

Chapter One

The Summer Crisis: June-July 1995

"Today, with the Cold War ending, people think Yugoslavia isn't in a position to do any damage. I think they're wrong. There's a fault line of instability running through the Balkans. I think events in Yugoslavia are going to turn violent and to confront the Western countries, especially the United States, with one of their biggest foreign policy problems of the next few years."

— George Kennan, to the last U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann, Summer 1989.¹

From the vantage of May 1995, George Kennan's words seemed all too prophetic. Since 1991, the Balkans had indeed become one of the greatest — if not the greatest — foreign policy dilemmas for the United States. Critics claimed that the West's inability to prevent and then end the bloodshed was the most significant failure of the post-Cold War era. For the Clinton Administration, Bosnia seemed to overshadow its entire foreign policy. During the 1992 presidential campaign, as images of the war in Bosnia filled American television and newspapers, Bill Clinton railed against the Bush Administration's tepid response. But as early as the spring of 1993 and increasingly over the next two years, the Clinton Administration found itself the target of blame — its approach toward the conflict was criticized as unfocused, uninspired, and unprincipled. Newspaper editorials cried that Bosnia was in a "freefall," and the Administration seemed to be unable to define and pursue a coherent policy.² The international community appeared willing only to carry out policies to contain and limit the tragedy, not end it.

The Clinton Administration's policy, pungently characterized by CIA Director John Deutsch as "muddle through," no longer appeared tenable. On May 1, a four-month cease-fire between Muslims and Serbs ended, and the Croatian troops attacked Serb positions in the Krajina region, an area once part of Croatian territory. A week later, Bosnian Serbs began to shell the Muslim-held capital of Sarajevo, and the areas around Brcko and Bihac were the sites of the worst combat in two years. The Bosnian Serbs had become increasingly bold in their defiance of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in the region, known as UNPROFOR.³ Acting with UN authority, NATO planes had responded to the Bosnian Serb attacks with a limited air campaign against Serb ammunition dumps and weapons. In retaliation, on May 26 the Bosnian Serbs began to take hundreds of UN personnel hostage, chaining them to ammunition dumps and bridges

¹ Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, (Times Books, 1996), p51.

² See, for example, *Washington Post* editorial, "Bosnia in a Free Fall," May 2, 1995.

³ For an excellent account of UNPROFOR's crisis during the spring of 1995, see Jan Willem Honig and Norbert Both, *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime* (Penguin, 1997), pp141-159.

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that were the targets of NATO attacks. By the end of the month, over 350 UN personnel had been forcibly detained by the Bosnian Serbs, some prominently displayed before television cameras. A hostage crisis was at hand. The nations who had contributed their forces to directing UN humanitarian relief efforts in Bosnia began to discuss openly the withdrawal of their "blue helmet" troops, thus precipitating UNPROFOR's collapse. They had grown increasingly weary of the hostage-taking, potential casualties, the sharp criticisms by the Western press, and the perception that the UN mission was only delaying the inevitable victory of the Bosnian Serbs.⁴

One way or another, it seemed, American troops were going to be on the ground in Bosnia. With the situation in the UN safe areas deteriorating, the Clinton Administration recognized that under the auspices of NATO, the United States might soon have to send in ground forces to help its Allies withdraw. Since 1992, NATO forces had played a limited but important role in implementing UN Security Council resolutions on the former Yugoslavia. Such operations included enforcing the international arms embargo, economic sanctions against Serbia and the "no-fly zone" over Bosnia. While the UN had assumed the lead role with forces on the ground, NATO was critical in supporting these resolutions as well as providing selective air protection for UNPROFOR troops.⁵

Since late 1994, the Clinton Administration had maintained that, should the situation on the ground prevent UN peacekeepers from carrying out their mission, NATO forces would have to help UNPROFOR leave Bosnia. This NATO mission, known as Op-plan 40104, called for 20,000 American soldiers to participate as part of a 60,000-person force. U.S. troops had to assist in this dangerous and humiliating effort, Administration officials explained, because American failure to take part "would devastate the [NATO] alliance."⁶ The only way for the U.S. to forestall the withdrawal mission would be for it to push the parties to peace -- preferable to Op-Plan 40104, but likely still demanding American troops to enforce a settlement.⁷ And such a scenario looked far away in the early summer of 1995.⁸

⁴ For details, see John Pomfret, "Shaky Truce in Bosnia Ends Today; UN Fails to Forestall Resurgence To War," *Washington Post*, May 1, 1995; "1995: The Year in Review," State Department Chronology (EUR/RPM); and "The United States and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: 1980-1995," Chronology prepared by the US Department of State, Office of the Historian, pp209-219.

⁵ Details on NATO operations in Bosnia from "NATO's Role in Peacekeeping in the Former Yugoslavia," *NATO Basic Fact Sheet*, No. 4, September 1996.

