Joint Press Conference with Ambassador Klein, OHR

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Duncan Bullivant, OHR: Good morning. Ambassador Klein will brief you on the events over the last 24 hours in Banja Luka. You will then have an opportunity to ask questions. All I would say is when you do ask questions, if you could identify which agency you're from, and wait for the microphone to get to you before you speak.

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Bonjour. Guten Morgen. Good morning. It's a pleasure to be with you. Let me try to update you on the events of the past 48 hours. If I seem a bit tired, I apologize. I haven't had that much sleep.

Basically, I arrived in Banja Luka on Monday evening. Prior to that, as you know, one of the opposition parities had scheduled a political rally. Based on the fact that the SDS had decided to have one of their own, that is Mr. Krajisnik and company, they had canceled theirs. By the time I got to Banja Luka, there was already a small demonstration, a small rally going on of Mr. Krajisnik's people. There were already some of Mrs. Plavsic's people across the street, obviously heckling them. I felt that the least vulnerable place and the best place to be was in the Central Police Headquarters, and I went there.

At that juncture, reports began coming in that there were a large number of buses heading for Banja Luka from elsewhere in Bosnia. That made me question the point that was this really a municipal rally, or was something else being staged.

Based on the reports we have that the buses and the passengers in the buses we provoking along the way, some stone throwing incidents, some gestures, etc., and the fact that on one of

the buses some personnel with weapons were found; in conjunction with SACEUR and the international community, obviously, we made a decision that the best thing to do to prevent violence and to prevent the situation in Banja Luka from getting out of hand, was to stop the buses prior to their arrival.

By that, I mean personnel on the buses; policemen, Special Police, with weapons in civilian clothing. The local police in Banja Luka have those documents, have those weapons; I showed them to press in Banja Luka yesterday. What one would question, is why are five policemen from Doboj in civilian clothes, with weapons, heading for Banja Luka?

We stopped the buses in a serieanum (sic) fashion as they were coming and felt that that was a reasonable course of action. By that time, Mrs. Plavsic's police had surrounded the Hotel Bosna, where Mr. Krajisnik and others were staying. As you know, in the course of the actual political rally that Mr. Krajisnik held, there was booing by the people of the community, there was heckling by the people of the community, and indeed, finally, he was heckled off the stage, if we can use that expression.

The situation at the Hotel Bosna then became tense because Mr. Krajisnik had brought with him an estimated 75, 80 or 90 people in the hotel, who were presumed to be armed. At that point I decided the best thing to do to avoid violence and bloodshed, in order to maintain law and order, was to go down there myself in conjunction with General Ramsay.

We basically tried to say to them 'look, we will help you leave here peacefully. We will try to prevent violence, but before you leave you will show us your documentation, you will leave all weapons, and we will extract you from here'. In conjunction with General Ramsay's people, who I must say performed superbly, we brought a series of armored personnel carriers, as you know, to the hotel, and then, after searching

the people, verifying whom they were, took them out in groups; basically six to each armored personnel carrier, and took them out to the Metal Factory that is SFOR's headquarters, General Ramsay's headquarters, outside of town.

We took 72 personnel out, including Mr. Krajisnik's brother, as it turns out, who was among the group. Based on the number of weapons collected in the hotel, and almost all of them were armed with long weapons and pistols, it occurred to me that there might be the real possibility that we might also have some personnel who could be identified as war criminals. I therefore requested ICTY in Sarajevo, to send up two personnel to screen all the people in the Hotel Bosna to determine if any war criminals were present. There were not, but everyone in the hotel was screened.

The personnel that we took out to the Metal Factory, the 72, were processed individually. They were desegregated. Some were businessmen and others of Mr. Krajisnik's following who were there for the rally. Others were Special Police, and we tried to desegregate those, and released them last evening.

It Mr. Krajisnik's case, the approximate twelve who stayed behind at the hotel, we continued for several hours to try to persuade him to leave for his own safety. We were protecting him, which means all the rumors and the erroneous press comments that he was being held was absolutely nonsense. We probably saved him from a much worse fate.

