparison with Dutchbats I and II, which never had to face such close public scrutiny) against the backdrop of the catastrophe which unfolded after 6 July. Conversely, we must ensure that all relevant factors are taken into consideration to ensure appropriate focus in the analysis. It will not be appropriate to allow the difficult circumstances during the attack to stand in the way of a full analysis or to excuse all the shortcomings. After all, soldiers are trained to operate under extremely difficult conditions. One might even say that society maintains an army specifically in order to have someone who is able to operate under extremely difficult conditions.

When examining the actions of the battalion command, it may be concluded that, difficult conditions or no difficult conditions, they failed to alleviate the introspective and demotivated mood of the battalion through inspired leadership. However, it may also be concluded that until those hectic July days, the vast majority of the demanding military and humanitarian tasks which fell to this battalion were completed satisfactorily. The battalion cannot be said to have been dysfunctional. But when the VRS opened its attack on the enclave, Dutchbat was not in a position to control the course of events. However, it must be remembered that the active military defence of the enclave was specifically excluded from the battalion’s instructions, and that a passive presence was the order of the day.

During the first few chaotic days following the fall of Srebrenica on 11 July, thousands of refugees assembled around the compound at Potocari into which the remaining section of Dutchbat had withdrawn. The battalion command was not able to gain a complete picture of events, and from time to time seemed likely to suffer a breakdown of internal communications as well. But eventually, the humanitarian tasks rendered necessary by the circumstances were taken up (for better or worse) in the belief that the refugees themselves would benefit from a rapid and orderly evacuation. Under the specific circumstances, much depended on the ability to improvise and the views of individual Dutchbat personnel as to what was desirable. Major Franken acted as the decision-maker and regulator on the spot. Karremans had the unenviable task of acting as official negotiator with General Mladic. Whether in performing these tasks they fulfilled the professional demands of good leadership depends on what one believes can be reasonably expected of army officers under the circumstances that prevailed here. With the benefit of hindsight, a number of critical observations may be made.

In the first instance, the criticisms refer to a series of separate issues, each of which is described and analysed elsewhere in this Epilogue (and in much greater detail in the report proper and its annexes). No effort was made to improve the poor relationships with and within the medical services. Opportunities to gather useful intelligence were passed up, in particular by restricting the freedom of movement of JCoS from Bosnia-Hercegovina Command in the enclave. Unclear orders were given with regard to the ‘blocking positions’ to be taken up. There was confusion regarding procedures to request air support and regarding the possibilities and limitations of such support. Furthermore, the actions with regard to the observation and reporting of (indications of) serious crimes on the part of the Bosnian Serbs cannot stand up to close scrutiny.

As far as the negotiations with Mladic are concerned, no matter how unfortunate their outcome or the publicity generated, little blame can be attached to Karremans. On the question of collaborating in the transport of the population, although insufficient guarantees of their safety were obtained, this is a question of a choice being made in extremely difficult circumstances. Had the population been kept in Potocari a humanitarian crisis may well have ensued. The decision can therefore be justified.

In the second instance and at somewhat greater length, we must consider the relationship between Karremans and Franken. In military circles, it is considered extremely important for the commanding officer to maintain a clear and visible presence. According to the literature and the ‘Army doctrine’, the commander should maintain close contact with his personnel. This is important in terms of loyalty and commitment, in terms of information, in terms of identifying problems and potential conflicts, and in terms of motivation. The second-in-command acts as the commanding officer’s right-hand man to whom many day-to-day tasks can be delegated, which enables the commanding officer to be present in
several locations, as and when the work demands. However, this was clearly not the situation within Dutchbat III. Karremans and Franken had adopted a different division of responsibilities, whereby it was Major Franken who maintained high visibility in various locations, while Karremans oversaw matters and issued orders from the battalion headquarters. Although there was never any lack of clarity with regard to where authority lay, and although Karremans and Franken never allowed themselves to be played off one against the other, this method of working did occasionally create the wrong impression. Some Dutchbat personnel believed that Franken was the actual commander. Even outsiders could have gained this idea. In practice, he was certainly the man who issued most of the orders.

This had already become apparent during the preparations for Dutchbat III’s posting. The acting commander of the Airmobile Brigade, Lt. Col. Lemmen, gained the impression that there was some hidden friction. Yet because everything seemed to operate well within the battalion, he saw insufficient cause to intervene (which would in itself have been a very unusual course of action). During Dutchbat III’s actual tour of duty in the enclave, several observers commented on the unusual division of responsibilities between Karremans and Franken. It was, however, difficult to ascertain what effect, if any, this had and despite the fact that the overall impression created by Dutchbat was not particularly favourable, it was concluded that most tasks were nevertheless carried out competently.