⁶ Background on 40104 and US military commitments from State Department memorandum, "Bosnia Peace Implementation," no author, October 3, 1995; D files.

⁷ In early 1994, when it appeared that a settlement could be reached based on the Contact Group initiative, NATO undertook planning deployments to implement an accord. This plan, known as Op-plan 40103, was never finalized, as renewed fighting effectively ended this initiative. When planning had stopped, NATO planners had not resolved such issues as troop size, participation of non-NATO forces, relationship with the UN, or chain of command. See *Ibid*.

⁸ For useful background on US policy toward the former Yugoslavia during 1992-1995, see Susan Rosegrant, "Getting to Dayton: Negotiating an End to the War in Bosnia," *Kennedy School of Government Case Program* (Harvard University, 1996), pp1-12.

Whither UNPROFOR?

In Washington, the Administration's frustration with its Bosnia policy was growing, as the situation began to deteriorate rapidly after the expiration of the cease-fire. At the NSC, European security and Balkan experts began to brainstorm about possible ways the U.S. could, at best, break out of this diplomatic morass, and at worst, prepare for a possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR troops. If the U.S. was going to get involved, many at the NSC felt, it should do so on its own terms.⁹ Nelson Drew, an Air Force Colonel who had just joined the NSC staff to work on Balkan issues, began work on a discussion paper in mid-May to probe the Administration's policy options. In his memorandum, circulated at the NSC on May 17, Drew noted that with the possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR and insertion of NATO/U.S. troops, "now is the time to review the fundamental principles guiding our policy and to determine the steps necessary to shape events before strategic choices are completely dictated by the situation on the ground." Although UNPROFOR was crippled and possibly moribund, Drew argued that it remained in the U.S. interest to try to keep it on the ground: "U.S. interests are best served by finding a way to restore credibility to the UNPROFOR mission in a manner that permits existing troop contributors to sustain their continued presence and the Bosnian government to agree to retain that presence."

Within the range of possible options to save UNPROFOR, Drew presented as the only "realistic choice" the idea to "retrench and reinvigorate" the mission: withdrawing UNPROFOR forces from untenable positions (such as some of the UN "safe areas" for Muslims established in eastern Bosnia) while pursuing a "more robust" enforcement of UN mandates, possibly including NATO airstrikes.¹⁰ Yet, with UN withdrawal a real possibility, Drew pressed the potential consequences of implementing Op-plan 40104: how to deal with unintended consequences of withdrawal operations, under what conditions withdrawal could take place without 40104 coming into effect, or how to ensure that actions in preparation for 40104 wouldn't precipitate UN withdrawal itself -- in other words, Drew argued, a "firebreak point" needed to be placed between UNPROFOR withdrawal and mobilization of U.S. forces.¹¹

Six days later, many of the points Drew raised were discussed at a Principals Committee (PC) meeting at the White House.¹² Officials began to confront the particulars of a post-UNPROFOR withdrawal strategy: what to do about the arms embargo, possible arming and training of Bosnian forces, and future airstrikes. They also discussed many of the unanswered questions of 40104 (such as how to handle refugee movement or Serbian aggression while NATO was in place) and explored possible alternatives to a NATO-led UNPROFOR withdrawal. Although the bureaucratic wheels

⁹ Don Kerrick interview, July 15, 1996.

¹⁰ The rejected options ranged from doing nothing, to "restabilizing" UNPROFOR with enhanced resources and more robust mandate, to withdrawing UNPROFOR completely.

¹¹ "Bosnia: Strategic Choices: NSC Discussion Paper," NSC memorandum, May 17, 1995.

¹² The Principals Committee was one of the Clinton Administration's primary forums for high-level decision-making in foreign policy. Chaired by National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, the committee met in the White House Situation Room and was typically comprised of Cabinet-level officials (or in their absence, their deputies) from State, OSD, JCS, CIA, USUN, Office of the Vice President, and NSC. Other agencies (such as Treasury or Commerce) would be included depending on the specific issues at hand. The PC would often work from conclusions that had already been reached by their deputies in the Deputies Committee (DC).

began turning on these issues, the Principals agreed that the magnitude of problems associated with 40104 and post-withdrawal planning made UNPROFOR's near-term survival crucial, and that the U.S. government should make a concerted effort to press the Europeans to keep UN forces in the game.¹³

Fortunately for the U.S., pressure was already building among its European Allies for revamping UNPROFOR. Newly-elected French President Jacques Chirac, known as the "bulldozer" for his penchant for frank discussion and fast action, was widely known to believe that the UN operation was weak and needed to get tougher.¹⁴ His new Foreign Minister Herve de Charette began laying the groundwork for UNPROFOR changes in a series of phone calls with Secretary of State Christopher in late May. While discussing a proposed meeting of the Contact Group, de Charette told the Secretary that "well-defined conclusions must be reached... regarding the need to modify UNPROFOR, whether it be in terms of mission, means, or field operations." The French, de Charette said, were anxious to make specific recommendations "to prevent the further humiliation of UNPROFOR forces."¹⁵ President Chirac followed up in a May 27 phone call with President Clinton, explaining to him that the way to solve the UNPROFOR dilemma was to make the force leaner and meaner -- "we need to change its [UNPROFOR's] mission, give it more weapons, consolidate the forces in less vulnerable positions, and let them defend themselves."¹⁶

