

Chapter Four

The Road to Geneva: The Patriarch Letter and NATO Bombing

The team arrived in Belgrade on August 30 not knowing what to expect from Milosevic. During the circuitous flight into Serbia to avoid the NATO air campaign, Holbrooke told his colleagues that the moment reminded him of another time in which military actions created diplomatic uncertainty: 1972, when Nixon and Kissinger flew into Moscow to discuss the SALT negotiations, shortly after the U.S. had mined Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam. In both instances, U.S. negotiators convened in a country's capital as the U.S. military exercised force against its clients. Like Nixon and Kissinger, Holbrooke and his team anticipated a negative response to the military action, yet remained unsure about what the implications would be on the diplomatic task at hand.¹ But this mission to Belgrade was important for another reason. For the four new members of the U.S. negotiating team, this was the first opportunity to see the Serb leader in action. As they soon found out, he could put on quite a show.²

The Patriarch Letter

Surprisingly, Milosevic did not rebuke the U.S. delegation for the bombing. Indeed, his reaction was quite the opposite. The Serb leader gave the impression that he didn't really care about either the marketplace massacre or NATO's response. Rather, he began that afternoon with some surprisingly kind words for the three fallen American diplomats, speaking with particular sincerity about Bob Frasure. "I was startled to hear Milosevic talk about Bob's family, his farm and his dream for the future," Holbrooke recalled. "I realized, for the first time, that he and Bob had spent a lot of time conversing about personal matters."³

¹ The expectation that Milosevic would want to talk about the bombing first-thing is reflected by the shuttle team's talking points prepared for this meeting. According to these points, the bombing "1) Was a necessary reaction to the Bosnian Serb attack on Sarajevo; 2) We had hoped that Karadzic and Mladic would have distanced themselves vigorously from the shelling attack. They did not; and 3) Despite the shelling we are prepared to continue our mission." See "Belgrade Talking Points," fax from Pardew to Slocombe, August 30, 1995. See also Holbrooke comment, Dayton History Seminar.

Incidentally, Nixon and Kissinger were apparently less concerned about the Soviet reaction in 1972 than Holbrooke recalled twenty-three years later. Although some had compared Nixon's situation in 1972 to Eisenhower's in 1960 (when the Paris summit with Khrushchev was undermined by the U-2 incident), Kissinger later reflected that the mood on *Air Force One* en route to Moscow "was one of optimism, even elation... we were going to Moscow with dignity... we had behind us a rare public consensus produced by the stunning events of the preceding month... Nixon was in high spirits." See Kissinger, *White House Years* (Little, Brown, 1979) pp1202-1207.

² Holbrooke comment, Dayton History Seminar; Clark interview.

³ Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 7 (December 12, 1996), p27.

After this rather poignant opening, Milosevic abruptly changed course. He told the delegation that he had an unexpected announcement. "While you've been away, I've been busy," he said.⁴ He explained that he had just worked out a deal with the Bosnian Serbs investing himself as the lead negotiator for all Serbs -- both in Serbia and Bosnia. Handing over to Holbrooke a letter dated August 29 and signed by seven members of the Bosnian Serb leadership and the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Milosevic explained that Karadzic, Mladic and Serbian Parliament President Momcilo Krajisnik had agreed to join a negotiating delegation in which he would have the final and deciding vote.⁵ By forging this so-called "Patriarch letter," Milosevic solved possibly the most intractable problem of the negotiations -- how to deal with the Bosnian Serbs. The Serb leader delivered what Holbrooke had been pressing for since their first meeting. Throughout the war, Milosevic had always tried to distance himself from the Pale leadership, claiming that he had no control over them. Now, the Milosevic strategy appeared to be developing brilliantly -- with this Patriarch letter in hand, the Serbian President tied his destiny directly to his clients in Pale.⁶

Milosevic's turn was likely motivated by several forces. First, there was ample evidence that he was losing control of the Bosnian Serbs. The marketplace massacre was a step backward. If such incidents could not be curbed, it would be impossible to negotiate. Alternatively, there was Milosevic's concern that the Bosnian Serbs could cut him out of a negotiated settlement. Bildt had made several contacts with Pale, and the Carter-Karadzic correspondence produced another possible opening. During this August 30 meeting, Milosevic said that he wouldn't deal with anyone but the U.S. "When Bildt comes to see me, I won't tell him anything, I won't go into details until I see you," he told Holbrooke.⁷ Quite plausibly, Milosevic was concerned that the Bosnian Serbs might strike a deal without him -- meaning, importantly, that an agreement would not necessarily bring sanctions relief. At last, U.S. pressure might have worked against Milosevic. During the first shuttle, Holbrooke made it clear to the Serb leader that to enjoy the "carrot" of sanctions relief he had to prove he could speak for Pale. It was bluntly conveyed that the U.S. would no longer accept Milosevic's tired claim that he had nothing to do with the Bosnian Serbs. It seemed that, finally, Milosevic understood this message.⁸

⁴ Kerrick interview; Perina interview; Holbrooke interview, June 18, 1996; Owen interview, September 11, 1996.

⁵ See copy of letter (English translation) in fax to John Kornblum (EUR), August 30, 1995.

⁶ Reflecting on this event, Rudolph Perina said that he had likely been tipped off by Milosevic about the Patriarch letter during an August 29 meeting with the Serb leader and US Senator Robert Kerrey of Nebraska. Milosevic told the Senator and Perina that Karadzic could not speak for the Bosnian Serbs because he would not politically survive peace in Bosnia. But, the Serb leader said that he "had some ideas" for further progress in the peace process. Perina noted later that he was likely referring to the Patriarch letter, which was signed that day. See "Senator Kerrey Meetings With Milosevic and Chief of Staff Perisic," Cable, Belgrade 4263, August 29, 1995; and Perina interview.

⁷ Clark interview, September 18, 1996.

⁸ In their work, Silber and Little report that Milosevic sensed that NATO bombing would begin, and wanted to grab "the opportunity to win his war against the Bosnian Serb leaders." According to Montenegrin President Momir Bulatovic (who was present when the Patriarch letter was signed), the Bosnian Serbs were basically forced to sign. "They were conscious of all the mistakes they'd made and that everything could be destroyed: Republika Srpska could disappear," Bulatovic reportedly said. "[Yet], it was difficult for them to sign. This was their political suicide." Silber and Little also report that there were possible "secret annexes" to the Patriarch letter, with Milosevic agreeing to protect certain issues for

Diplomatically, the Patriarch letter opened the floodgates. Milosevic had shown little willingness to respond substantively during the first shuttle; now, he poured forth with commitments and proposals. He repeated his support of using the Contact Group plan, particularly its 51-49 territorial division, as the basis for negotiations. Moreover, he suggested that the Bosnian state should be a "union" within its current boundaries with a Muslim-controlled Sarajevo as its capital. Territorially, he advocated giving the Muslims Gorazde (with a connecting corridor to Federation land); the roads and connecting lands from Tuzla and Kiseljak to Sarajevo; a fifteen-kilometer buffer along the Croatian border from the Livno Valley to Bihac; and the northern Bosnian city of Brcko. On Eastern Slavonia, Milosevic proposed creating a joint U.S.-Russian security guarantee for three years to be followed by a referendum on whether the region would become Serbian or Croatian.⁹ Suddenly, concrete progress seemed as hand.¹⁰

After lighting up a huge cigar, Milosevic pushed for quickly convening an "3-by-5" international conference (Milosevic, Izetbegovic, and Tudjman joined by the Contact Group) to ratify an agreement on such a set of principles. Holbrooke hinted that he might explore convening a conference with the three Balkan foreign ministers after an agreement was reached on more fundamental principles. Here, the U.S. wanted to be careful, not committing to anything too soon. "In principle, we will have a conference sooner or later," Holbrooke told Milosevic, "but we are not ready yet."¹¹ As Pardew later reported to Under Secretary of Defense Slocombe, the shuttle team wanted to wait until both sides undertook "significant confidence-building measures" and Milosevic and his "delegation" formally agreed to principles.

Only after two hours of talks did the Serb leader bring up NATO airstrikes. With a conspicuous lack of passion, he asked that the bombing be stopped to help the negotiations. Holbrooke explained that while he had no direct authority to demand a bombing halt, he would work with NATO Allies to implement a "suspension" of the campaign, as long as Mladic ended the Serb shelling of Sarajevo. As he had done when discussing the possibilities for safe travel into Sarajevo during Holbrooke's first shuttle, Milosevic immediately contacted the Bosnian Serb general to secure his agreement. After he did so, Holbrooke promised to seek a suspension. The Assistant Secretary felt that a temporary pause might help negotiations by providing the Bosnian Serbs a chance to withdraw. Once they had retreated, the U.S. could use the resumption of bombing as leverage to negotiate broader cease-fire terms.¹²

the Bosnian Serbs (such as, they imply, Bosnian Serb control of Brcko). See pp365-66; p379 (fn7). US officials have speculated about why Milosevic sought the Patriarch letter, and how he attained it, but with no conclusions. See Holbrooke, Hill, Pardew comments, Dayton History Seminar.

⁹ Details on this meeting from Pardew's report to Slocombe, "Peace Initiative in the Balkans--Belgrade," August 30, 1995.

¹⁰ Milosevic's proposals were consistent with what US intelligence had reported he was likely to do.

¹¹ Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 7 (December 12, 1996), p30.

¹² Holbrooke interview, September 30, 1996.