It is incorrect to draw any direct connection between the two senior officers’ unusual division of responsibilities and the alleged shortcomings of the battalion during the VRS attack, the fall of the enclave and the shocking events which were to follow. There is no hard evidence to suggest that such a connection exists. Franken and Karremans had developed a method of working together. In a sense, each complemented the other well. Karremans was the man who analysed matters and reported on progress upwards in the chain of command (most contacts with the higher ranks and the Hague went through him), while Franken was the ‘man of action’, making the decisions regarding day-to-day command. Franken was the practical man, much more of a ‘troops officer’ than Karremans. For his part, the battalion commander respected Franken’s ability. He allowed him considerable leeway, of which Franken made full use. It was therefore inevitable that Franken would play the dominant role in day-to-day practice and tended to overshadow the commanding officer in many respects. Together, they made the most of the difficult circumstances that prevailed. Even in the subsequent discussions and analyses of their actions, they remained loyal to each other despite some major differences in opinion and the level of appreciation.

It is interesting to note that Major Franken did not at first enjoy the affection of the battalion due to his rigid enforcement of discipline and insistence on proper turnout at all times. Nevertheless, he eventually came to command the fullest respect of his men, earned during the Bandera crisis but more especially during the VRS attack and the fall of the enclave. (The equally hard-line company commander Captain Groen was also to earn respect in this way.) Karremans still attracted considerable criticism despite – and because of – his relatively low profile. As is so often the case, the criticism was levelled at the commander since it is he who bears overall responsibility for what occurs within the unit.

13. Once the deportation of the enclave population was completed on 13 July, practically all other activities were directed towards the evacuation of the remaining wounded, Dutchbat itself, and the local staff of the battalion, Médecins sans Frontières and UNHCR. On 22 July, the battalion arrived in Zagreb, the city which housed the headquarters of UNPROFOR. They were preceded the week before by a group of 55 former hostages who had been captured from the OPs taken by the VRS, together with a medical team which the VRS had allowed to leave Potocari on 15 July. The time spent by Dutchbat in Zagreb is significant for two reasons. First, it was here that the first debriefings took place, intended to determine the exact course of events during and after the fall of the enclave. Second, Zagreb was the scene of the first major confrontation with the press. This meeting later proved to have a significant influence on public perceptions of Dutchbat and the Ministry of Defence.

The men of Dutchbat arrived in Zagreb tired and distressed by all they had seen. The majority just wanted to go home as soon as possible. Friends and family in the Netherlands had long been impatiently awaiting their return. All in all, this was not the best time to start seeking answers to the countless questions which had arisen. Nevertheless, a few Dutchbat men were very keen to tell their story, incensed as they were by what they had experienced. There was certainly some relief at their safe return, but at the same time the many disquieting stories concerning the fate of the civilian population became a point of concern for the authorities and the press. The Dutch men faced a series of questions from people of various degrees of officialdom. VIP visitors included Crown Prince Willem-Alexander and prime minister Wim Kok, but most interlocutors were ‘debriefers’ of one type or another. People arrived from the Netherlands to conduct the ‘psychological debriefing’, while army officers and UN officials conducted the ‘operational debriefing’. They were interested in any violations of human rights which had been observed.

Somewhat unusually, representatives of the Sectie Militaire Geschiedenis (Military History Section; SMG) were also in attendance, at the express request of the Commander of the Land Forces, General Couzy. This unit is responsible for documenting military events as soon as possible after they happen, but it was nevertheless remarkable for them to be on the spot as soon as this. Couzy had called in the SMG because he sought the answers to some specific questions. Besides a factual reconstruction of the events, he was particularly concerned with the question of whether certain Dutchbat personnel should be considered for a decoration, the course of events at the blocking positions, aspects relating to air support and the internal relationships within Dutchbat (stories about the battalion’s unusual command structure had reached Couzy’s ear). He also wished to examine the communication between the DCBC and the army crisis staff, which had certainly not been perfect. Couzy also had a hidden agenda in that he wished to learn about the gaps in the information made available to him, as opposed to the DCBC; this part of the assignment was to remain ‘strictly confidential’.