Only minutes after he hung up with Chirac, the President called British Prime Minister John Major, who expressed his support for the French view in principle. But Clinton and Major each raised concerns about Chirac's plan: Clinton was worried that if UNPROFOR consolidated forces, the Bosnian Serbs may perceive a "green light" to take the eastern enclaves; Major wanted more on Chirac's specifics. "What does he mean by UNPROFOR being 'beefed up?'" Major asked Clinton. "Is this putting people in place to withdraw? [My agreement] depends on what Chirac means by beefing up."¹⁷ Despite

¹³ See memorandum from Richard Holbrooke (EUR) to Secretary Christopher, "Principals Committee Meeting, May 23," May 22, 1995; and "Summary of Conclusions of Principals Meeting on Bosnia," May 23, 1995, NSC memorandum. On arming and training the Bosnians, the principals agreed that if UNPROFOR withdrew, they would support limited action along with a multilateral lift of the arms embargo. The fact that this decision was made created some confusion among the State Department's seventh floor Principals. In a note to Secretary Christopher on June 13, Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott expressed his "puzzlement" from the NSC's Alexander Vershbow that a "lift, arm and train" proposal had been agreed to. Vershbow reported that no decision memorandum had been forwarded to the President. Christopher returned the note to Talbott with a hand-written "let's discuss." See DC/PC folder, Dayton History Project files. In an interview, Sandy Vershbow explained that at this May 23 PC, "The Principals did reach a preliminary decision that our policy would be lift, limited arm and train but no commitment to strike." Christopher recalls that no such decision had been firmly decided, and to call the U.S. position at the time a commitment "would be overstated."

¹⁴ Chirac had been inaugurated into office on May 17. See William Drozdiak, "Bulldozer' Heads for Halifax; French Leader Chirac Brings Reputation for Frank Talk to Summit," *Washington Post*, June 14, 1995.

¹⁵ See, respectively, Memorandum of Telephone Conversations between Secretary Christopher and French Foreign Minister de Charette, May 24, 1995 (Cable, State 129348); May 26, 1995 (Cable, State 130130); and May 27, 1995 (Cable, State 13144).

¹⁶ "Telcon with President Chirac of France," NSC memorandum, May 17, 1995.

¹⁷ "Telephone conversation between UK Prime Minister John Major and President Clinton, May 27, 1995," Cable, State 151264, June 22, 1995.

such concerns, the three leaders had agreed to prod their governments to discuss this particular issue in more detail.

The result of these deliberations was a British and French proposal to create what became known as the "Rapid Reaction Force" (RRF) -- a force of heavily armed mobile troops that could be called upon to defend UN peacekeepers from Serb attacks. It was not clear that UNPROFOR's new muscle would bolster the resolve of UN civilian leaders to stand up to the Serbs, yet it was hoped that it would at least deter the Serbs' from continuing their humiliating harassments of UNPROFOR. But the RRF was the UN's last stand. If these forces could not invigorate the UN mission, then it appeared that the Europeans would withdraw their troops before the next Balkan winter set in.¹⁸

In light of the test of wills between the Bosnian Serbs and the international community, Secretary Christopher requested that a Principals Committee meeting be convened to discuss the deteriorating situation and determine the U.S. position on next steps in advance of the May 30 Ministerial meeting of NATO's political body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC). At this rare Sunday, May 28 PC meeting, officials decided to suspend "quietly" the use of airstrikes against the Serbs for the foreseeable future, as UN peacekeepers were just too vulnerable to Serb retaliation.¹⁹ This was a position supported by Chirac as well as Major (as both expressed to the President the day before). However, they did not rule out future airstrikes. On the prospects for a potential emergency UNPROFOR withdrawal, the Principals reaffirmed their pledge to 40104. They agreed that the U.S. commitment in principle to provide troops for withdrawal should be extended "to apply to assistance and relocation" of UN forces from the eastern Bosnian "enclaves" of Srebrenica, Zepa, and Gorazde. In a decision memo for the President on this issue, NSC Advisor Anthony Lake explained that "we don't want to see UN withdrawal from the Eastern enclaves, but if it comes to that, U.S. credibility among NATO Allies would be seriously damaged" if the U.S. refused to assist allied forces evacuate from an untenable position and relocate elsewhere in Bosnia. "This would support our main goal," Lake wrote, "of maintaining UNPROFOR presence and making that presence more robust."²⁰

At the May 30 NAC meeting in Noordwijk, The Netherlands, Secretary Christopher reaffirmed U.S. support for UNPROFOR, pledging to work to enhance its capability and strength. Formal agreement was also reached on exploring the Rapid Reaction Force proposal. In a statement released after a separate meeting between the U.S. and its

¹⁸ See Memo from Toby Gati (INR) to Strobe Talbott, "UK/French Plans for the Rapid Reaction Force," June 21, 1995.