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Moreover, getting a halt might enhance Holbrooke's own bargaining leverage with the Serb leader, proving to Milosevic that the American negotiator could deliver. While Holbrooke knew that his team had no official line of authority with NATO to stop the airstrikes, they could at least try.¹³

That night, the team returned to their room in the Belgrade Hyatt Hotel, which they had been informed was bugged.¹⁴ Military aides traveling with General Clark set up communications so the team could converse in a secure environment. In a scene reminiscent of "Get Smart," the team donned voice-shielding nose cones and climbed into a makeshift white-noise tent to report back to Washington. Holbrooke and Clark contacted Talbott and Admiral William Owens, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, to report on their talks with Milosevic and to press for a bombing halt. If they could not fulfill their promise and the air campaign continued, the delegation worried that they would start to have "serious negotiating problems" with the Serbs.¹⁵

The eight hours with Milosevic that day were truly remarkable. The "gambler" seemed to be playing at the top of his game. Pardew characterized Milosevic in this first meeting as "commanding, charming, a convincing debater, obstinate and enthusiastically agreeable -- all in five minutes." By presenting the Patriarch letter, the Serb leader had completely changed the dynamic of the negotiations. The letter accomplished, in effect, what both the U.S. (and Milosevic) had been insisting the Bosnian Serbs do for over a year -- accept the Contact Group plan as a starting point for negotiations. Shrewdly, Milosevic had done so while allowing the Bosnian Serbs to save face -- the Bosnian Serbs did not have to say publicly that they accepted the Contact Group plan, but merely that Milosevic would negotiate on their behalf. There was now a basis for negotiations. Although Holbrooke deliberately played down the development publicly as a "procedural breakthrough" so as not to raise expectations, Milosevic's move opened the door for real negotiations to begin.¹⁶ Following the tragedies of the Mt. Igman accident and the murderous Sarajevo shelling, the prospects for peace had suddenly improved. "I've put down the hammer I was using to beat down my optimism," Pardew told Slocombe. "This may work."¹⁷

The next day, August 31, the team left for Zagreb where they met with Croatian officials and Bosnian Foreign Minister Sacirbey. They discussed Milosevic's breakthrough announcement, and some of his initial bargaining positions. On Gorazde, Sacirbey remained firm that it be part of Federation-controlled territory, which coincided with Milosevic's expressed flexibility on the issue.¹⁸ With Croat President Tudjman, the team discussed the status of Eastern Slavonia. Milosevic had told the team in Belgrade that he was willing to defer this issue until Bosnia was solved, but this issue was enormously important for Croatia. Acknowledging that the UN protection mandate for the area (known as UNCRO) expired in three months, Tudjman threatened to use military

¹³ Interestingly, Milosevic apparently never believed Holbrooke when he said that he had no authority to stop the airstrikes. See Pardew interview, July 26, 1996.

¹⁴ See Perina to Holbrooke, "Playing Hardball with Milosevic," no date.

¹⁵ Pardew report, August 30; see also Pardew's hand-written notes from phone call with Slocombe, August 30, 1995; and Clark interview.

¹⁶ See Roger Cohen, "Serb Shift Opens Chance for Peace, A US Envoy Says," *New York Times*, September 1, 1995; and Holbrooke interview, Dayton History Seminar.

¹⁷ Pardew notes for phone call with Slocombe, August 30, 1995.

¹⁸ See note from Pardew to Slocombe, "Gorazde," August 31, 1995.

force to retake the area if compromise failed. After talking through the main points of a potential Serb-Croat agreement (such as extension of the UN mandate, composition of an implementation force, refugee status, and a potential referendum vote on status), the American delegation felt that the ability to agree came down to two core points: mutual recognition between Croatia and Serbia and the continued credibility of Croatia's military threat. If Serbia and Croatia recognized one another -- which seemed likely if Serbia perceived that Croatia had achieved military parity -- there might be enough common ground in their negotiating positions to close a deal.¹⁹

Shortly after arriving in Zagreb, Holbrooke and Clark called NATO Commander U.S. General George Joulwan and Admiral Leighton Smith, the Commander of NATO Forces in Southern Europe, to lobby for a pause in the air campaign.²⁰ They also discussed this later that day with UNPROFOR chief Janvier, to find out that he had already been in contact with the Bosnian Serbs. When the air campaign began, Janvier had outlined in a short letter to Mladic three terms on which the bombing could end: the cessation of attacks against the safe areas; withdrawal of all heavy weapons from a twenty-kilometer exclusion zone around Sarajevo; and "immediate and complete" cessation of hostilities throughout Bosnia. As an incentive, Janvier offered Mladic an immediate "halt" in the air campaign if the Bosnian Serbs would immediately agree to these terms in writing.²¹ Janvier concurred with the U.S. delegation's opinion that the bombing should pause to test Bosnian Serb compliance.²²

Interestingly, Janvier claimed that Milosevic had contacted Akashi on August 30 to recommend that Janvier write the letter to Mladic outlining the conditions for a bombing halt. Apparently, this call was made shortly before the U.S. delegation met with Milosevic. During the August 30 meeting, Milosevic had seemed so uninterested in the bombing that U.S. negotiators were left with the impression that he actually favored the air campaign against his Bosnian comrades.²³ If Janvier was right, the Serb leader was more concerned than he appeared. They were unsure what to make of such a claim; it didn't seem to square with Milosevic's relatively calm reaction, and Milosevic never mentioned working with UNPROFOR.²⁴ In any event, the letter had gone to Mladic, the U.S. team felt that a pause was wise, and Janvier seemed to concur.²⁵

A Watershed Day: September 1

After this full day of talks, the team left Zagreb to return to Belgrade. The U.S. delegation awoke that morning to hear the news that as of 2am, the NATO bombing campaign would be halted for at least a day. Janvier and Mladic were planning to meet soon to discuss the status of Bosnian Serb compliance.

¹⁹ As described in "Negotiations on Eastern Slavonia," memorandum for Holbrooke from Pardew, August 31, 1995.

²⁰ Galbraith interview, October 2, 1996.

²¹ Letter from Janvier to Mladic, August 30, 1995.

²² Holbrooke comment, Dayton History Seminar.

²³ Holbrooke had conveyed this observation in a phone call to Anthony Lake, which Lake later discussed at a September 5 PC meeting. Vershbow interview, September 26, 1996.

²⁴ "Balkan Intrigues," Pardew memorandum to Slocombe, August 31, 1995.

²⁵ After the talks with Janvier, Clark called the NATO commander in the region, Admiral Leighton "Snuffy" Smith to tell him that the negotiating team and Janvier felt it may make sense diplomatically to allow a pause in the bombing. Smith reacted with some hostility to Clark, apparently feeling that the Lt. General was meddling in his command area. See Clark interview, July 15, 1996.

The Bosnians were absolutely livid that the campaign had been halted. In a call to Talbott, Sacirbey said that fighting in and around Sarajevo was continuing, and demanded that the airstrikes be resumed immediately. At first, Talbott explained that the cessation was called for technical military reasons. But as Sacirbey pressed him further, Talbott admitted that the pause had certain diplomatic benefits, although the U.S. wanted to keep this secret. He reassured the Bosnian Foreign Minister that it was "not, repeat not a rolling suspension... it is a limited one designed [to] permit a Mladic/Janvier meeting and to offer Mladic the opportunity to comply with all demands." Yet, to preserve NATO and the UN's credibility, Talbott told Sacirbey that the bombing needed to be portrayed as a military effort, not merely a tool of diplomacy.²⁶

In Belgrade, the shuttle team would try to use the halt to their advantage. Having pressed for the pause and now energized by the Patriarch breakthrough, they decided to try to work quietly to gain the public agreement of the parties to a set of political principles. Holbrooke had set out on this shuttle with the intention of getting the parties to agree on a general legal and political framework; he and Owen thought that it would be a useful step forward, and officials in Washington anxiously sought a public symbol of progress.²⁷ After debating the issue, the shuttle team decided to arrange a conference in Geneva in which the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian foreign ministers could gather to bless an interim agreement. "Our theory," Holbrooke later explained, "which was central to our operating strategy as we went along, was to use Geneva to create a public and private sense of momentum... I wanted to use Geneva only for the announcement of those forward steps [previously] agreed, and then adjourn without getting into unproductive arguments."²⁸

On the plane between Zagreb and Belgrade the previous day, Owen began to work on drafting framework political principles to present to the Serb leader. Loosely based on the "six points" he had discussed with Izetbegovic two days before in Paris, Owen's first draft outlined that Bosnia would remain a single state composed of two "constituent entities," the Federation and the Bosnian Serb entity. The draft also detailed an arrangement for a three-person Bosnian Presidency, which would be empowered to conduct foreign relations, appoint and supervise a Commission for Displaced Persons, joint public corporations, and an arbitration system to resolve disputes.²⁹ Holbrooke at first felt that Owen's work was a bit too spare, but then working along with Chris Hill, they developed a package that offered a minimal but realistic target.³⁰

While the rest of the delegation prepared to meet with Milosevic on September 1, two members of the delegation, Chris Hill and Jim Pardew, secretly traveled to Skopje, Macedonia to meet with Macedonian officials on a possible agreement with neighboring Greece. Since February 1994, Greece had imposed an economic embargo on Macedonia out of anger that the tiny, land-locked former Yugoslav republic had assumed the name of a Greek region and had used a traditional Greek symbol on its flag. This dispute had proven one of the more intractable in the region, and the U.S. was concerned that it could

²⁶ See "Acting Secretary Talbott and Bosnian Foreign Minister Sacirbey, September 1, 1995" Cable, State 209772, September 5, 1995.

²⁷ Holbrooke interview with author (notes), September 30, 1996.

²⁸ Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 8 (January 27, 1997), p21.

²⁹ See "Constitutional Organization of Bosnian State: Proposed Basic Principles," Draft, September 1, 1995.