The SMG did not have the opportunity to launch any comprehensive or probing inquiry during those days. A search for
relevant documents had already been commenced prior to the departure for Zagreb. The main focus in Zagreb itself was the debriefing teams, which included SMG representatives. The commander of the Luchtmobiele Brigade (Airmobile Brigade), General Bastians, played a key role in the debriefings. Given the short time available and the many other activities demanding attention, the interviews with the Dutchbat men offered only fragmentary information. Of greatest significance is the fact that there was so much uncertainty about almost every aspect, making it difficult to confirm the little information that could be obtained. A dominant frame (such as any premeditated intention on the part of the Bosnian Serbs to exterminate the Muslims) had yet to emerge.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning the questioning tended to gravitate towards the possibility of genocide having taken place or, in more general terms, a large-scale violation of human rights. The reports from survivors who had reached Tuzla were very significant in this regard, but given the setting of the reception facilities for the refugees (the local airfield) some doubt concerning the veracity of these accounts existed at first: were they perhaps exaggerated for propaganda purposes?

Among Dutch officials, various approaches could be seen. In a television broadcast (the current affairs programme NOVA) on 18 July, Minister Jan Pronk expressed the concerns with which he had just returned from a visit to Tuzla from 15 to 17 July, using the word 'genocide' without hesitation. His colleagues Van Mierlo and Voorhoeve also expressed concern, although they chose to do so in rather more guarded terms with a view to the safety of the Dutchbat personnel who were still in a very vulnerable position in the former enclave.

By contrast, Couzy adopted a very cautious approach. In the first instance, this was due to the connotations as well as the legal definition of the term 'genocide' in international law. Pronk was not concerned with such niceties and used the word in a much broader and general sense. But Couzy actually suggested that the problem might not be so bad as some were saying, although he stressed that he based his views solely on the information obtained from Dutchbat. In doing so, he pushed the possibility of any (indirect) involvement on the part of Dutchbat into the background. This was due to his uncertainty regarding exactly what had happened in the enclave and was in keeping with his wish to protect the image of Dutchbat and the army in general. However, the vague and incomplete nature of the facts at his disposal could also have led him to conclude that there were sufficient grounds for caution and further investigation.

The difference in the approach to the issues became particularly apparent during the press conference held in Zagreb on Sunday 23 July 1995, the day before Dutchbat left for the Netherlands. That press conference was broadcast live on Dutch television, there being considerable public interest in the events. With the benefit of hindsight - at first this was not apparent to everyone - many things went awry there and then. In the chaos of the day, the official Ministry of Defence and the army PR spokesmen were unable to prepare Couzy and Karremans adequately. There was no time to think through the possible effects of certain statements. The contrast between Couzy's approach and that of Minister Voorhoeve (who was also present) did not escape the journalists in attendance. At first, it was accepted that one based his views on the facts presented to him by Dutchbat personnel, while the other also listened to international reports. Later this explanation would no longer be sufficient. In the efforts to find out exactly what had happened and what had been observed to happen, the two men's fundamentally different attitudes to the way in which information was obtained and disseminated would become very significant.

In the first instance, it was Karremans's performance which proved more deleterious to the image of Dutchbat and the Dutch defence forces in general. In hindsight, it is possible to ask whether the authorities should have exposed Karremans to this ordeal, at a press conference which had been so inadequately prepared. He was not a particularly good communicator at the best of times but on this occasion he was extremely tired and, if not angry, certainly irritated by the treatment he had received during the debriefing. In any event, his contribution to the proceedings created an unfavourable impression which persisted for some time. In particular, his statement that there had been "no good guys, no bad guys" was pounced upon by the press. His statements reflected a certain vision of the interrelationships between the combatant parties. Karremans was trying to make it clear that the Bosnian Serbs had not been the only ones to display extreme aggression and violence. In doing so, he drew attention to the ABiH sorties, citing the figure of 192 villages which he claimed had been burned to the ground and their inhabitants massacred in 1993. This being an extremely high number, it was all too easy to dismiss as nothing more than Serb propaganda.

Karremans was also unable to rectify a rather unfortunate remark about Mladic he had made earlier. When crossing the border into Croatia, Karremans had run into two journalists, who recorded him as saying that he considered Mladic to be a 'great military strategist'. Now, during the press conference, he described Mladic as 'anything but a good general' but described the operation as 'very correct'.

The 'no good guys, no bad guys' comment had been suggested by the defence spokesman W.P. Hartman and was intended to characterize the relationship between the combatant parties. The comment was, however, taken in a completely different context by many journalists as it now seemed highly likely that the Bosnian Serbs had been responsible for large-scale atrocities. Many had very different conceptions of 'good guys and bad guys', the Serbs usually being seen as the main aggressors and the Muslims as the unfortunate victims. During the international press conference in particular, Karremans' version of events was very poorly received. Minister Voorhoeve intervened and tried to rectify the situation, but was unable to make any great impact.