¹⁹ One official who had recommended against such a decision was the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Richard Holbrooke. Two hours before that Sunday PC meeting, Holbrooke spoke to Christopher by phone from Budapest (where he was about to be married), recommending that NATO give the Bosnian Serbs an ultimatum to release all UN hostages. If the Bosnian Serbs failed to comply, he argued, then NATO air strikes should commence. Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996.

²⁰ This decision memo, dated May 28, was presented to the President as a result of the PC meeting that day. Because these decisions were considered sensitive by NSC staff, the standard "Summary of Conclusions" from the PC was not distributed inter-agency; Vershbow interviews, July 23, 1996 and September 26, 1996. Also see Memorandum from John Kornblum (EUR) to Secretary Christopher, "Principals Committee Meeting on Bosnia, May 28, 1995."

partners in the five-nation "Contact Group,"²¹ these nations promised to "examine promptly" the British-French plan in an effort to take steps to assure UNPROFOR's freedom of movement and safety.²²

On the decision to support UNPROFOR withdrawal, the President agreed, announcing so publicly in a May 31 speech before the graduating cadets at the Air Force Academy. "We have obligations with our NATO Allies," the President said, "and I do not believe we can leave them in the lurch." President Clinton added, however, that any introduction of U.S. ground troops to support UN withdrawal would be temporary and that he would seek Congressional approval. That same day, UN Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali turned up the heat on the UN mission in Bosnia, calling it a "mission impossible" and urging the Security Council to either scale down peacekeeping operations or deploy reinforcements. The combination of these two statements triggered a firestorm of criticism about the possible introduction of American troops into the region, and Clinton soon stepped his pledge back, explaining that U.S. troops would only be involved in an emergency extraction operation if UN troops were trapped under siege.²³

While public scrutiny of UNPROFOR brewed, the diplomatic track appeared stalled as well. Robert Frasure, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs and the President's envoy to the Contact Group, had met with Serbian President Milosevic numerous times over the past three months, trying to negotiate a settlement package worked out earlier by the Contact Group.²⁴ Frasure

²¹ In 1994, a five-nation body composed of a representative each from the US, UK, France, Germany and Russia, was formed to help negotiate a settlement in Bosnia. For background, see Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (Penguin Books, 1996), pp335-36.

²² See, respectively, "Contact Group Ministers Urge Strengthening of UNPROFOR," May 29, 1995; and Secretary Christopher's "Intervention at the NAC Ministerial Meeting, Noordwijk, The Netherlands," May 30, 1995. US Department of State *Dispatch*, June 5, 1995, pp2-8.

²³ See R.W. Apple, Jr., "Conflict in the Balkans: The Overview; Clinton Talks of Ground Role in Bosnia," *New York Times*, June 1, 1995; Todd Purdum, "US Policy; Clinton, Facing Objections, Refines Narrow Conditions for Using Troops in Bosnia," *New York Times*, June 4, 1995. Some on the NSC staff felt that this speech had been blown out of proportion, that the decision was only a subtle change in policy. See Vershbow interview, September 26, 1996.

²⁴ Frasure's negotiations pre-date the scope of this analysis but constitute the critical context for US decision-making during the summer and fall of 1995. Frasure's cables offer vivid and fascinating details of negotiating with Milosevic, as well as deliberations among the Contact Group that spring. See: "Contact Group -- Milosevic's Proposal," Cable, Belgrade 1050, March 4, 1995; "Contact Group Proposal on Recognition/Sanctions Suspension," Cable, State 86669, April 8, 1995; "Milosevic on Bosnia Recognition: No," Cable, Belgrade 1773, April 12, 1995; "Milosevic's Response to Contact Group Paper on Recognition," Cable, Belgrade 1868; "Official-Informal [message to Milosevic from Frasure]," Cable, State 10661, May 2, 1995; "May 3 Contact Group Meeting," Cable, London 6422, May 3, 1995; "Paris Contact Group Meeting: Deadlock," Cable, Paris 10979, May 5, 1995; "Official-Informal [message to Holbrooke from Frasure]," Draft Cable, Belgrade, May 8, 1995; "Talks with Milosevic: First Round," Cable, Belgrade 2352, May 16, 1995; "The Milosevic Discussions: An Analysis," Cable, Belgrade 2419, May 19, 1995; "Instructions for your Meeting with Milosevic," Cable, State 123714, May 20, 1995; "Paris Wants the US to Cut a Deal -- Any Deal -- With Milosevic," Cable, State 124132, May 20, 1995; "Official-Informal [message to Frasure from Jack Zetkovic]," Cable, State 124139, May 21, 1995; "Instructions for Fourth Round of Negotiations with Milosevic," Cable, State 124155, May 21, 1995; "Saturday Night with Milosevic -- 'We Are Right on the Edge of the Blade,'" Cable, Belgrade 2436, May 21, 1995; "A Sunday Lunch With Milosevic," Cable, Belgrade 2437, May 21, 1995; "Milosevic Discussions -- No Deal," Cable, Belgrade 2468, May 22, 1995; "Official-Informal [message to Frasure from Chris Hill]," Cable, State 124160, May 22, 1995; "Milosevic Expects Release of UN Hostages Today," Cable, Belgrade 2650, June