³⁰ Owen/Holbrooke interview, June 18, 1996; Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996.

escalate into bloodshed. The problem was very tricky: while Macedonia was seen as a likely flashpoint for violence, Greece was a NATO ally and the Clinton Administration was under heavy pressure from vocal Greek-American groups not to press the weak Greek government. Nearly 550 U.S. soldiers had been deployed in Macedonia for two years as part of a larger UN "tripwire" force trying to prevent hostilities from spilling over from Bosnia. Over the past few months, the two sides had made some progress in talks mediated by former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz, and were close to solving their differences. However, the remaining issues were the most difficult, and Holbrooke, Hill and Marshall Adair, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, had decided that the U.S. had to engage at a higher level to try to bring the talks to closure. Holbrooke sensed that "a deal was ready," and that a final high-level push would do the job. After a staff meeting the evening of August 31 in the Belgrade embassy's secure "bubble," Holbrooke asked Hill and Pardew to take the plane to Skopje the next day while the rest of the delegation remained in Belgrade for talks with Milosevic.³¹

The two-hour meeting with Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov went smoothly.³² Gligorov was eager for a deal, telling Pardew and Hill that "when I learned you were coming today, I decided that now is the right moment for agreement." Pardew showed him the Patriarch letter, which Gligorov said was significant evidence that a deal was possible between Serbs and Bosnians. The three discussed a draft agreement that Greek and Macedonian negotiators had been working on at the UN, outlining mutual recognition, with Macedonia allowed to keep its name given certain conditions. Gligorov seemed satisfied with the draft, and after two hours of talks, Hill and Pardew returned to Belgrade believing that a settlement was possible. The remaining step was for Holbrooke to convince the Greek leadership, which he would try to do during a previously scheduled visit on September 4.³³

Following the short flight from Skopje, Hill and Pardew rejoined the team that afternoon at Dobanovci, a military compound outside Belgrade which Milosevic used as his retreat. There, at the Serb leader's "hunting lodge," Hill and Pardew found their colleagues already hours into what Pardew later described as a "day of bonding with the Godfather." The Milosevic displayed that day was far looser than his stern reputation. With the Patriarch letter under his belt, Milosevic acted as the Don Corleone of all Serbs. Over the course of twelve hours, the delegation saw a Milosevic at once "drunk and sober, spouting Shakespeare and Latin, overbearing and raging, patronizing and joking. He covered topics from the future of Russia in the post-Cold War world to the sexual preferences of [Bosnian Prime Minister] Haris Siladjic."³⁴ He took Holbrooke and

³¹ During the summer of 1995, Chris Hill had first raised the idea of working "to close" the deal between the two sides with Greece Ambassador Loucas Tsilas. Details from Holbrooke/Hill comments, Dayton History Seminar; Hill interview with author (notes), December 19, 1996.

³² In a letter cabled to Macedonian Foreign Minister Stevo Crvenkovski that same day, Deputy Secretary Talbott stressed that "we remain hopeful that a solution is close at hand... at this critical time, anything you can do to overcome the remaining obstacles will make a major contribution to stability in the region." This letter was a response to a letter Crvenkovski sent to Washington on August 12. See "Response to FM Crvenkovski," Cable, State 207787, September 1, 1995.

³³ For details of Skopje visit, see "Two Hours with Gligorov; 12 with Milosevic," Pardew report to Slocombe, September 1, 1995; Pardew interview, July 31, 1996; and comments by Holbrooke, Hill, and Pardew, Dayton History Seminar.

³⁴ Pardew report to Slocombe, September 1, 1995.

Clark on a long walk around the compound's grounds, where he and Holbrooke talked about everything from international banking and Balkan personalities to duck hunting.³⁵ As delegation members later reflected, events of this day changed the character of their bargaining relationship with Milosevic. Particularly for Holbrooke, the informality of the day created a sense of trust with the Serb leader -- although he was still approached with healthy skepticism, Milosevic seemed prepared to make a deal.³⁶

Part of what made this day so important was the substantive ground they covered with the Serb President. Owen presented Milosevic with his paper on political and legal principles. Over cigars and glasses of wine, Milosevic agreed to all the main points of the draft, asking only for minor changes in language and less specificity on the proposed Presidency's role in foreign affairs.³⁷ The Serb leader expressed most interest in any "special ties" the principles permitted between Serbia and the Bosnian Serb entity, seeing in them a precursor to the Bosnian Serb republic's eventual incorporation into Serbia proper. Such "special ties" had been discussed with Frasure during June, and Milosevic wanted them outlined in these principles.³⁸ Milosevic asked that one of the "outstanding issues" outlined in the draft proposal -- concerning possible disqualification from the joint Presidency persons indicted as war criminals -- be deferred for later consideration. He seemed concerned that bringing this up would push his Bosnian Serb colleagues too far, too fast. "In a house of [a] man just hanged, don't talk about rope," the Serb leader told Owen, implying that if war crimes were pursued at this point it would be tough to keep the Bosnian Serbs on board. Although he had the Patriarch letter, Milosevic was aware that he had to proceed carefully.³⁹

When asked by Holbrooke about convening a foreign ministers meeting to ratify the principles formally, Milosevic was relaxed. "It's up to you," he said, "You decide."⁴⁰ All Milosevic insisted on was that the U.S. be in charge -- he did not want the Europeans to control the agenda. After confirming the Serb leader's approval, Holbrooke immediately went to an American military phone set up at the hunting lodge to call Washington. Neither Washington nor the Contact Group had any idea that such a meeting was in the works, and they would have to act quickly. Speaking with Talbott, Holbrooke requested that senior Washington officials start to inform the other Contact Group ministers that the U.S. was convening a meeting in Geneva on September 8. The Contact Group partners quickly agreed, and later that day Washington made the announcement.⁴¹ Remarkably, the Geneva meeting had been arranged in a little more than two hours. The meeting would be held under the auspices of the Contact Group, with Holbrooke, Bildt and Russian representative Igor Ivanov as the co-chairs. Holbrooke had

³⁵ Clark interview, July 15, 1996; Holbrooke interview, October 18, 1996.

³⁶ On this note, Pardew wrote to Slocombe on September 1 that "More than anything else, Slobodan and his buddies remind you of a mafia boss who has decided to make a deal with you. This has all the air of a predetermined agreement. We just don't know the bounds yet."

³⁷ Pardew report, September 1, 1995.

³⁸ Owen/Holbrooke interview.

³⁹ See "Constitutional Organization of Bosnian State: Proposed Basic Principles," draft presented to Milosevic (with Owen's handwritten edits), September 1, 1995; and Owen/Holbrooke interview.

⁴⁰ Pardew report, September 1, 1995.

⁴¹ See, for example, "The Acting Secretary and Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev, September 1, 1995," Cable, State 209771, September 5, 1995.

initially wanted Christopher to represent the U.S., but the Secretary decided that it would be better if the event was handled below the foreign minister level.⁴²

The U.S. diplomatic initiative now had its first concrete benchmark. Although the team had Milosevic's agreement on their draft paper, they still had not discussed the draft with the Bosnians or Croats. They now had a meeting scheduled and a week to create something which all sides could agree to.

September 1 ended as the most significant day thus far in the negotiations. Over the course of the past twelve hours, the delegation had seen the Serbian leader in a way that was entirely unexpected, dramatic and frankly bizarre. With the bombing suspended, the U.S. could now see if the Bosnian Serbs were ready to deal; they would find out the next day when Janvier would meet with Mladic. With the Geneva announcement, the negotiating team marked a goal for all parties to work toward and, just as important, provided an image that their talks were traveling toward a solution, if slowly. Finally, the Hill-Pardew visit to Skopje seemed to be just enough to pocket a solution to the Greek-Macedonian dispute. While the issue was not a central component of the Bosnian problem, Holbrooke and his delegation realized it had a larger benefit. If they could deliver something on Greece-Macedonia, an issue where resolution had eluded the international community for four years, it would project an image to both the Balkan parties and European Allies that this U.S. negotiating team was formidable.⁴³

The Contact Group and NAC

The next day, September 2, the U.S. team started to put the pieces together for Geneva by traveling to Bonn, Germany, where they joined talks with the five-nation "Contact Group." Meeting that day in Petersberg, that national state guest house outside Bonn, the team briefed the German, French, British and Russian officials on their discussions in Zagreb and Belgrade. As the primary forum for negotiations during the past two years, the Contact Group had failed to bring the parties any closer to agreement. With this in mind, Holbrooke was already skeptical of the Contact Group's ability to act decisively. This meeting made him even more so.

While they approved of the scheduled Geneva meeting and seemed encouraged by the progress so far, the Contact Group officials remained hung up on the process at the expense of negotiating progress. They complained about the lack of consultation, and were upset at Holbrooke's decision to hold the meeting in the American mission in Geneva rather than a neutral UN site. All this grousing accomplished nothing. As Holbrooke reflected later: "These minor dramas over the hosting and location of meetings were a constant issue -- at times, nearly an obsession -- with the Europeans. It was very rare for a serious substantive disagreement to reach the levels of intensity that procedure and protocol routinely triggered within the Contact Group."⁴⁴

⁴² Holbrooke interview with author (notes), September 20, 1996. In his draft memoirs (Chapter 8, January 21, 1997), Holbrooke explains that Christopher delegating the Geneva meeting to Holbrooke was "an important moment. Not every Secretary of State would have given up the chance to chair the first direct meeting of all three parties in the Balkan wars in almost two years, a meeting certain to attract worldwide attention. But it was characteristic of Warren Christopher, who firmly believed in the theory of delegating both authority and responsibility downward to key subordinates, provided they operated within established policy guidelines."

⁴³ See Hill and Holbrooke comments, Dayton History Seminar.

⁴⁴ Holbrooke draft memoir, Chapter 8 (January 27, 1997), p 11.