The press conference signalled a radical volte face on the part of the media. By and large, Dutchbat had hitherto been portrayed in a positive light. The Dutch battalion had done its work under particularly difficult circumstances. This attitude continued even during the attack on and subsequent capture of Srebrenica. Many journalists, including Twan Huys of the television programme NOVA, displayed considerable understanding and remained cautious as long as Dutch personnel were still in the enclave. After all, the Bosnian Serbs were unpredictable types.

It may be said that the Zagreb press conference was the turning point. Various factors go to explain this. First, in the light of the shocking events which had apparently taken place, some journalists were embarrassed by the submissive, establishment-compliant attitude they had adopted and were now inclined to take an opposite stance. Second, there were...
understandable and often justified complaints about the paucity of information made available by the Ministry of Defence. In Zagreb, for example, the press (who had been waiting for some time) were kept well away from the Dutchbat personnel. By chance, the NOVA television programme had recorded a speech by General Couzy in which he warned the men about the media attention they could expect. In the circumstances this was seen - quite erroneously - as an order not to speak to the press at all. Third, the balance of personal relationships was disrupted, and a certain jalouse de métier entered the equation. Twan Huys, for example, was enraged that his colleagues were able to report Karremans's statement about Mladic. He believed himself to have been misled by the Ministry when it announced that no statements would be made until the Zagreb press conference itself. Huys had been made various promises in return for his undertaking not to compromise the safety of the Dutchbat troops still in the field, and these promises later proved impossible to meet. In particular, he considered the decision to hold the press conference on a Sunday - a day on which there was no scheduled edition of NOVA - as adding insult to injury, although he did manage to feature General Couzy in the previous evening's programme by way of compensation.

All in all it is clear that Zagreb included a number of elements which encouraged the media to take a far more critical view of official statements in future. Sometimes a distinction would be drawn between the Central Organization (personified by Voorhoeve) and the army itself (Couzy), and sometimes they would be regarded as one and the same apparatus. Some media - with the Volkskrant newspaper and NOVA setting the tone - fulfilled their role as watchdog with much inventiveness and persistence. Like the 'deb briefers', the journalists devoted themselves to discovering the truth about the Srebrenica affair. They quickly found sources who were only too pleased to talk about their experiences, emotions, irritations and feelings of anger towards the defence establishment.

After Srebrenica, the picture painted by the media was perhaps even more black and white: the Serb villains and the Muslim victims. However, this perception was not shared by the majority of Dutchbat personnel, who had known a very different world during their time in the enclave. Although the Muslims eventually proved to be the victims in no uncertain terms, the only Dutch fatal in the enclave - Private Raviv van Renssen - died at the hands of the Muslim ABiH. When Dutchbat was criticized in the media, which it quite often was, this contributed to the feeling of being misunderstood by Dutch society in general, and by the press and politicians in particular. It made dealing with the psychological effects of the Srebrenica experience that much more difficult, both collectively and individually. In this context, the television footage of the 'Dutchbat party', made public in the autumn of 1995, is illuminating. For many, the scenes of beer-drinking, carousing Dutchbat soldiers came to symbolize the insouciance with which the men and their country as a whole regarded the fate of the Muslims killed in the mass executions. This footage was broadcast time and time again. It was taken from a home video made by the battalion information officer, Wim Dijkmee. The full video reveals that apart from the men seen to be enjoying themselves so ebulliently, there were others sitting in quiet contemplation at the tables. The full story, of which this video contains only a few fragments, is very different than that suggested by a few soldiers having a party.

On the evening of 22 July 1995, a barbecue was held for the men who had arrived in Zagreb (and who had not yet moved on). This began as quietly as any social gathering, but the atmosphere was later to change as the alcohol and the music took effect. Many harboured an acute feeling of senselessness with regard to the death of Van Renssen, whereupon they began to recall memories of their late brother-in-arms. A sort of spontaneous and informal memorial service was held, and at a certain moment the band was asked to play the Dutch national anthem, the Wilhelmin. There were tears. After this moving moment, some turned to festivities as a release for their pent up emotions. One of those present likened it to the outpouring of emotions often seen after a funeral. In fact, only a few dozen Dutchbat personnel took part in the revelry seen in the television reports.