offered Milosevic partial relief from the UN sanctions crippling the economy of Serbia-Montenegro.²⁵ In return, the Serb leader would recognize the Bosnian state and bring pressure on his rebel Serb clients to begin serious peace negotiations. But Frasure's negotiations had stalled over the mechanism for reimposing the sanctions should Milosevic not live up to his end of the deal.

Moreover, the Serb leader seemed emboldened by UNPROFOR's recent crisis. Frasure cabled Washington that "Milosevic's position in this complicated game has been immensely strengthened, and he is well aware of that fact." Concerning future negotiations, Frasure explained, "we face a stark choice: either we back off from these talks -- and run the risk that either the Russians/British/French fill the vacuum, or we agree to pay the Balkan political hit man the price he now demands for his promise to resolve our Bosnia problem."²⁶ Secretary Christopher solicited the views of his Contact Group counterparts on Frasure's next steps, explaining that "Milosevic might interpret Frasure's continued presence in Belgrade as a sign of our urgent need to conclude the talks on term increasingly acceptable to Serbia." Thus, the Secretary surmised, Milosevic position may only harden.²⁷ Given such unrelenting intransigence, the Principals Committee decided to recall Frasure on June 6. Although technically Frasure's talks were characterized as "at a standstill," in fact, the U.S. let the Europeans, led by their new negotiator Carl Bildt, assume primary responsibility for the negotiations.²⁸

As Frasure struggled with Milosevic, former President Jimmy Carter tried to jumpstart the flagging diplomatic process. As he had on other occasions during the Clinton Administration -- most notably with the cease-fire that had held from January to May 1995 -- Carter offered the President his thoughts and services to broker a peace in Bosnia.²⁹ In a phone call and subsequent letter to Clinton, the former President argued that the Contact Group convene talks among all sides (Bosnian Serbs included) with no preconditions (meaning, using the Contact Group peace plan as a basis for negotiations but not to accept it in advance). The proposal challenged twin taboos of American

2, 1995; "F-16 Shootdown: Meeting with Milosevic," Cable, Belgrade 2667, June 2, 1995; "Milosevic Negotiations -- Demands for More Concessions," Draft Cable, Belgrade, June 3, 1995; "Conversation with David Owen -- F-16 Pilot, Hostages, and the Bosnia Recognition Package," Cable, Belgrade 2711, June 5, 1995; and "Farewell Session With Milosevic," Cable, Belgrade 2742, June 7, 1995. For the best public account, see Honig and Both, pp160-174.

²⁵ The United Nations Security Council had voted to place economic sanctions of Serbia-Montenegro on May 30, 1992. The sanctions called on all member states to sever trade links, freeze foreign assets, impose an oil embargo, ban sporting and cultural exchanges, and suspend air travel.

²⁶ "Milosevic and the Good Serb/Bad Serb Game," Cable, Belgrade 2699, June 5, 1995. On Milosevic's hardening negotiating stance, Frasure had cabled Washington on June 1 that "on balance, Milosevic feels that the Bosnian airstrike debacle has considerably strengthened his position in these negotiations, e.g., he has a stack of western press clips saying he is the key to peace in the region. In my view, Milosevic sees the Bosnian Serbs digging themselves even deeper into a pariah hole with their seizure of the UN hostages. And the west is even more desperate for a deal to avoid UNPROFOR withdrawal. Therefore, if the Balkan spider just sits and waits, more good things will be brought to him, i.e., a non-operational [sanctions] reimposition formula." See "Milosevic Talks -- No Movement on Reimposition, Saying the Right Things on Hostages," Cable, Belgrade 2621, June 1, 1995.

²⁷ "Letter from the Secretary Re Contact Group," Cable, State 135194, June 4, 1995.

²⁸ See "Summary of Conclusions of Principals Meeting on Bosnia," NSC memorandum, June 6, 1995.

²⁹ In December 1994, Carter's efforts had been instrumental in getting the parties to agree to a temporary cease-fire that began on January 1, 1995. See John Pomfret, "Bosnians Set 4-Month Cease-fire; Accord Skirts Issue of New Peace Talks," *Washington Post*, January 1, 1995.