Although the Contact Group was essential as a mechanism to exchange views and occasionally to bring pressure on the parties, Holbrooke and his team really saw it as more of a nuisance. The Contact Group's 1994 plan was indeed the basis for the current negotiations, but the endless bickering at its meetings was at best time-consuming, and at worst counter-productive. Given the urgency of the current negotiations, Holbrooke felt that the Contact Group wasn't able to function as a productive negotiating partner. "Our colleagues in the Contact Group were disturbed that we planned to negotiate first, and consult with the Contact Group second, reversing the previous procedure in which we tried to work out the Contact Group position internally among the five nations before taking it to the parties -- a system that had proved to be cumbersome, unworkable, and unproductive."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Holbrooke realized that feeding Europe's hunger to feel involved -- and to be seen to be involved -- in the negotiations was essential.⁴⁶

Holbrooke and his colleagues knew that the Contact Group could help provide the "public facade" of Russian and allied unity. In late August, Holbrooke summed up the Contact Group dilemma in a note to Secretary Christopher. "We can't live without the [Contact Group]," Holbrooke explained, but "we can't live with it. If we don't meet with them and tell them what we are doing, they complain publicly. If we tell them, they disagree and leak -- and worse. In the end, we must keep [the Contact Group] together for public reasons, especially since we may need it later to endorse and legitimize any agreement -- but we must also reduce significantly the amount of material we share with them."⁴⁷

When Lake framed the initiative for the Allies in Europe as a Contact Group effort, he was simply building this "facade" that Holbrooke described. U.S. officials hoped that by paying occasional homage to its representatives, such as holding the Geneva meeting under Contact Group auspices, they could garner the support of their respective governments. Europe would ultimately play a critical role in implementing any settlement, from supplying troops for IFOR to providing economic assistance to the Bosnians. "We must never forget that we will need them all if there is ever a settlement - the EU for economic assistance, our NATO Allies for the new post-UN peacekeeping force, the UN for legitimizing resolutions, the Islamic Conference for additional aid, and the Russians and Greeks for their influence (however limited) on Belgrade," Holbrooke explained. Accordingly, the U.S. had to seek its assistance, but in a way that kept the Contact Group sufficiently distant to prevent it from wrecking the negotiating process.⁴⁸

To create sufficient distance, Holbrooke's strategy was rather simple: limit the information that the Contact Group had about his negotiations. In his August memorandum to Christopher, Holbrooke suggested that the U.S. only provide the Contact Group a "rough outline of where we are, issue by issue, without revealing anything not already known or agreed by each of the parties. With respect to our future plans, we

⁴⁵ Holbrooke draft memoir, Chapter 2 (September 21, 1996) p17.

⁴⁶ Holbrooke comments, *passim*.

⁴⁷ Holbrooke wrote this memorandum in preparation for an August 23 meeting he and Tarnoff had with European representatives at the State Department before the Ft. Myers memorial service. See memorandum to Christopher from Holbrooke, "The Contact Group," no date. In his draft memoirs (Chapter 2, September 21, 1996, p21), Holbrooke describes this memorandum, explaining that it was sent to the Secretary on August 23. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references are from this memorandum.

⁴⁸ Clark interview; *passim* comments, Dayton History Seminar.

intend to keep the focus on the process, and while we will be eager to hear from them their ideas for initiatives, we don't intend to share ours to the group." Overall, Holbrooke explained, the "dilemma now is how to keep the actual negotiations in our hands alone."

As the Holbrooke delegation was with the Contact Group in Germany, reports came in about the discussion between Janvier and Mladic late the evening of September 1. They were not positive. The two opposing generals met to discuss terms for a possible cease-fire. It looked as though the Bosnian Serbs were hedging -- it was soon determined that they had only moved weapons around, refusing to "withdraw" them from the exclusion zone around Sarajevo.⁴⁹ Moreover, Mladic would only agree "in principle" to a permanent withdrawal of heavy weapons, demanding in exchange a meeting with Bosnian Muslim military leaders and a pledge by NATO and the UN to end any future military actions.⁵⁰ In a September 2 call with President Clinton, NATO Secretary General Claes reported that the Janvier-Mladic talks were "very difficult." For Claes, this was to be expected. "Remember," Claes observed, "we are working with former communists and their negotiating techniques." The two agreed that if Mladic did not accept the Allies' "very reasonable" terms, bombing would resume. NATO, Claes noted, would be ready "within two hours."⁵¹

For Holbrooke, it was more of the same from the Pale leaders, who in the past had often feigned a sincere desire for negotiations only as a delaying tactic.⁵² The Assistant Secretary had considered the pause a way to gauge the impact of the bombing and secure allied unity (the Allies remained somewhat skittish about bombing). But now, less than a day after he had pushed for a pause, Holbrooke realized that the calculated gamble had come up short: Mladic was taking advantage of the pause, probably assuming it to be just another example of the Allies' lack of resolve. As Mladic stonewalled a vacillating Janvier, Holbrooke and the team decided that the airstrikes needed to be resumed at once. Only massive force and decisive action would sway the Pale leaders.⁵³ Before the team left Bonn that day for Brussels, Holbrooke and Wes Clark again worked the phones with their counterparts in Washington and NATO command. This time, however, they lobbied to restart the air campaign. Calling from the delegation's car

⁴⁹ A US review of Bosnian Serb compliance judged that "[the Bosnian Serbs' purpose was not withdrawal of the weapons from the 20KM exclusion zone around Sarajevo, but to provide them more protection against possible NATO airstrikes and to try to show some heavy weapons movement in order to state that they (the BSA) really had started to execute the UN requirements. The BSA had enough time to move many more weapons than they had and were merely changing their positions." See "G2 Assessment about the Bosnian Serb HW Withdrawal, September 5, 1995," as quoted in USAFE Study, August 1996. In his September 1 phone conversation with Sacirbey, Talbott said the BSA was not withdrawing its weapons, and that if this continued, NATO was prepared to resume strikes.

⁵⁰ As conveyed in a September 2 letter from Mladic in reply to Janvier's August 30 letter. Characterizing Mladic's letter, the US embassy in Sarajevo observed that "in essence Mladic is prepared to accept the West's surrender. He freezes the lines, keeps his gains, strangles Sarajevo, continues to harass the UN with license, renegotiated the airport deal, reduces the exclusion zone to a tiny safe area (Pale remains exempt), and reserves the right to launch offensive operations. The letter is an outrage, as a senior UN official put it. But it will become a crime if the UN accepts it." For text and comment, see "Mladic letter to Janvier," Cable, Sarajevo 528, September 2, 1995.

⁵¹ "Presidential Telephone Call, September 2, 1995," Cable, State 215056, September 11, 1995.

⁵² Holbrooke interview with author (notes), September 30, 1996.

⁵³ Holbrooke interview with author (notes), September 30, 1996; Clark interview, July 15, 1996.

parked on the airport tarmac in Cologne, Clark tried to persuade a skeptical Admiral Leighton Smith that resuming the bombing would help the negotiations.⁵⁴

Once in Brussels, Holbrooke, Clark and Pardew continued their efforts in a meeting with NAC representatives. Briefing the NAC on the recent progress in the negotiations, Holbrooke began by observing that exactly two weeks prior, he and Clark had returned to the U.S. with the bodies of Frasure, Kruzel and Drew. Dedicating their efforts to the memory of their fallen comrades, Holbrooke explained, the negotiating team had moved things forward dramatically over the past few days. Milosevic had solved the question of who would speak for the Serbs, and the upcoming Geneva meeting aimed to provide momentum to the process and set the stage for a larger conference. To preserve the positive course of negotiations, Holbrooke asked that the NAC present the Bosnian Serbs with a firm ultimatum and prepare to resume the NATO air campaign.⁵⁵

This was a key moment for the American negotiator, who recognized the considerable advantages bombing brought to his bargaining leverage. The decision facing them, Holbrooke said to NATO's political leaders, was a "classic dilemma in political-military relations, one we faced but never solved in Vietnam: the relationship between force and diplomacy." NATO's decision to retaliate for the Sarajevo massacre had been necessary and correct, he argued. Now, after the Bosnian Serbs have refused to take the opportunity to comply, the bombing pause needed to end. "It [is] now essential to establish that we are negotiating from a position of strength," Holbrooke stressed.⁵⁶

Despite this presentation, the NAC remained uneasy about resuming the bombing. The problem, it seemed, was that the NAC partners were getting mixed signals about what to do. Upon receipt of Mladic's written response and his guarantee "not [to] conduct combat operations or threaten any attack [on the safe areas] except in the case of self defense," Janvier believed that the pause should continue -- indeed, he had already extended the pause from 24 to 72 hours.⁵⁷ Janvier seemed to accept Mladic's statement that as long as the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) did not threaten any safe areas, it should be allowed to assume defensive positions to protect themselves from NATO airstrikes.⁵⁸ U.S. officials in Washington, the Holbrooke delegation, General Joulwan, NATO Secretary General Claes and Acting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan all disagreed. They believed that Mladic's response to Janvier's demands was totally unacceptable and wanted the NAC to act.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ According to Clark, General Joulwan supported the resumption of bombing, but Admiral Smith felt that rearming the campaign would hurt the negotiating process. Joulwan asked Clark to call Smith (who outranked him) to explain to him that not starting the bombing would damage the team's bargaining position. At one point, when an angry Smith lashed back at Clark, Holbrooke took the phone himself to insist that the bombing resume. See Clark interview, July 15, 1996; Holbrooke interview (notes), September 30, 1996.

⁵⁵ See "Assistant Secretary Holbrooke Briefs NAC on Peace Negotiations," Cable, USNATO 3457, September 4, 1995; and Holbrooke interview (notes), September 30, 1996.

⁵⁶ Ibid; and Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 8 (January 27, 1997), p18.

⁵⁷ See Cable, Sarajevo 528.

⁵⁸ He had apparently told this to US Ambassador Galbraith on September 2 after his meeting with Mladic. See Galbraith interview, October 2, 1996.

⁵⁹ This is described by Talbot in a September 2 phone call to British Foreign Secretary Rifkind. This conversation also reflects the different views of Mladic's response: Rifkind tells Talbot that Mladic showed "significant progress," although by the end of the call he agreed with the US position to press for a NAC ultimatum. See "Acting Secretary Talbot and HMG FM Rifkind, September 2, 1995," Cable, State 211971, September 7, 1995.