It must be asked how these private pictures of an equally private occasion came into the public domain. Dijkmee had responded to a call from the Ministry itself and handed his tape to the information department. He did, however, advise caution in the use of certain scenes. He was told that there was a policy of full disclosure and that all videotapes would be given into the safe-keeping of the Dutch broadcasting facilities agency NOS, who would then make them available to any interested parties. So it was that Dijkmee's tape was made public in late 1995. The short clip shown on television had a strong, anachronistic effect. The impression created was one of Dutchbat soldiers, fully aware of mass murders having been committed around them, holding a wild party under the very eyes of the press. This impression is false on all three of its tenets: there was no wild party, they could not have been aware of the murders and there were no press cameras present. The episode illustrates the power of the selective picture in creating its own version of reality. The manner in which the tragedy of Srebrenica was later dealt with in the Netherlands would provide several further illustrations of the importance of perceptions.

14. In Zagreb, the Ministry of Defence came under fire from the media. From one moment to the next, unquestioning support gave way to a very critical examination of official dealings. Back home in the Netherlands, some members of Parliament joined in the chorus of disapproval, but this time chose not to return early from their recess. In political circles, the Minister of Defence, Joris Voorhoeve, was seen to be accountable. Increasingly, the process of obtaining and disseminating information became a key issue. Detective work on the part of journalists revealed a constant stream of new facts of which the minister had been totally unaware. Both the press and the politicians renewed their call for more information from the defence apparatus. There was a growing suspicion that there was some kind of cover-up afoot; that the authorities were trying to protect Dutchbat's reputation. The minister was clearly ill-informed. He wished to see a broad, comprehensive investigation which would leave no stone unturned. The debriefing which had begun on such a small-scale in Zagreb must now be continued on a much larger scale in the Netherlands. Only this could stop the revelations and quash the rumours of scandal. Voorhoeve wished to be on top of the information, rather than constantly have to chase after it. He relied on the loyalty, support and political awareness of the armed forces.

http://www.srebrenica.nl/en/content_epiloog.htm

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However, this reliance proved misplaced. The army had other priorities, whereupon efforts to inform the minister were frequently too late or too little. On some occasions, the minister was not informed at all. This increasingly came to damage the image of both the minister and the armed forces themselves. Within the armed forces, may personnel believed that the minister had left them out in the cold when dealing with the various issues. In addition, General Couzy, whose relationship with the minister had been under strain for some time, was under the impression that Voorhoeve interfered too much in matters which rightfully fell to himself. The Dutchbat mission in Srebrenica had been an army matter, and should therefore be dealt with entirely by the general in his capacity as Commander of Land Forces. Couzy also believed that the debriefings should also have been treated as a military operation, focusing on Dutchbat and dealt with entirely within the army. This opinion was not shared by Voorhoeve. When on 23 July 1995 the two men met in Zagreb and discussed a 'general debriefing', they were therefore talking about two entirely different things. The minister's ambitions for a broad approach were at cross purposes to those of the general, as became clear in late July. Nevertheless, the army was later to acquire sole responsibility for the debriefings. This was primarily because Voorhoeve thought that having the investigation conducted by some external party would be construed as a demonstration of mistrust in the military. It was the minister who formally commissioned the investigation and he appointed two advisors to assist in the investigation: the former Minister of Defence Job de Ruiter and General (retld.) Govert Huys. But since there were no written instructions with clear objectives and conditions, it was nevertheless possible for the army to place its own stamp on the actual debriefing.

The army's Military Intelligence Department (MID/KL) played a prominent part in that debriefing. This was in keeping with the unit's usual responsibility for providing the Commander of Land Forces with adequate information to enable him to do his job. The Koninklijke Marechaussee (Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary; Km) also played a very significant role, forming the organizational backbone of the entire operation. This provided the Central Organization of the Ministry of Defence with a guarantee of the integrity, probity and objectivity of the investigation. The Military History Section managed to extricate itself from the rather thorny position in which it had been placed during the preparatory phase by withdrawing from the debriefing process proper.

For the Koninklijke Marechaussee, it would have come as some relief that its usual duty of investigating criminal behaviour, which had at first been difficult to combine with the process of debriefing, was 'neutralized' by means of an arrangement made with the Public Prosecutions Department. In practice, the arrangement meant that there would be very little likelihood of any (criminal) misconduct on the part of Dutchbat personnel being reported to a higher authority, but this was not a matter of priority for any of the parties involved at this time. In this context, the course of events in connection with the now-notorious 'management report' is both remarkable and telling. In brief, a captain of the Marechaussee had scribbled a note in the margin of another report, detailing complaints and accusations about the functioning of Dutchbat and its command. Although many people must have seen and read this note, no one in the Army considered it to be of any relevance. Only the commanding officer of the Koninklijke Marechaussee, General D.G.J. Fabius, thought it important enough to call the minister and inform him accordingly.