Balkan policy: that the U.S. not negotiate with the Bosnian Serbs, and that the Contact Group 51-49 territorial division remain unchanged.³⁰

The Clinton Administration viewed Carter's proposal seriously, but skeptically. Dealing with the former President itself had become an exercise in diplomacy, especially in light of well-publicized strains over Haiti the previous fall. Administration officials, many of whom had also served under President Carter (Christopher, Lake, and Richard Holbrooke, for example), were careful to consult with Carter respectfully but were likewise concerned that his proposal may undermine their policy.³¹ Some frankly felt that Carter's interventions bordered on meddling. In a return letter dated June 12, President Clinton thanked Carter for his service and ideas but explained that his proposal was too soft on the Bosnian Serbs. "I am sure you must agree that, under the circumstances, we should not be initiating any course of action that could be seen as a reward for such [Bosnian Serb] behavior and intransigence," the President wrote. "Unfortunately, to now abandon our insistence that the Bosnian Serbs join with the other parties in accepting the Contact Group plan as a starting point for negotiations... would be seen in Pale [the Bosnian Serb headquarters outside Sarajevo], as well as in Sarajevo and by the international community, as precisely such an award."³² Bob Frasure talked with Carter by phone the next morning, briefing him on the talks with Milosevic and trying "to feed him as much complexity as possible" to convince the former President to disengage (Carter had told Frasure that in a scheduled appearance on Capitol Hill, he would say things that would prove "unpopular" in the Clinton Administration). During the half-hour conversation, the former President didn't offer any panaceas -- "he has no more idea what to do than we have," Frasure reported.³³

The next day, June 14, French President Chirac arrived at the White House for his first meeting with President Clinton. By this point, Clinton had become increasingly discouraged by Bosnia. The issue was spilling over into the domestic political arena; the hostage crisis and recent downing of U.S. F-16 pilot Scott O'Grady had focused public attention on the President's much-maligned Bosnia policy, and criticism from Republican members of Congress had intensified -- including from Senate Majority Leader and front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, Robert Dole.³⁴ Hill opposition to partial U.S. funding of the RRF was holding up Clinton's ability to support it formally with a UN Security Council vote (under the plan, the U.S. would have to fund thirty-percent of the force, and Congressional authorization would be required for such an expenditure). At a morning pre-brief with his top advisors for the day's meeting with Chirac, the President insisted that "we need to get the policy straight." Without action soon, Clinton argued, "we're just going to be kicking the can down the road again."

³⁰ Letter from former President Jimmy Carter to President Bill Clinton, June 2, 1995 (COS files).

³¹ Holbrooke phone interview with author (notes), August 1996.

³² Letter from President Bill Clinton to former President Carter, June 12, 1995 (COS files).

³³ Frasure reported on this conversation in a memorandum to Secretary Christopher, "Phone Conversation with Carter," June 13, 1995.

³⁴ O'Grady, a US Air Force pilot, had been shot down by a Bosnian Serb missile over Banja Luka on June 2. This action gained widespread international attention, as O'Grady's whereabouts were unknown for six days. O'Grady was located and rescued by US Marine helicopters on June 8. See Francis X. Clines, "The Rescue; Downed US Pilot Rescued in Bosnia During Daring Raid," *New York Times*, June 9, 1995.

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With the situation in Bosnia festering, the West was directionless: "we've got no clear mission, no one's in control of events."³⁵

The Clinton-Chirac discussion was entirely dominated by Bosnia. Chirac, explaining that he had secured the support of Russian President Yeltsin, pushed for a U.S. commitment on the RRF. Clinton was concerned that if they pushed a UN vote too soon, it would exacerbate tensions with Congress, which he described to the French President as "the most isolationist Congress since the 1930s." Snapping his fingers, President Clinton told Chirac "I would vote like this if I didn't have to get the money [from Congress]. If we voted tomorrow, it could undermine our ability to keep the word of the United States on funding of the RRF, and it could cause more trouble. That is the only issue."

Chirac told the President that he wanted to take the risk and push a UN Security Council vote soon. "There are two problems, political and financial," Chirac said. "Politically, everyone including the Russians is ready to vote for the resolution. The situation in Bosnia being what it is, I think we should approve the resolution tomorrow -- that is, before the G-7 summit [scheduled to begin the next day in Halifax, Nova Scotia]." Chirac warned that if the pace was slowed at the UN, leaders like Yeltsin and Milosevic would get more "oxygen" to oppose the RRF. Chirac and Clinton agreed to pursue negotiations with Congressional leaders, particularly Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Dole, to "tell them that their behavior is helping the Serbs and not the Bosnians."³⁶ The two leaders and their aides proceeded to work the phones to set up consultations on Capitol Hill, delaying talks with an EU delegation, which was anxiously waiting in the next room.³⁷

President Clinton had committed U.S. troops to the UN withdrawal operation months before, but Christopher and his Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, Richard Holbrooke, were concerned that the President had not yet confronted the reality that there were less options than he thought. They planned to alert the President to the fact that based on previous NAC decisions, U.S. troop deployment under 40104 would be *automatic*. In their view, given previous decisions, there was not much flexibility (in terms of deployment timetable, troop composition, or area of operations) in what the U.S. could do.