By six in the afternoon, he decided that he did not want to leave under SFOR international community protection, and at that juncture, I called Mrs. Plavsic and she had been in a dialogue with him through her Security Advisor, Major Lukac. I think between the two of them they wanted a peaceful resolution to the issue, which is something we fully supported, and the agreement was made the Mr. Krajisnik could leave in his own vehicle, and as you know, ultimately three vehicles left with about seven people in them. We were not

part of that, we observed it. As you know, as the vehicles left, eggs were thrown, stones were thrown, etc. That left, basically, five people in the hotel; Mr. Klickovic and four of his body guards. Major Lukac and Mr. Klickovic worked out arrangement where by later in the evening, Mr. Klickovic and the four body guards left as well.

The goal of the international community was obviously, based on the evidence we had, that there was a clear intent to provoke violence and intimidation. The fact that the local police arrested five policemen with weapons, the fact that one local police officer was shot at one of the checkpoints where the buses were stopped; based on all of those things, and the fact that Mr. Krajisnik's party in the hotel was heavily armed, we felt it was best to do what we could to offer our good faith service to prevent further violence.

I must say the commander on the ground, General Angus Ramsay, Multi-National Division Southwest, and his officers and soldiers, did an absolutely superb job of mitigating any violence. I think it was wise to turn the buses around. I also noticed in the buses a great shortage of women. I think there were three or four women I saw. It was basically a young, male crowd. It is my understanding that we have here, if we can use the English vernacular, we have something call a rent-a-crowd of thugs, who were paid a hundred deutschmark to come to this rally. There were obviously not there for a political rally. They were there to do mischief. That gives you the sequence of events of what occurred in Banja Luka.

I think I have to credit Mrs. Plavsic's police, who I worked with very closely, who were very professional, in terms of holding back her followers, preventing violence at the hotel, General Ramsay and his soldiers, who did their job in a very professional fashion. I think what we have is a situation where everything was done by the international community in mitigating against violence.

Let me stop there and answer any questions you might have.

(Mark Laity – BBC) Q: What was your assessment that this rally was perhaps more than just to create violence, but may have been an attempt at some kind of coup or getting rid of Mrs. Plavsic's influence in Banja Luka?

Ambassador Klein, OHR:I don't want to speculate on whether it was a coup or not, but certainly when you go to a community with several hundred armed men, and we have the weapons to prove that, one could assume you're not there for a traditional political rally unless it's you intention to fire weapons in the air of a celebratory fashion of some sort.

My suspicion was that they were up to no good; at a minimum, to trash the downtown area, to cause a major political disturbance. For all those reasons I think what was done by the international community and SFOR was the right decision to make.

(Mark Laity – BBC) Q: You praise Mrs. Plavsic's police. Do you think they were correct in surrounded the Hotel Bosna and keeping Mr. Krajisnik there, because perhaps that raised the temperature rather then letting him get out of

town?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: That is a misinterpretation. They didn't prevent him from leaving. They were actually trying to keep Mrs. Plavsic's supporters at bay, which they did throughout the day. Remember now, we offered Mr. Krajisnik in the morning, around 8 o'clock, the option of leaving in a caravan, with all their vehicles, after they had been disarmed, with SFOR escort, out of Banja Luka. They turned that down. In other words, there were a whole series of negotiations that went on during the day. I don't think he realized how serious the situation was. I don't think he realized how angry the local population was. I think there is a Serb population in Bosnia that deserved better then they have gotten from their

leadership. I think that there is a Serb population that is tired of being exploited, tired of having their pockets picked, and that these people are people who wish to support Dayton, who wish to support the democratic process, and are tired of corruption and criminality. I think that's what I saw in the street. Many people came up to the soldiers, to General Ramsay's soldiers, and in, obviously with communication problems, were saying 'demokratija, democracy, future, economic reconstruction, we need to get on with our lives'. I think there is a great percentage of the population who have those kind of goals. Whatever the international community can do to support that, I certainly think we should. I think our attitude is, if you support Dayton, if you're opposed to corruption, if you're interested in building democratic processes and engaging here in building a government, I think that's what we support.