Other material concerning such delicate issues as criminal offences, the functioning of the battalion command, the problems in connection with medical treatment and the general attitude of Dutchbat men towards the local population did not result in passages of any great length or content in the final debriefing report, which concentrated on the matters which were of greatest interest to the press and the politicians at the time of the investigation itself. That the debriefing report had serious shortcomings was immediately obvious to Minister Voorhoeve and his staff when it was presented. This is evident from the letter dated 30 October 1995 with which the Minister offered the report to Parliament, which was unusually long and contained copious explanatory notes and 'context'. Nevertheless, Voorhoeve had little choice but to praise the report. For weeks, he had managed to field questions by referring to the forthcoming debriefing report. Furthermore, any immediate admission that it was inadequate would reflect very badly on its authors, the Army. This he wished to avoid. In short, Voorhoeve was the debriefing report's unwilling hostage. Despite its shortcomings, Voorhoeve managed to get very good 'mileage' out of the report during the latter months of 1995. After two very long sessions in which he answered questions from the House, the debate of 19 December closed a whole series of parliamentary sessions devoted to Srebrenica and the part played by the Netherlands and Dutchbat. The minister emerged relatively unscathed. Voorhoeve maintained that the failings were primarily those of the UN, although he did accept responsibility for the errors made after the fall of Srebrenica. Members of the House conceded that they too bore some responsibility for the tragedy that had taken place. At the time, the media was conducting a debate concerning the responsibility of the UN in providing air support to Dutchbat, and had once again raised the possibility that the UN had deliberately ceded the enclave. This coverage served to divert immediate attention from the debriefing report and its shortcomings.

In the longer term, however, the report proved unable to serve the minister's original purpose, which was to staunch the flow of uncontrolled revelations. In fact, the debriefing had quite the opposite effect. The ministry and the army had chosen not to respond to any reports in the media while the debriefing was going on, in the hope that the resulting report would be sufficient. Yet very soon after its publication, new revelations emerged concerning matters which were perhaps somewhat more substantial than the issues which had been covered: the alleged deliberate running-over of civilians, the 'iron ration' of drugs and medical equipment, the refusal of medical assistance to the wounded, the preparation of lists of male refugees and casualties, the alleged negative attitude towards the Muslims, the assistance offered in separating the men from the women, failure to report observations in a timely manner, and the functioning of the battalion command. There were further revelations of a type which reflected badly on The Hague: a roll of film which was lost under suspicious circumstances, the 'press mole colonel', a leak in the crisis command bunker and the promotion of Karremans all raised questions.

This laid the basis for the re-emergence of the Srebrenica issue in the press and in political circles, now with an even more distinct emotional and political slant. The army had been able to determine the form of the debriefing and had
chosen the 'narrow' approach wherever possible. In doing so, it clearly lacked political awareness and its avoidance of potentially unwelcome topics rebounded like a boomerang. 'Srebrenica' continued to dominate the media, and hence it continued to plague the Ministry of Defence and the army. Indeed, the defence apparatus was virtually paralysed in several respects. Voorhoeve was unsuccessful in breaking through this deadlock. He had commenced his term of office full of enthusiasm and ambition, determined to make the Netherlands' participation in UNPROFOR and its role in Srebrenica a success, or at the very least perform the task in hand in a correct and competent manner. Yet eventually, he too became embroiled in the aftermath of the fall of the enclave and was buffeted by the aftershocks which resounded through The Hague. In all probability, this was primarily because he never managed to gain a grasp of the defence organization as a whole.

This situation continued to obtain throughout the rest of Voorhoeve's term of office. Eventually, when Voorhoeve was replaced when the new cabinet took office in the summer of 1998, his successor Frank de Grave seemed set to fall into the same situation within a week of his appointment. De Grave decided that it would be disastrous to follow the same path as his predecessor, with all the press revelations, political commotion, difficulty in obtaining information and long letters to Parliament. The integrity of the entire defence organization was under question and a more forceful response was called for.