Later that night, after a private White House dinner with Chirac, they tried to explain to the President just how constrained the United States really was. Meeting with some of his foreign policy advisors out on the White House's North Portico, Clinton's thoughts returned to how they might regain control of their Bosnia policy. "Mr. President, I'm afraid that we may not have as much flexibility and options left," said

³⁵ Bob Woodward, *The Choice*, (Simon and Schuster, 1996), p255. See also memorandum from Secretary Christopher to President Clinton, "Your meeting with French President Chirac," June 9, 1995.

³⁶ See "Memorandum of Conversation of the President's Meeting with President Jacques Chirac of France, June 14, 1995" NSC memorandum, June 21, 1995; Vershbow interview.

³⁷ On Congressional funding, the result of these talks was a compromise agreement with Congress to delay the issue, allowing the Administration to promise political but not economic support. This was conveyed to the President in a June 15 letter from Robert Dole and Newt Gingrich. Despite this compromise, the legislative-executive battle over RRF was far from over. In a June 29 letter, Dole and Gingrich expressed anger with the President that he had gone ahead to use "UN assessments funding" to fund the RRF partially. In a July 1 response letter, President Clinton argued that the US should support its Allies and UNPROFOR, and that "I strongly believe it is in the US interests to make a voluntary contribution [to the RRF]."

Holbrooke. As the Assistant Secretary described that the U.S. commitment to participate in UN withdrawal under plan 40104, a surprised Clinton responded, "I'll decide that when the time comes." Secretary Christopher told the President the plan had already been approved by the NAC, and under NATO procedures this contained a "large degree of automaticity." Given the consequences of renegeing on such a pledge, the Secretary said, no other "practical options existed." The U.S. had committed itself to the withdrawal mission, and to renege on this pledge now would further undermine the Administration's credibility in Europe.³⁸

The next day, the G-7 leaders met in Halifax for their annual summit. Though Bosnia found its way onto the agenda of the economic meeting, the summit itself broke little substantive ground. Observers have described the talks as little more than a "hand-wringing session."³⁹ The members of the P-8 (the G-7 plus Russia) called for a moratorium on fighting in the region, recommended a UNSC resolution authorizing the RRF, and requested the parties' support for the Contact Group plan. President Clinton, for his part, publicly stated that he remained committed to lifting the arms embargo should the UN withdraw. While united in sentiment, the P-8 was far from consensus over how to translate these hopes into reality.⁴⁰

More important, perhaps, was the symbolic outcome of Halifax. Participating in his first G-7 summit, French President Chirac seemed to outshine his counterparts, particularly on his concern about Bosnia. To some in the press, Chirac's performance personified the contrast between fresh French activism and continuing American timidity. During a live joint press conference, for example, Chirac seized the center of attention by reading aloud for his counterparts portions of a French intelligence document about the current situation in Bosnia. As they strained to look over Chirac's shoulder, President Clinton and the other G-7 leaders were perceived as simply following the French "bulldozer." Some U.S. officials mused (off the record) that Chirac's "grand-standing" may have helped to dramatize the converging continental consensus that enough was enough, the Bosnian crisis needed a solution. The message seemed clear: if the U.S. wasn't willing to lead on Bosnia, others nations like France would.⁴¹

The Elements of a New Strategy

The realization that American troops might soon be in Bosnia forced the Administration to search for new options. At a June 21 "Foreign Policy Team" meeting in the Oval Office to discuss funding for the RRF, officials launched into an impromptu discussion over long-term strategy.⁴² The President was growing increasingly frustrated

³⁸ Account from Woodward, pp256-257; Vershbow interview, September 26, 1996; Holbrooke interview with author (notes), October 17, 1996; and Christopher interview, October 22, 1996.

³⁹ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996.

⁴⁰ See David Sanger, "Seeking Embrace, Yeltsin is Rebuffed at Talks," *New York Times*, June 18, 1995. On June 16, the UN Security Council approved the RRF, although it left open the question of how to pay for the force. See Barbara Crossette, "Security Council Approves Additional Troops for Bosnia," *New York Times*, June 16, 1995.

⁴¹ See Anne Swardson, "Chirac, New to G-7 Summitry, Proves Top Attention-Getter," *Washington Post*, June 18, 1995; for impact on US policy-making, see Thomas Lippman and Ann Devroy, "Clinton's Policy Evolution; June Decision Led To Diplomatic Gambles," *Washington Post*, September 11, 1995.