Holbrooke asked U.S. Ambassador to NATO Hunter to remain with the NAC and hammer out an ultimatum.⁶⁰ Hunter pressed his colleagues to place specific, verifiable conditions on the Bosnian Serbs -- no attacks on any safe area, withdrawal of all heavy weapons from the Sarajevo exclusion zone, complete freedom of movement for the UN and NGOs, and unhindered use of the Sarajevo airport -- and with compliance to be achieved within a "finite" period of time. After a long and "tumultuous" meeting, the NAC agreed that Mladic's reply "[was] not sufficient and does not constitute a basis for terminating airstrikes," set the U.S.-proposed terms for BSA compliance, and announced that the Bosnian Serbs had another 48 hours to cooperate.⁶¹

After Holbrooke's briefing on the status of the talks and resuming the air campaign, Clark and Pardew walked the NAC through the key points of a memo recently approved through the NSC Deputies Committee on a NATO-led force, now to be known as an Implementation Force, or IFOR.⁶² Stressing that such a force must be available to deploy quickly following a negotiated settlement, they outlined the principles on which the mission should operate: UN-mandated, but operationally under NATO command and control; capable of combat with a "robust" role; flexible enough to accommodate non-NATO participants; and a limited duration of no longer than one year. Clark and Pardew recommended that NATO Op-plan 40104 (the UN extraction plan) be used as a baseline for NATO planning, and they discussed potential structures for political guidance for IFOR. The Allies were generally supportive of the U.S. plan, and candid about areas which would require further discussion. They agreed to meet again during the next week before submitting a formal proposal for NAC consideration.⁶³

While Clark and Pardew briefed the NAC, Holbrooke returned to their hotel to join Owen, Hill and Sacirbey to continue work on the draft principles for Geneva. Sacirbey remained angry about the bombing pause, arguing that it was inappropriate to give the Serbs any more time to comply with Janvier's terms.⁶⁴ On the draft principles, the Bosnian foreign minister disagreed with the notion that each Bosnian entity would have the right to maintain cultural and economic ties with other countries. He correctly identified this as a Milosevic addition, pointing out that such arrangements would allow for the eventual dissolution of Bosnia. He asked that language be added to guarantee that

⁶⁰ Holbrooke interview (notes), September 30, 1996.

⁶¹ See "NAC Press Statement," UK Cable, Telno 343, September 3, 1995; and "NAC Conclusions," UK Cable, Telno 345, September 3, 1995. The Holbrooke team had set out to get the NAC to agree to only a 24 hour pause. See "Proposed NATO/NAC Statement," September 2, 1995 (no author, located in Pardew notebook, Shuttle II; Book II); and Holbrooke comment, Dayton History Seminar.

⁶² This memo, approved on August 30 by the DC, was sent to the Principals on September 1 for decision. See "Implementing a Balkan Peace Settlement," Department of Defense memorandum, revision 30, September 1, 1995. See also "NATO Implementation Force (I-FOR)," Pardew report to Slocombe, September 3, 1995; and Cable, USNATO 3457.

⁶³ General Clark followed-up this initial NAC briefing with a private meeting with British and French representatives the morning of September 1. They agreed that the US, French, and British would have to coordinate planning and come to agreement before any plan was submitted to the NAC. See "Tri-Lateral Discussions (US/UK/France) on Bosnia Peace Plan Initiative," Cable, USNATO 3464, September 4, 1995; and Clark interview, July 15, 1996.

⁶⁴ Sacirbey had again expressed this anger to Deputy Secretary Talbott in a phone call (prior to Sacirbey's meeting with Holbrooke that day), where the Bosnian minister said that "the GOBH is concerned the air strike pause signifies a pull-back in NATO determination to press the Serbs." See "Acting Secretary Talbott and Bosnian Foreign Minister Sacirbey, September 2, 1995," Cable, State 211939, September 7, 1995.

such ties be consistent with Bosnia's integrity and sovereignty. Sacirbey didn't seem to care if the Bosnian Serbs actually lived "separately" from the Croats or Muslims, as long as they did so within Bosnian territory with no option to secede. What Sacirbey was saying was that the Bosnian Serbs could live on a sort of reservation -- Holbrooke and his team started to refer to his concept as the "Navajo Indian idea."⁶⁵

Ankara: "Republika Srpska" and NATO Bombing

The next day, September 3, the negotiating team split, as Holbrooke traveled to Geneva for a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) while the rest of the team flew to Zagreb. The OIC would be essential to the economic component of any settlement package by providing economic and military assistance to the Bosnians. Thus, like the European Contact Group, the U.S. needed to keep them "in the tent" on the diplomatic track but wanted to do so with as little time and effort as possible. Holbrooke's trip to Geneva aimed to keep the OIC satisfied, hoping to leave the impression that the U.S. was consulting with them in earnest.⁶⁶

While in Zagreb that afternoon, the rest of the team met with UN General Janvier and civilian representative Akashi to discuss the new NAC ultimatum. Janvier provided the team with a copy of the most recent letter he sent Mladic detailing the terms of the NAC demands.⁶⁷ Pessimistically, Janvier told the team that Mladic would likely not comply, and that the bombing would therefore have to resume. He also stated that while Mladic had not yet attacked UNPROFOR on a large-scale, he was concerned that he might do so when bombing resumed. After being burned by Mladic, apparently Janvier felt that NATO would have to get tougher with the Bosnian Serbs; he told the U.S. negotiators that he expected NATO to reach the limits of Option Two bombing during the next round.⁶⁸

The shuttle team then continued on to Belgrade. Their discussions with Milosevic -- which Holbrooke joined midway after arriving from his OIC talks in Geneva -- were on the new language about the integrity of Bosnia and possible "special ties" between Serbia and Srpska negotiated with Sacirbey. Milosevic acted confused about the rationale for the additions. When the team explained that the new language aimed to prevent secession, he claimed that such a line was unnecessary. Milosevic tried to convince the U.S. that there was no issue; he would never allow a Serb entity to secede, therefore there was no need to even acknowledge the possibility. He claimed that to imply that he would allow secession by including such language would sully his honor. Owen and others did not accept his point, and reluctantly, Milosevic finally accepted the changes.⁶⁹ The next step for the delegation was to present the draft principles to Izetbegovic the next evening in Ankara, Turkey.

⁶⁵ Holbrooke, Hill and Owen comments, Dayton History Seminar.

⁶⁶ These objectives are explicitly outlined for Holbrooke in a memorandum faxed to Brussels from Jack Zetkovic (EUR/SCE), "Keeping the OIC Contact Group 'in the tent,'" September 2, 1995. For more on efforts to gain Islamic support for implementation, see "U/S Tarnoff Meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Moussa, September 7," Cable, Paris 21826, September 12, 1995; and "Planning for Peace Implementation in the Former Yugoslavia -- A Critical Role For Turkey," Cable, Ankara 10831, September 20, 1995.

⁶⁷ See letter from Janvier to Mladic, Zagreb, September 3, 1995.

⁶⁸ As explained in a note faxed to Slocombe from Pardew (hand-written), September 3, 1995.

⁶⁹ Details on this meeting from Dayton History Seminar; Owen/Holbrooke interview.

Before stopping in Ankara on September 4, the Holbrooke delegation spent most of the day in Athens and Skopje to close the Greece-Macedonia agreement. The team got the two sides to agree to have their Foreign Ministers meet the following week in New York under the auspices of Cy Vance and Matthew Nimetz to normalize relations formally.⁷⁰ But the deal was in fact closed in a dramatic series of phone calls and discussions that day. In Athens, Holbrooke played to the aging Papandreou's sense of history. "It took a Nixon to go to China," Holbrooke said, "and history will give him great credit for what he did. Today, Mr. Prime Minister, you can do the same thing in regard to Skopje -- and at no cost to your nation's interests, only benefit."⁷¹

But the Greek Prime Minister, under considerable pressure from his Foreign Minister, who strongly opposed any deal, still wanted the U.S. to guarantee that Macedonia would keep its word. Time was running short, Holbrooke said, as he had to get to Ankara to meet with Izetbegovic. Finally, Papandreou said he would agree to a deal if Holbrooke would call him personally from Gligorov's office in Skopje and, speaking for the U.S., "guarantee" that the Macedonians would keep their word. Holbrooke, who had no problem providing Papandreou with this bit of theatre, immediately flew to Skopje, where after several more hours of additional discussion, Gligorov agreed. Holbrooke made the phone call, and the deal was done.⁷²

While the two sides were unable to reach agreement on such contentious issues as the name "Macedonia" or the Macedonian flag, they decided to discuss these later and sign an interim agreement. Greece agreed to lift its embargo on Macedonia, greatly reducing the threat of conflict.⁷³ Although the Holbrooke team expended a relatively small amount of effort to get this deal, it was clear that their intervention provided the decisive pressure. The secret trip of Jim Pardew and Chris Hill, later named the first U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia, paid off. The team hoped that this success would create an image that they were a group who "meant business" and "could get things done." Milosevic had told them the previous day in Belgrade that they would not be able to solve the Macedonian issue; they hoped he was watching.⁷⁴

The Holbrooke delegation reached Ankara hours later and exhausted. When the team met with the Bosnians late that evening at U.S. Ambassador Mark Grossman's residence, they found their interlocutors still deeply concerned that the constitutional principles failed to preserve the legitimacy and integrity of the Bosnian state. In the latest

⁷⁰ See "Greece-FYROM Agreement," Cable, State 209743, September 5, 1995; and Steven Greenhouse, "Greece and Macedonia Ready to Settle Dispute, US Says," *New York Times*, September 5, 1995.

⁷¹ Account from Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 8 (January 21, 1997).

⁷² Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996; Hill interview with author (notes) December 17, 1996; and Pardew interview, July 31, 1996. For cable reports of Holbrooke's meetings with Greek Foreign Minister Papoulias and Prime Minister Papandreou, see "Official-Informal to Marshall Adair (EUR/SE) from Thomas Miller (DCM Athens)" Cable, Athens 8227, September 4, 1995.

⁷³ See Christopher S. Wren, "Greeks to Lift the Ban on Trade that Crippled Macedonia," *New York Times*, September 6, 1995.