This response came in the form of a official inquiry conducted by a prominent former politician and administrator who was no longer in the front line of politics itself. Professor J.A. van Kemenade. On behalf of Prime Minister Kok, among others, Van Kemenade was asked to investigate, as quickly as could be regarded responsible, whether there had been any question of what was usually referred to as a 'systematic cover-up' (although this term is too strong to cover the terms of reference exactly). A prompt and definitive statement on the matter would serve to break through the administrative impasse which the Ministry of Defence now faced. If there had indeed been a cover-up, firm and far-reaching action would be taken. If there had not, the rumours could be scotched with persuasive arguments.

Before reaching any conclusion, Van Kemenade had to conduct an investigation, of course. However, the prime purpose of his inquiries was not strictly to establish the truth. Rather, both the commissioning authorities and the investigator took the view that it was intended to resolve an administrative problem. After a relatively short time, in which he heard testimony from a large number of witnesses on a variety of points, Van Kemenade concluded that there had been no cover-up as such. However, his report Omwent Srebrenica ("With Regard to Srebrenica") was in many respects extremely critical of what he characterized as 'blanders' and 'carelessness', of the poor communications (particularly between the Central Organization and the army), and of the difficulty which the Ministry of Defence was experiencing in implementing its restructuring programme. Moreover, the report used unusually strong words to express its criticism of the debriefing process and the role of the Public Prosecutions Department.

The Van Kemenade report did indeed clear the administrative air within the Ministry. It became possible to work in a different way within the organization, and in a different atmosphere. However, the report did little to deflect the intensive media attention. Yet more revelations emerged soon thereafter, and it was even suggested that Van Kemenade had failed to conduct the inquiry with due probity and that the contents of his report were a foregone conclusion. No evidence was offered to support such an accusation. However, on close inspection it becomes apparent that the Van Kemenade report, produced in the exceptionally short period of six weeks as it was, does lack a certain cogency of argument.

Van Kemenade's conclusion regarding the administrative impotence within Defence was justified, but too limited in its scope. No matter how quickly the inquiry had been conducted, the material collected (and in particular the discussion reports) also provided enough evidence to suggest obstructiveness on the part of the Army as the main cause of the poor information exchange. This could have led to doubt concerning the conclusion which blamed all problems on inexperience alone, and might have prompted Van Kemenade to continue his investigation further. No doubt this was precluded by the desirability of producing an unequivocal report as quickly as possible.

15. The tragedy of Srebrenica hence became an issue which permeated public and political debate in the Netherlands. But this was far from being the only way in which the name Srebrenica continued to hold a tragic significance in people’s minds and hearts in the months and years following the events of July 1995. First and foremost, this applies to the survivors and the grieving loved ones of the victims in the enclave: the original Muslim population of Srebrenica and its surrounding villages, and the many refugees who had come there to find safety. For most, the events destroyed their lives. Especially the women of Srebrenica, the wives and mothers of those who were reported missing and who, sooner or later, had to be presumed dead, still suffer the effects what happened to them every day of their lives. Many had already experienced a series of dreadful and draining events before the Safe Area came into being. They were then required to spend another two years in an enclosed stronghold, around which the VRS applied a strategy of attrition and obstruction, intercepting supplies in order to create an untenable humanitarian situation. This all culminated in the attack, the deportation of the people and the cold-blooded mass executions. (At the time of writing this report, the process of exhuming and identifying the bodies continues.) These women, and those who were murdered, are the primary victims. In many respects, they feel abandoned by the rest of the world, in Bosnia as well as beyond.

The original people of Srebrenica - those who survived - have undergone a sort of Diaspora and now live in all corners of the world. Many young people in particular chose to leave Bosnia, but there are also significant concentrations in Bosnia itself, notably in Tuzla and Sarajevo. But the old community, with its ethnically mixed population, has disappeared forever. Although the further developments have rendered Srebrenica a place in which Muslims can live if they wish, and in which many Muslims are indeed registered to vote, very few have actually returned to set up home. Strangely enough, only few of the former Serbian population wish to return either. Predominantly, the town is now home to newcomers, many of whom have been displaced from elsewhere. They have few emotional ties with the town or the region.

Srebrenica, which has the potential to be a welcoming and prosperous town, is actually a doleful and desolate little place,
damaged and neglected.
The events of July 1995 also left a deep impression on the other people in the enclave at the time: the men of the Dutchbat battalion. Although they were able to return to a world which is, compared to Bosnia, an oasis of peace, safety and prosperity, many suffered persistent psychological effects following their experiences in Srebrenica. Some continue to do so today, and to a very significant degree. The feelings of powerlessness, fear, tension, apprehension and doubt they experienced continue to haunt their every moment. Physical effects include fear, violent mood swings, panic attacks, sleeplessness and difficulty in interpersonal relationships. Many were dissatisfied with the help they received. It was some time before the best approach to psychological assistance was found in the form of 'call-ups' in small groups. The previous system of large-scale reunions proved ineffective.

