

U.N. Cites 'Errors' in Killing

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SARAJEVO, BOSNIA, JAN. 9 – The United Nations commander in Bosnia admitted today that his soldiers failed to provide adequate security for a top Bosnian politician who was assassinated while under U.N. protection, and he warned that the killing could provoke an escalation in Balkan warfare.

Gen. Philippe Morillon, looking weary and trembling at times, acknowledged that “some more precautions” should have been taken and described Friday’s assassination of Bosnian Deputy Prime Minister Hakija Turajlic by a Serb soldier as a “tragedy, naturally, of errors.” But the French general, speaking at a heated press conference, dodged questions about who committed the errors, and he failed to clarify conflicting accounts from his officers.

More than 24 hours after the assassination and just a few hours after Turajlic was buried today in an ancient Muslim cemetery here, there were mounting complaints among Bosnians that the current U.N. policy of using persuasion rather than force to stop harassment and killings by Serb fighters is failing.

The U.N. policy toward the Serbs has infuriated the Bosnian government as well as a growing number of diplomats and politicians who want the Uni-

ted States and its allies to intervene militarily to stop the nine-month-old war in Bosnia that has killed at least 17,000 people.

The anger and frustration felt by Bosnians were evidenced today by protest banners strung up along the U.N. headquarters’ barbed-wire perimeter, saying, “Morillon, You Are Guilty For Everything” and “Killeers, Killeers.”

Turajlic was killed Friday afternoon as he was returning to Sarajevo from the U.N.-controlled airport in a French armored personnel carrier. The vehicle was stopped at an illegal roadblock by about 40 soldiers of the Bosnian Serb army, and after a nearly two-hour standoff, a Serb soldier pushed aside a French officer and fired at least seven shots at Turajlic, killing him.

The French armored personnel carrier was traveling on a nominally demilitarized road that the Serbs had agreed, in writing, would be controlled by the United Nations. The Serbs are not allowed to set up checkpoints or inspect vehicles on the road. But they frequently do so, and the United Nations has not forced them back into their barracks.

When the French vehicle was stopped at 4 :15 p.m. – less than 400 yards from the headquarters of the well-armed French battalion – by Serb soldiers backed up by three armored

personnel carriers, the French officer who took charge of the negotiations refused to call for help.

Col. Patrice Sartre, commander of the French airport battalion, arrived at the roadblock about 75 minutes after the standoff began and tried to persuade the Serbs to back off.

“This kind of problem is not a problem of weapons,” he told reporters at the press conference today. Morillon agreed, saying the presence of reinforcements would only incite the “crazies.”

Sartre ordered away two British armored personnel carriers that were on the scene when he arrived, according to Capt. Peter Jones, commander of one of the British vehicles. Sartre also directed two Ukrainian armed personnel carriers that rolled up to the roadblock to move on.

“We always make the same mistake,” said a disgruntled U.N. staff officer. “We negotiate. But the only way to negotiate with the Serbs is, if they have two APCs, then we bring 50 of our own.”

During the standoff, Sartre or one of the five French soldiers under his command at the scene apparently allowed the back doors of the armored personnel carrier to be opened – a violation of U.N. security rules. Once the doors were open, there was nothing protecting the Bosnian deputy prime minister from the Serbs.

There was controversy today over why and when the vehicle’s doors were opened.

Sartre said today that the back doors were open when he arrived on the scene and that he does not know who was responsible. He said that because his negotiations seemed to be going well, the open doors did not ap-

pear to be a big problem.

But Jones, the British commander ordered away from the roadblock, told journalists the doors were closed when Sartre arrived. A Bosnian Serb liaison officer who works for the United Nations and was at the scene also said the doors were closed when Sartre arrived.

Sartre, a small and stocky veteran of the French military intervention in Chad, gave a dramatic account today of what happened when he arrived at the illegal roadblock. He said that he blocked the open doors with his body and, at one point, armed his 9mm pistol and aimed it at about 10 soldiers who wanted to take Turajlic out of the vehicle.

“Two or three men, very upset, tried to pull me away from the entrance,” Sartre said. “Their commander stopped them. But one of the men, realizing that he would not succeed, that he was losing, stepped back and shot his own gun over my shoulder at Mr. Hakija Turajlic. He was pulled back quickly by soldiers who shouted, ‘No, No, Stop.’ But he got loose and fired several more shots.”

The Serbs immediately retreated, Sartre said. Because the shooting was over and the Serbs were pulling back, neither Sartre or the other French soldiers fired back. They whisked Turajlic to the U.N. hospital in Sarajevo. He was pronounced dead on arrival.

The Bosnian Serb army command today issued its version of the killing of Turajlic, claiming that its soldiers had not been warned that he was passing their checkpoint, news services reported.

“They wanted to detain him until authorized officers arrived. However, the commander of the French battalion pulled his gun on our soldiers

and Mr. Turajlic swore and insulted them and expressed a high degree of hatred” said a Bosnian Serb army statement.

“This strongly affected one of the soldiers present, whose family had earlier been slaughtered by Muslims,” it said. The soldier then fired.

Morillon said Serb authorities have informed him that the soldier who assassinated Turajlic has been arrested.

The French general called for higher-level Serb officers to be “denounced” for complicity in the attack.

“Everybody here is thinking of the first assassination in Sarajevo, which was followed by millions of deaths,” Morillon said, referring to the 1914 killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which sparked World War I. “I hope history will not repeat its madness.”