⁷⁴ As the American team left the Serbian Presidency the evening of September 3, Chris Hill had turned to Milosevic and said "by the way, we're off to Skopje and Athens tomorrow. You had better watch carefully in the next twenty-four hours," see Hill comment, Dayton History Seminar. In the final New York agreement mediated by Vance and Nimetz on September 13, Macedonia agreed to scrap its flag and both sides agreed to resolve the "Macedonia" name issue at a later date. See "FYROM Agreement: All Cool with PM Papandreou," Cable, Athens 8148, September 12, 1995; Christopher S. Wren, "Greece to Lift Embargo Against Macedonia if it Scraps Flag," *New York Times*, September 14, 1995.

draft written after the meetings with Sacirbey and Milosevic, Owen had dropped the subject of the "Presidency" altogether and focused only on general political concepts.⁷⁵ When Owen showed Izetbegovic the new draft, the Bosnian President turned his attention directly to the references used to describe the Bosnian state and the Serb entity in the opening line. Izetbegovic demanded that the Americans change the first line's promise of the continuation of the "legal entity known as Bosnia and Herzegovina" to the more concise "Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina." Milosevic had insisted that the words "Republic of" be removed. Such a change involved more than semantics; to Izetbegovic, it reflected that the sanctity of Bosnia's geographic boundaries would be preserved. For the Balkan leaders, "republic" also connoted sovereignty -- by insisting on continuance of the republic, the Bosnians were arguing for a unitary, sovereign state with unchanged borders.⁷⁶

Similarly, Izetbegovic adamantly opposed referring to the Bosnian Serb entity as "Republika Srpska." Milosevic had insisted that the name be added. Milosevic's view was that the title alone would not threaten the territorial integrity of Bosnia; "what else should the Serbs call themselves"?, he asked. Izetbegovic was not against giving the Bosnian Serbs a legal role in the new state, but he felt that to allow them to use the term "republic" granted them de facto autonomy. It seemed to legitimize the actions undertaken by rebel leaders like Karadzic in January 1992 when they declared their "Srpska" republic independent from Bosnia and part of Serbia. "That name is like the Nazi name," Izetbegovic said emotionally. "If you use it, you are letting them win. It contains the word 'republic,' so they will appear to have a separate country."⁷⁷

Holbrooke and Owen tried to convince the Bosnian President that the name did not imply a sovereign government but, like the "Republic of Texas" and the "Commonwealth of Massachusetts," a separate entity under a central governmental structure. An entity's name didn't matter, they argued; what mattered was the political and legal structures it adhered to. They battled with Izetbegovic on this point, "browbeating" him as one delegation member later recalled. Owen was sympathetic to the Bosnian President's concerns, but could not see how they could tell the Serbs what to call themselves. Milosevic had demanded "Republika Srpska" as a price for his agreement and the U.S. negotiators preferred not to call his bluff.⁷⁸ Late that night, after a great deal of pressure, the Bosnian President finally agreed. The Republic of Bosnia would consist of two entities -- the Federation and the Republika Srpska. A fundamental pillar of an eventual agreement had fallen into place.⁷⁹

During these tense discussions with Izetbegovic, Holbrooke, Clark and Kerrick occasionally split off to phone Washington. Even as they fought to get details with Izetbegovic, their main focus was to get the bombing resumed. For the past day, the UN had been receiving conflicting responses from the Bosnian Serbs on whether they would

⁷⁵ See "Constitutional Organization of the Bosnian State," draft (no date), EUR/SCE files.

⁷⁶ Details of this meeting, see Holbrooke, Hill, Owen and Zetkovic comments, Dayton History Seminar.

⁷⁷ Owen interview, June 18, 1996; Holbrooke, Owen, Hill comments, Dayton History Seminar; Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 8 (January 27, 1997), pp42-45.

⁷⁸ Owen interview, June 18, 1996; Holbrooke interview, June 18, 1996.

⁷⁹ See Holbrooke, Owen, Hill, Clark comments, Dayton History Seminar. Holbrooke also reviewed these talks with Izetbegovic during a September 5 meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller in Ankara, see "A/S Holbrooke's meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Ciller," Cable, Ankara 10444, September 12, 1995.

comply with NATO's terms, with political leaders indicating they would and Mladic indicating the opposite. This transpired first in what Holbrooke described as an "idiotic letter" from Bosnian Serb Vice President Nikola Koljevic to Janvier apparently accepting NATO's terms, shortly followed by a "literally insane" letter from Mladic claiming that what NATO was doing was worse than the famous Nazi raid on Belgrade during World War II. In any event, the fact remained that the Bosnian Serbs were not withdrawing weapons from the exclusion zone around Sarajevo, and Mladic threatened that he would strike back against any NATO attack.⁸⁰

Despite the evidence that the Bosnian Serbs refused to comply, there was considerable resistance to resuming the bombing. Holbrooke later reflected that even though NATO Military Commander (and U.S. General) George Joulwan and Claes supported resumption, the UN military command "was looking for an excuse to avoid resumption of bombing." What Holbrooke and others had once thought would be a rather clear-cut strategic decision had now become far less certain.⁸¹

On that Labor Day in Washington, Talbott, Berger and others survived on take-out pizzas while staying in almost constant telephone contact with NATO officials in Brussels and Naples, UN officials in New York, Zagreb and Sarajevo, and the shuttle team in Ankara. Judging that the Bosnian Serbs were not complying, Holbrooke, Clark and Kerrick stressed that the attacks had to resume during a conference call with Talbott, Berger and Walt Slocombe.⁸²

Holbrooke explained that if the bombing was not resumed, "our chances for success in the negotiations, especially at Geneva, will be seriously reduced. The Bosnians are barely on board for our Geneva draft, and when I see Izetbegovic again in the morning to go over the draft, the bombing must have resumed... if we do not resume the bombing, [then] NATO will again look like a paper tiger. The Bosnian Serbs will return to their blackmailing ways." Finally, in what he recalled saying "as melodramatically" as possible, Holbrooke stated that "if the bombing does not resume, history will hold us responsible for failure. Give us bombs by morning."⁸³

From the shuttle team's perspective, U.S. military officials were ambivalent about restarting the campaign, despite Talbott and Berger's support.⁸⁴ Yet, after a flurry of phone calls between Washington and Brussels, the bombing advocates finally prevailed.⁸⁵ When the UN confirmed Bosnian Serb noncompliance on September 5, the bombing campaign resumed.

Once Izetbegovic's agreement to the principles in Ankara was secured, the team returned to Belgrade on September 5 to finalize the document with Milosevic. Bosnian

⁸⁰ See Holbrooke comment, Dayton History Seminar; [redacted]

⁸¹ See Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 8 (January 27, 1997), p51.

⁸² Holbrooke comment, Dayton History Seminar; Talbott interview; Vershbow interview. In phone calls, Sacirbey had already begun to lobby the US to resume airstrikes, arguing that "NATO must show the trigger can be squeezed" to create a psychological reality of determination. Sacirbey claimed that BSA heavy weapons had been moved around, but not out. See, for example, "The Acting Secretary (Talbott) and Bosnian FM Sacirbey," Cable, State 211925, September 7, 1995.

⁸³ Details from Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 8 (January 27, 1997 draft), pp52-53.

⁸⁴ See Holbrooke comment in Mark McLaughlin, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deliberate Force: Harnessing the Political-Military Connection," USAF Air Power Survey, Maxwell AFB (draft), p3.

⁸⁵ For full details of these calls, see State Department Operations Center Telephone Logs, September 4, 1995, Shifts II and III; and Walter Slocombe interview, January 6, 1997.

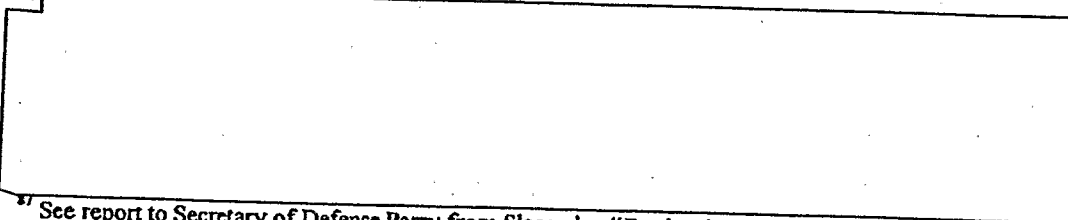
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Serb actions during the bombing pause seemed to throw Milosevic's influence in doubt; his authority invested by the Patriarch letter didn't help him get Mladic to withdraw his weapons. Such events particularly highlighted the stark division among Milosevic, Karadzic and Mladic.⁸⁶ As Pardew reported back to Washington, "[The] Bombing pause affair has made clear that Milosevic cannot deliver Mladic and Mladic is who counts among Bosnian Serbs." This incident revealed that Milosevic had limited influence over military affairs in Bosnia, but he would have to get control of Mladic to get a settlement. These intra-Serb disputes, which the delegation planned to raise with Milosevic, cast a shadow not only on the conditions for continued bombing but the political talks as well. Indeed, the very premise of the Milosevic strategy was that if forced, Milosevic had the ability to deliver the Bosnian Serbs. Obviously, if the U.S. had overestimated Milosevic's power vis-à-vis the Bosnian Serbs, this approach would be severely crippled. Pardew questioned, "is there not a risk we are negotiating Milosevic on a deal that Mladic won't buy, and that will then serve as the starting point for concessions to Mladic?"⁸⁷

Holbrooke and others pressed Milosevic on his problems with Mladic. Milosevic still clearly wanted a deal, and Holbrooke played on the Serb leader's desire for international acceptance, even going so far as to project an image of a White House Rose Garden signing ceremony, to get him to rein in the belligerent Bosnian Serb general. Milosevic was enraged by the Bosnian Serbs -- the mere mention of Karadzic sent him off into a tirade. In response to a "short but intense" complaint about resumption of bombing, Pardew told Milosevic that Defense Secretary Perry was a "soft spoken man with a tough mind," who favored air power and was "extremely frustrated with the UN's past unwillingness to use force and the inability to achieve peace." During a short one-on-one meeting, Holbrooke got Milosevic to concede nearly all the outstanding issues on constitutional principles, except for Izetbegovic's desire to have the term "Republic" before "Bosnia" in the first line. They agreed to keep the word out. Finally, after a brief discussion of some territorial issues, Milosevic agreed to the draft.⁸⁸

With Milosevic's agreement, the U.S. delegation now had a document to be signed at Geneva in three days. The team briefed Tudjman on September 6 in Zagreb, receiving his blessing on the principles and a short statement that Croatia and Serbia sought a peaceful resolution to the Eastern Slavonia dispute.⁸⁹ Then, the team again split up to consult the Allies on the negotiations and continue planning for military implementation. On September 6, General Clark and Jim Pardew held an IFOR planning

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⁸⁷ See report to Secretary of Defense Perry from Slocombe, "Pardew Report at 1400Z," September 5, 1995.