When the men of Dutchbat returned home, the reception they received - marked by public doubts and frequent negative comments concerning their performance - would have done little to help them readjust. There was scant understanding for the Dutchbat version of how things 'really' were. Today, there is somewhat greater appreciation and respect for their actions, at least at the personal level. At the opening of a Veterans' Institute in Doorn on 10 May 2000, Prime Minister Wim Kok publicly stated that the responsibility for what happened should not be laid at the door of the troops, who performed their duties with great commitment under very difficult circumstances. It is, he went on, the politicians to whom responsibility falls and it is they who must accept it.

Eventually, it was also the (international) politicians who managed to put an end to the war in Bosnia. Although the problems caused by the disintegration of the 'old' Yugoslavia have yet to be resolved, the situation today is less perilous than it was in the summer of 1995. Then, the UN finally broke free from the culture of improvisation and 'muddling through' under which it had long operated. 'Srebrenica' went some way towards changing this culture. However, the fall of Srebrenica did not in itself bring the end of the conflict any closer. For that, within the Bosnian theatre of war, the enclave was not significant enough. Nevertheless, Srebrenica and Zepa demonstrated how little notice the warring sides took of Security Council resolutions or UN threats to withdraw.

The executions also had a profound effect within the UN and NATO. According to US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and American ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright, it was the shock that the mass murders caused which brought about the radical shift in American policy. The London conference of July 1995 established a demarcation line close to the town of Gorazde, where - among others - British troops were stationed. Another significant development that summer was the expulsion of the Serbs from Croatia. The deterrence strategy could thus be revived. The UN's staunch insistence on impartiality began to weaken. The foundation was laid for the preemptive use of air power without having to wait for the 'smoking gun'. The military were allowed greater discretion in responding to incidents. Because Zepa had by now been evacuated and there was less danger of UNPROFOR personnel being taken hostage, a more active involvement became possible.

Such involvement was eventually provoked by the attack on Markale market in Sarajevo on 28 August 1995. The UN and NATO response was unequivocal. Air strikes paralysed the Bosnian Serb air defences. From this action ('Deliberate Force'), we can draw a direct line to the Dayton Peace Agreement of 21 November 1995. In the new circumstances, the reluctant parties eventually allowed peace to be imposed upon them. Under the Contact Group's proposals, Srebrenica and Zepa were 'traded' for parts of Sarajevo. A proposal to do so had been made long before, but this had met firm and successful resistance from local hardliners. Compared to the Vance Owen Peace Plan, after two years of war and many thousands of casualties on all sides and within all sections of the population, Dayton brought about only a very small adjustment to the way in which the territory was divided.

The fall of Srebrenica and the mass murder which followed may not in themselves have been enough to force a breakthrough in Bosnia. However, the combination of these events with the fall of Zepa, the threat to Gorazde, the Croat advance and the attack on Markale marked the beginning of the end. There was absolutely no part for the Netherlands during the final negotiation phase. The Dutch were not even invited to the conference table. The country continued to make various military contributions to the UN mission in the former Yugoslavia, although it would no longer allow Dutch personnel to be sent into an enclave.

In addition, Dutch governmental and non-governmental organizations made a significant contribution to ongoing humanitarian aid programmes, particularly in Bosnia. This had also been a significant motive for sending Dutchbat to Srebrenica. Any focus on Srebrenica was reflected not so much in projects within the town itself (such as those that Dutchbat had attempted to some extent) but more in terms of assistance from non-governmental organizations to the people who had lived in the enclave when Dutchbat had been there.

In the Netherlands and throughout the rest of the world, the events in and around Srebrenica attracted considerable attention. People asked how it was possible for things to have gone so far; various inquiries and investigations were launched. Significant international publications include the United Nations report and that of the French parliament. In the Netherlands, various books and articles have been written, as well as the official reports Omtrent Srebrenica, by Van Kemenade, and Vertrekpunt Den Haag, by the Bakker Commission. The production of the current report has been greatly aided by ready access to a variety of sources and the willing cooperation of many of the people involved at first hand. It aims to be a cohesive, comprehensive and thorough study which makes a substantial contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the tragedy of Srebrenica.