(Mark Laity – BBC) Q: You first offered to get Krajisnik out at 8 o'clock in the morningÖ

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Oh yes. Not only him, but all of his peopleÖ

Let's do it this way very simply; in conjunction with the local police, by the way, who the local police chief was sitting next to me throughout the negotiations, I said basically 'what we can do here now is have all your people come out, get into your vehicles, which were parked around the Hotel Bosna, form a caravan, and SFOR will escort you out of town, and we'll escort you as far as we need to for security reasons, with the understanding that no one leaves the hotel without leaving their weapons behind.'

(Sead Numanovic – Dveni AVAZ) Q: Do you have figures of how many arms have been captured by SFOR?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: My God, almost all of them. I was standing there as we were disarming them, and we had a pile of

weapons. They were all armed; everyone I saw coming in that we processed out. There was basically a hotel lobby full of weapons. I say this was more than just a visit to a political rally, unless you are interested in celebratory gun fire.

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: Two quick questions and one general one; firstly, is Kijac still in the hotel, as far as you know?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: No, no, there's no one in the hotel. Mr. Kijac left with Mr. Krajisnik. We have like a KKK combination, you know, Krajisnik, Kalinic, Kijac. The KKK crowd left with Mr. Krajisnik. Mr. Klickovic, the fourth member of the K, stayed behind, as I said, and when I left the hotel he was drinking Rakija with Mrs. Plavsic's police advisor and trying to sort out when he was going to leave, which was going to be done sometime after dark, in a peaceful manner.

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: The second point is, do you seriously doubt that Plavsic's crowd was not a rent-a-crowd? The TV pictures show, again, not many young women. Do you really think that crowd was there, if she asked them to disperse through the day, or if the police asked them to disperse, that they would not have done it, and that indeed the police were trying to save the KKK?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: One would be naÔve not to assume that some of those people were strong political supporters, who were obviously participating as a result of being asked to. As I said, based on the level of popular thanks as we were walking through the crowd, as soldiers were walking through the crowd, that you've given us, you've broken something here, that you've given us some hope for a better future; that at least now we're in control of our own city, that the thugs may be on the run. That kind of enthusiasm clearly came through to me and I think to the other observers who were there. Your question is a valid one, and I don't doubt there was also some control over the crowd. At one point, we asked them to please try to move down the street a bit further as we were trying to

extract people. There was a certain amount of crowd control. A lot of people, I think, were generally opposed to the presence of these people, who forced themselves on the citizens of Banja Luka, and who were there to do mayhem. I think there comes a point when even the average citizen gets fed up and you don't have to motivate them to oppose such a presence.

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: If these police were armed, for instance, then there's going to be no come back to either Plavsic or to her police for the action that they took or any kind of investigation?

Duncan Bullivant, OHR: Please clarify that, there's going to be no come back to either Plavsic or Krajisnik?

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: No, it seems that you have one set of rules for them and one set of rules Plavsic. If her police are outside this hotel and they're armed, it would seem that some sort of explanation would be necessaryÖ

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Why, because they prevented violence and contained their population from breaking into the hotel?

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: So at no time did you ask Plavsic to ask the crowd to move?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Oh yes we did, and they did, and I just said that. We did several times, when the crowd was coming closer, said 'could you pleaseÖ', and the police chief went over and said 'lookÖ'. I think the attitude was, if I could put it another way, let's not behave like Krajisnik's people. Let's not behave the way they do. One stone was thrown, relatively near to where I was, and I went up to crowd and they apologized.