⁸⁸ See report to Slocombe from Pardew, "Meeting with Milosevic," September 5, 1995. Attached to this report is the latest version of principles (reflecting Milosevic's deletion of the word "republic") and the territorial issues raised. These preliminary issues included 51-49 territorial breakdown; a Serb corridor across northern territory of Bosnia; agreement that Sarajevo would be capital of Federation; Federation control of Brcko; Serb control of the former enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa; Muslim control of Gorazde with a corridor link to Federation territory; and a similar arrangement with Bihac.

⁸⁹ See Galbraith Diplomatic Diary, September 6, 1995 entry, pp44-45.

meeting in Brussels with NATO, British and French officials. Building on the talks they had started four days before, they discussed specifics of an IFOR mission -- including the duration of its deployment, proposed IFOR tasks, job of theatre commander, and how to include non-NATO countries in any decision-making process. The "atmospherics" of these talks were very good, although few specifics were agreed to. Meanwhile, on September 7 Chris Hill joined Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Tarnoff in Paris to brief the Contact Group partners on the upcoming Geneva signing.⁹⁰

After the shuttle team reunited in Rome on September 7 (meeting with Italian officials who remained angry that Italy was left out of the Contact Group), they traveled on to Geneva to prepare for the foreign ministers meeting. The next day, the U.S. delegation and Contact Group representatives would witness Croat Foreign Minister Mate Granic, Serb Foreign Minister Milan Milutinovic, and Sacirbey agree to the principles.⁹¹ It would be the first time the three Balkan parties had met officially in over eighteen months.

Washington at Work

During this shuttle round, a decision-making pattern began to emerge. Negotiating decisions generally did not flow from Washington. Delegation members checked in by phone several times a day with their respective agencies, and Clark and Pardew provided written reports to their superiors (Clark to General Shalikashvili everyday; Pardew to either Secretary Perry or Under Secretary Slocombe whenever possible). Holbrooke himself called Washington an average of four times a day during this shuttle round.⁹² The lead negotiator, though, wanted delegation decision-making on the negotiations kept internal to the team, oftentimes keeping key decisions from officials in Washington (such as Milosevic's final approval of the principles on September 5). In effect, many of the shuttle team's accomplishments were presented to Washington as a *fait accompli*. As a consequence, Holbrooke requested to see all written correspondence to Washington, and the team usually agreed in advance as to what information would be conveyed verbally.

Holbrooke believed that to preserve the integrity of the negotiations -- preventing leaks, for example -- and to maximize the team's bargaining flexibility and ability to make quick decisions, they had to circumvent the typical inter-agency deliberative process.⁹³ He was heavily influenced from his days as a junior member of the American

⁹⁰ For details of Clark/Pardew talks, see Clark interview, July 15, 1996; "Questions for NATO," typewritten notes dated September 6 in Pardew's notebook Shuttle II, Book II; "Trilateral Meeting (US/UK/France) on Bosnia Peace Plan Initiative," Cable, USNATO 3524, September 8, 1995; and "Considerations for Bosnia Peace Implementation Plan," Cable, USNATO 3477, September 5, 1995. For details of Tarnoff/Hill talks, see "September 7 Quad meeting on Bosnia," Cable, Paris 21734, September 11, 1995; and "Readouts of U/S Tarnoff's Paris Meetings," memorandum to Kornblum from Fletcher Burton (EUR/SCE), September 7, 1995.

⁹¹ The UN was not invited to Geneva. On September 7, Boutros-Ghali complained to Christopher about this, to which the Secretary replied that "Holbrooke strenuously resisted inclusion of four or five other countries in the Geneva meeting [and] participation in the meeting had been determined in negotiations with the parties themselves." See "Secretary's Conversation with UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali, September 7, 1995," Cable, State 213440, September 8, 1995.

⁹² Average from calls patched through the State Department Operations Center during August 28-September 8, 1995. Additional calls likely were made, although through direct dialing.

⁹³ For details, see Holbrooke interview, October 18, 1996.

negotiating team led by Averell Harriman that met with the North Vietnamese in Paris in 1968-69, where, in his view, internal divisions of the Harriman's team (particularly between military and political officials) and the mistrust of officials in Washington had hindered the negotiations. As Holbrooke later reflected, "no other experience was as valuable for me in shaping both the composition and operational style of our [Bosnian negotiating] team; I knew that we could not afford any similar internal divisions within our team, and that the negotiating flexibility we needed could come only with the full backing of the key members of the Principals Committee."⁹⁴ Officials in Washington were aware of this history, and thus willing to trust the team with considerable decision-making leverage. Consequently, during these early days in September, Holbrooke and his colleagues did not seek guidance or approval from Washington on the principles they were negotiating, they just proceeded. Similarly, while the Greece-Macedonia issue was watched by officials in Washington, it was Holbrooke and his team who decided to try to forge a breakthrough, and they did so secretly.⁹⁵

As far back as July 1995, when the NSC-driven policy review was underway, Holbrooke believed that regardless of any "finalized" U.S. strategy, the negotiator would require a great deal of decision-making leverage to succeed.⁹⁶ In other words, while the broad parameters of the strategy might remain (such as 51-49 or maintaining the territorial integrity of Bosnia), how the negotiations proceeded or what was finally approved would be the negotiating team's responsibility. Holbrooke explained this approach to Lake during their August 14 London meeting, and while Lake urged that Holbrooke use the talking points as a script initially, he concurred that the lead negotiator would need considerable flexibility. Christopher also felt comfortable leaving the tactical negotiating choices up to Holbrooke, as long as he operated within the "red lines" of the U.S. initiative.⁹⁷ In this sense, with delegation members representing OSD, JCS, State and NSC, the inter-agency process was repackaged in miniature on the road. Through their representatives on the team, each agency could "clear" negotiating decisions. General strategy would be discussed with Washington, but the day-to-day decisions -- which cities they traveled to, who they negotiated with, and what issues they discussed -- were the sole prerogative of Holbrooke and his team.

On this shuttle, the delegation established an interpersonal rapport and mutual respect that would serve them well throughout the negotiations. "Our negotiating team had already developed an internal dynamic that combined bantering, argumentation, and discipline," Holbrooke reflected. "Complete trust and openness... was essential if we were to avoid energy-consuming internal intrigues and back channels to Washington." Holbrooke fostered the idea that Kerrick, Hill, Pardew, Owen and Clark were all equals on the team and not simply his supporting players. To avoid the infighting that had plagued many past negotiating teams, he encouraged informality and frankness. "We

⁹⁴ Holbrooke draft memoirs, Chapter 2 (September 21, 1996), pp15-16.

⁹⁵ According to members of EUR staff, officials in Washington were confused by Hill and Pardew's Skopje trip. When one senior State Department official called the State Department Operations Center to get the latest on Holbrooke's negotiations, they were told that the entire team had traveled to Skopje. For a brief period, it seemed, no one could track down exactly where the delegation had gone. The result of this confusion was that EUR had to place a staffer in the Operations Center whose sole responsibility was to keep track of the delegation's whereabouts. Author discussion with Chris Hoh (EUR/SCE), July 1996.

⁹⁶ Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996.

⁹⁷ Christopher interview, October 30, 1996.

succeeded in avoiding [internal divisions], in part because our team was so small, and in part because we shared all information internally and developed close personal relationships," Holbrooke has written. Foregoing the more spacious front cabin of the airplane during shuttle flights, Holbrooke sat in the more cramped quarters with the rest of the team to discuss strategy, while support personnel sat in front. It was agreed that everything would be discussed openly within the group, and that they would present recommendations to Washington as the "consensus view of the negotiating team."⁹⁸

While Washington officials did their best to keep up with Holbrooke's progress and the course of the NATO bombing campaign, they also began important work concerning implementation of a possible settlement. At the DC level, officials had been working since late August to prepare planning papers on such issues as IFOR, equip-and-train, Serbian sanctions relief, and arms control.⁹⁹ On September 1, the first comprehensive paper summarizing the outcome of these discussions was presented to the Principals. This paper set forth the broad outlines of key issues concerning both the ongoing negotiations and implementation, including: on sanctions relief, agreement that sanctions against Serbia would be suspended once an agreement is reached and lifted once implemented; on Gorazde, consensus that the Bosnians would not be pressed to give it up; on economic reconstruction, commitment of U.S. support for a multi-billion dollar reconstruction program (but no specific financial commitment); on IFOR, approval of the DoD's approach (with which Clark and Pardew had begun consulting with Allies), and; on equip-and-train, a pledge to lead a multilateral support effort to achieve parity of forces among the parties.¹⁰⁰

The Principals Committee met to discuss this paper and other negotiating issues at a White House meeting the afternoon of September 5. This was the first time top officials met to discuss Bosnia since the August 23 memorial service meeting at Fort Myer. Joint Chiefs Chairman Shalikashvili opened the meeting with a detailed briefing on the NATO air campaign, which had restarted shortly after 7am EDT.¹⁰¹ The Principals agreed that the U.S. would support the strikes as long as the Bosnian Serbs refused to comply, even if that meant an exhaustion of Option Two targets. Shalikashvili pointed out that if NATO chose to escalate bombing and move to Option Three targets

⁹⁸ See Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996; Pardew interview, June 27, 1996; and Holbrooke draft memoir, Chapter 7 (December 12, 1996), pp43-44.

⁹⁹ See, for example, "Summary of Conclusions for NSC Deputies Committee Meeting, August 28, 1995," NSC memorandum, August 31, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ See Memorandum for Principals from Deputies Committee, "Achieving a Bosnia Peace Settlement: Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations," NSC Memorandum, September 1, 1995. Also attached was a paper outlining the viability of defending Gorazde, "Ensuring the Viability of Gorazde - Implications to the Peace Implementation Force and the Longer-Term Requirements"; the DoD paper on IFOR, "Implementing a Balkan Peace Settlement"; a paper on the arm/train issue for Bosnia, "Equipping and Training the Bosnian Federation"; a concept paper of economic assistance, "Post-settlement assistance package for Bosnia and Croatia," and draft talking points on the Bosnia strategy for Congress. For Secretary Christopher, EUR prepared a paper outlining reactions to NSC paper, "State Views on Achieving a Balkan Peace Settlement," which revealed very few differences with the approach reflected in the DC paper.

¹⁰¹ Secretaries Christopher and Perry were not at the meeting, they were represented by their deputies Strobe Talbott and John White. For details on this meeting, see "Summary of Conclusions for NSC Principals Committee Meeting, September 5, 1995," NSC memorandum, September 11, 1995; Memorandum to Deputy Secretary Talbott from John Kornblum (EUR), "Principals Committee Meeting, September 5, 1995," no date; and Vershbow interview, September 18, 1996.

(which were not covered by the July 26 NAC decision), it would require new NAC approval and further consultation with the UN. Lake argued that the U.S. needed to be prepared to "carry the bombing campaign through," whatever that required. Agreeing, Shalikashvili recommended that if NATO chose to escalate, there must be a pause or "firebreak" between Options Two and Three.

Concerning the DC decision paper, the Principals agreed on almost all the proposals outlined, although with some minor additions for clarification. For example, on IFOR, the Principals made clear that the force would remain in place up to a year or when the Bosnians could defend themselves, whichever came first. They also realized that a NATO-led IFOR could create some friction in the U.S. relationship with Russia (the Russians apparently had already told German Chancellor Kohl that they objected to a NATO-led IFOR), and therefore, the U.S. should begin to think of ways to include the Russians in such a force. Realizing that congressional approval would be critical on all implementation issues, the Principals finally endorsed immediate briefings on Capitol Hill to discuss the air campaign, Holbrooke's progress, and implementation planning.

Many of these issues were raised with the President two days later at a White House Foreign Policy Team meeting. The President focused particularly on the bombing campaign's status, and Shalikashvili and Perry provided the President with an update. Shalikashvili explained that NATO was currently working to take out all of the Bosnian Serbs air defenses, particularly in western Bosnia. Recognizing that targeting was around the area where U.S. pilot Scott O'Grady had been shot down in June, President Clinton supported such strikes not only for their strategic benefits, but "on principle." Perry recommended that NATO attack BSA air defenses around the key stronghold of Banja Luka, and Shalikashvili explained that U.S. cruise missiles would likely be used for such an attack. Shalikashvili also outlined that NATO could run out of Option Two targets soon, and that if the Bosnian Serbs had not complied in two to three days, the U.S. would have to consider going to the NAC for Option Three authorization. They deferred this decision for the coming days.¹⁰²

The First Stepping-Stone: Geneva

As President Clinton and his advisers discussed the status of the air campaign, the Holbrooke delegation arrived in Geneva for the Balkan foreign ministers' signing of the principles. The result of the meeting was supposed to be a foregone conclusion, as the three Balkan Presidents had already consented to the document. Yet, as was becoming clear to Holbrooke and his team, nothing was ever final in Balkan diplomacy.

In a call with Secretary Christopher early the morning of September 8 (EDT), Izetbegovic expressed dismay that the U.S. had accepted Milosevic's latest demand to drop the word "republic" before Bosnia. He said that Sacirbey would ask to include a statement that Bosnia would remain a whole state, and that all contacts with neighboring countries would have to be by mutual consent of both entities. If the Serbs rejected such an addition, the Bosnian President said, "there could be problems." Christopher replied that the first sentence of the principles represented a "powerful recognition" of Bosnia's status as a state, and that the Geneva agreement represented a strong first step. The

¹⁰² Vershbow interview, September 18, 1996.

Bosnian President was less optimistic, but agreed to bless the agreement if the Serbs cooperated on their sovereignty statement.¹⁰³

As officials converged on Geneva, the last minute theatrics reflected the difficulties of these negotiations and the deep suspicion held by each side. To begin, Sacirbey threatened to derail the talks by calling from his hotel to announce that he would not attend the meeting. The Bosnians were still upset about the removal of the word "republic." Holbrooke quickly put that fire out, telling Sacirbey tersely that he would not serve his country's interests well by boycotting. Once the meeting was finally underway, the Bosnian Serbs became the problem. Attending as part of the Serb delegation but not allowed to speak (Serb Foreign Minister Milutinovic would speak for them), the Bosnian Serbs were not even seated at the table with the Contact Group representatives, Holbrooke and the three foreign ministers.¹⁰⁴ Yet, Bosnian Serb Vice President Koljevic tried to make an opening statement anyway. A break was called in the meeting, and Holbrooke took the Bosnian Serbs into a private room. Furious, he told them that they could leave if they wanted, but they would not be allowed to speak. With Milutinovic's support, Holbrooke told Koljevic that he was "certain" that Milosevic didn't want the Bosnian Serbs to walk out, but they could of course do so if they wanted to. After what others only heard as a "heated shouting match," the Bosnian Serbs returned to the room and agreed to abide by the original condition that they be represented by Serbia.¹⁰⁵

Once the principles were formally approved, a discussion ensued which revealed just how far the parties had left to go to achieve true peace. As a way to break the ice, Holbrooke asked for the representatives' informal views on one aspect of the agreed principles, the formation of a commission to preserve national monuments. Sacirbey thoughtfully observed that the commission was, in some ways, a "substitute for national institutions." Since mosques, churches, bridges, and other national monuments were spread around Bosnia, the commission would help preserve them all for posterity and possibly help build some trust along the way. Milutinovic, though, immediately linked the commission to ethnicity and territory: before one could decide which monuments to preserve, one had to determine to whom they belonged, because only their ethnic owners would really care about preserving it. The discussion went on for some time without resolve before Russian Contact Group representative Igor Ivanov finally ended it by saying it was useful to gain some insight into their thinking and to see what negotiating tracks would not be fruitful.

¹⁰³ "The Secretary's Conversation with Bosnian President Izetbegovic, September 8, 1995," Cable, State 213439, September 8, 1995. Christopher conveyed similar sentiments to Bosnian PM Silajdzic minutes later; see "Secretary's Conversation with Bosnian PM Silajdzic, September 8, 1995," Cable, State 213441, September 8, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ Reminded of the debates over the table shape and seating arrangement from his days as a junior aide at the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam, Holbrooke intentionally left the Bosnian Serbs out.

¹⁰⁵ Details of Geneva meeting from "September 8 Meeting Between the Contact Group and the Foreign Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and FRY," Cable (draft), Geneva 6808, September 11, 1995; Holbrooke comments, Dayton History Seminar; and Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996.

The Geneva Principles, as this agreement came to be known, was a modest but important step on the road to peace. By getting the parties to agree to the basic concepts - the recognition of Bosnia as a single state with its present borders and negotiations based on 51-49 per cent territorial division - the U.S. had helped lay the foundation for future talks on a more specific settlement. With Milosevic as their negotiator and spokesman, the Bosnian Serbs were now engaged in the process, finally accepting concepts they had resisted for the better part of two years. The Principles outlined the framework for a Bosnia divided between the Muslim-Croat Federation and Serbs; a Bosnian state with free elections, human rights standards, binding arbitration of disputes, ability to establish "parallel special relationships" with neighbors, and country-wide institutions on monuments, human rights and displaced persons. Yet, the Geneva Principles were silent on exactly how this was to be achieved. While less ambitious than many had hoped, a State Department assessment recognized that the principles could provide "a dynamic basis for stopping the fighting and allowing the communities to work together."¹⁰⁶ More would have to be accomplished, in particular creating the federal institutions and rules which would govern this now official bi-national state.

When the Holbrooke team returned to Washington after Geneva, they believed that, for the moment, negotiations had been pushed as far as possible. As Pardew reported to Secretary Perry: "Holbrooke achieved everything that was possible to achieve at this point in the negotiations. The mistrust, hatred, and maneuvering among the parties will not allow a single, big-bang settlement."¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the delegation had accomplished quite a bit without providing Milosevic the sanctions relief he so deeply coveted. The Bosnian Serbs, who had pushed the Allies too far with the marketplace shelling, were again experiencing the full fury of NATO. The NAC was aware of U.S. thinking on IFOR, and the Contact Group and OIC were supportive, at least for the moment. The Greece-Macedonia settlement, while not central to the Bosnian problem, symbolized the "can-do" nature of the shuttle team and helped make the Balkan cauldron a bit cooler.¹⁰⁸

Milosevic had provided the real breakthrough with the Patriarch letter; yet, Bosnian Serb belligerence during the bombing pause renewed speculation about how much influence Milosevic actually wielded, particularly over Mladic. Nevertheless, Milosevic seemed to have developed a real rapport with the U.S. team, particularly with Holbrooke personally. This relationship would no doubt be tested mightily in the coming weeks. The Croats were for the most part agreeable. Although Zagreb leaders were key in the Muslim-Croat Federation, they were most concerned with Eastern Slavonia. Tudjman's Napoleonic attitude had quelled, at least for the moment. The most arduous negotiations were with the Bosnians. Believing that they deserved the most out of a settlement, the Bosnians would resist anything they interpreted to be remotely close to a concession.

¹⁰⁶ See "'Agreed Basic Principles' For a Peace Settlement for Bosnia-Herzegovina: An Analysis," memorandum drafted by John Kornblum and Jack Zetkovic (EUR), September 8, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Pardew report to Perry and Slocombe, "Balkan Peace Initiative: Round II," September 10, 1995.

¹⁰⁸ This "can-do" nature of the Holbrooke-led team also began to garner some attention in the U.S. press. See, for example, Carla Anne Robbins, "Outspoken Holbrooke's Skills Face a Major Test as Foreign Ministers Meet on the Bosnian War," *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 1995.

Holbrooke intended to wait at least a week before bringing the team back to the region.¹⁰⁹ When that time came, they would have to deal with more contentious issues like specific governing arrangements for Bosnia (such as the Presidency, foreign policy structure, and elections) and territorial control. "[Shuttle] Round III will be even harder as we move from concept and future structures to the territorial issues that represent reality to the people in the Balkans," Jim Pardew observed.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 18, 1996.

¹¹⁰ Pardew report, September 10, 1995.