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: Could I just ask a general question; there seems to be an awful lot of behind the scenes arguments about the events of the 28th in Brcko, in which the United Nations say they refuse to take part in an operation that

Gelbard wanted them to take part it, together with SFOR, with the US Army, to close down those police stations. The UN view is that they were only consulted at the very last moment, and therefore said no. The SFOR view is that the UN simply not wanting to get involved, and so on. Can you clarify, perhaps the events of that day.

Ambassador Klein, OHR: No I can't. I don't know the background. One thing you'll learn from me, is that if I don't know something, I will tell. I really don't know the background on that one. I wasn't involved in it.

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: So Mr. Gelbard hasn't told the OHR the details of his side of thatÖ

Ambassador Klein, OHR:I just said, I will always tell you the truth. When I don't know something, I'll tell you I don't know. I don't know anything about that. If I did, I would honestly tell you.

(Chris Stephen – AFP) Q: Just finally, has the OHR requested information from either SFOR or the UN about what happened there?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: That I don't know either.

(Elizabeth Neuffer – Boston Globe) Q: During the course of negotiations with Mr. Krajisnik yesterday, can you explain to us exactly what he said when he refused leaving under SFOR protection? What was his rationale?

Ambassador Klein, OHR:I think the first thing, we said 'look, let's get everyone out of here and get you out of here last'. I think he was concerned about one of three Ks; Mr. Kijac. I think he didn't want to leave without him. I think there was also a certain fear that some of them might be on the sealed indictment list, and that once, even if we extracted them, you see, peacefully, at their request by the way. We volunteered to help them, but they also requested out assistance to get

out of there. It was a tense situation. I think he was against leaving his colleague behind, who probably knows too much. Consequently, that was one of the reasons for not leaving. As I said, we processed all these people. That has to very clear. Two ICTY investigators were there. When he did finally leave, he left with Kijac; they left together as a little group of seven in the vehicles. That was his original reason; 'I'm not leaving without him'.

I think he was a very nervous man. There was no bluster and no bravado. What was outside in the streets was very real, and we were trying in every possible way to persuade him that the logical thing to do is to let us escort him out and to prevent further violence. His presence there was only fermenting the reaction by the local population.

(Elizabeth Neuffer – Boston Globe) Q: You said that you had ICTY personnel reviewing to see who might be a war criminal and who might not. Did they also review Mr. Kijac and Mr. KrajisnikÖ

Ambassador Klein, OHR: They reviewed everyone there.

(Elizabeth Neuffer – Boston Globe) Q:ICTY actually said that none of these people are war criminals?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: They reviewed everyone that was there.

(Elizabeth Neuffer – Boston Globe) Q: And what was their final decision then?

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Obviously the fact that people left; we're not that naÔve, I just answered you question.

(Elizabeth Neuffer – Boston Globe) Q:I just wanted to be clear.

(Pamela Taylor – Voice of America) Q:I'm just curious why you're hesitating to classify this as an attempted coup. The State Department was quite clear in calling itÖ

Ambassador Klein, OHR:I'm not hesitating toÖwhat is an attempted coup? Could you define that for me what that is?

(Pamela Taylor – Voice of America) Q:I'm not the one to define it, but the State Department has defined it as suchÖ

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Well that's the point, I don't know what an attempted coup is eitherÖ

(Pamela Taylor – Voice of America) Q:Öand I'm wondering why you aren't defining it that way? The press doesn't define these things, we're asking you to define it.

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Who actually said it was an attempted coup?

(Pamela Taylor – Voice of America) Q: The State Department.

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Well that is certainly his prerogative.

(Pamela Taylor – Voice of America) Q: So you wouldn't agree with that characteristic?

Ambassador Klein, OHR:I did not say that. I was there. I saw a lot of guns. I saw a lot of weapons. What do you mean by a coup? What does that mean to you?

(Someone in the audience): A certain attempt to unseat Mrs. Plavsic.

Ambassador Klein, OHR: Alright, that probably is true then. If that is your definition of a coup, I would support that.

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