⁴² The "Foreign Policy Team" meeting was the highest-level of decision-making among the Principals -- Lake, Christopher, Perry, Shalikhvili, Albright and Deutsch -- and President Clinton and Vice President

with the UN, claiming that it "is paralyzing our actions and weakening the arguments for our current policies." Lake explained that the Administration needed to engage in "blue-sky" thinking on its Bosnia policy. What does the U.S. do if UNPROFOR does become untenable, Lake asked? Should the U.S. prepare to push for a lift of the arms embargo, and if so, how hard? Should the West relax its demands that any talks with the Pale Serbs be conditional on their acceptance of the 1994 Contact Group map as the basis for negotiations (counter to what the President had written Carter a week before)? Should the U.S. even be working to forestall the withdrawal of UNPROFOR?⁴³

Lake's questions struck a chord with the UN Ambassador, Madeleine Albright. From her perspective in New York, Albright saw how Bosnia influenced U.S. diplomatic leverage around the world. "It didn't matter what the subject was we were talking about in New York," she recalled, "the U.S. position on Bosnia affected it." To Albright, the Administration's unwillingness to take the lead on Bosnia was crippling its foreign policy more generally. "When U.S. leadership is being questioned in one area, it affects our leadership in others... it was important for the President to understand how this subject affected so many other subjects we were dealing with." Sensing that events on the ground in Bosnia -- namely, the possible withdrawal of UNPROFOR -- would force the Administration to take some action, the UN Ambassador had begun "agitating" among her senior colleagues about the need for a thorough policy review.⁴⁴

At this June 21 meeting, Albright presented a proposal, "Elements of a New Strategy," recommending the Administration begin planning for a post-UNPROFOR environment in Bosnia. "Bosnia is destroying our foreign policy domestically and internationally, the way Haiti was last summer," she wrote. The present strategy -- then well known by the sobriquet "muddle through" -- "makes the President appear weak." Albright argued that her proposal "recognizes reality," calling on the President to get ahead of the game and take steps to lead the alliance, rather than being reluctantly "sucked [into] much of the same policy decisions."⁴⁵

Albright's position was that whether the U.S. liked it or not, UNPROFOR would leave Bosnia by the end of the year. The Europeans had simply had enough. And, because of the Administration's commitment to Op-plan 40104, the situation was already an American problem. Since the U.S. was going to be involved militarily, Albright argued that the U.S. create a policy to do so "on our schedule rather than somebody else's."⁴⁶

Accordingly, Albright advised a bold move: The Americans should press their Allies to concede that UNPROFOR would withdraw, thus sparking its immediate departure. The international community would lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian Government, and NATO would follow up with airstrikes to protect Muslim-held territory. President Clinton had advocated "lift-and-strike" during his 1992 presidential campaign, but upon taking office, the Europeans had effectively vetoed the policy, fearing for the

Gore. Depending on the issue at hand, other officials would be included on an *ad hoc* basis. The meeting was usually held in the Oval Office or Cabinet Room.

⁴³ Vershbow interviews, July 23, 1996 and September 26, 1996.

⁴⁴ Albright interview, October 28, 1996.

⁴⁵ See "Elements of a New Strategy," fax to Albright from Jamie Rubin, June 21, 1995. Rubin worked closely with the Ambassador in formulating this proposal. All quotes below are from this memorandum unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁶ Albright interview.

safety of their troops on the ground. If UNPROFOR withdrew, Albright believed the Europeans could no longer block the Administration's policy. Then, the U.S. would demand (through a higher-level emissary than Frasure) that Milosevic accept the sanctions relief for recognition proposal or else face the consequences of a Bosnia sans UNPROFOR: "Either Milosevic agrees to existing sanctions relief for recognition package or he will face a new dilemma this coming winter; namely, no UNPROFOR, a more powerful army threatening the Bosnian Serbs and a decision by him whether to intervene on behalf of Pale." Albright recognized that this approach had some potential downsides: a tougher Bosnian negotiating stance, and U.S. troops in Bosnia during an election year. The President seemed intrigued by her presentation, although he admitted that he didn't agree with everything in the memorandum. Not elaborating any further, he said that "liked the thrust of it and... that it was the right direction to go."⁴⁷

Though Albright's memorandum was not widely discussed at the June 21 meeting, it began a series of quiet consultations between her and Lake that would prompt the NSC to begin developing its own diplomatic initiative.⁴⁸ On Saturday morning, June 24, Anthony Lake, his deputy Samuel "Sandy" Berger, Alexander Vershbow, Nelson Drew, and Lake aide Peter Bass sat down in Lake's West Wing office for a brainstorming session. All had Albright's ideas on their minds. "We cannot go on like this," the National Security Advisor said. "We need to think about carrots and sticks and gaining leverage; we need to get this [Bosnia] thing off the table." Rather than focus on dealing with the immediate problems at hand, Lake suggested that his staff consider what kind of Bosnia they hoped to find at the end of the peace process, and to work back from there. The Administration had to "start thinking about the unthinkable" -- UNPROFOR withdrawal. If that occurred, what would the next steps be? They needed to look at the conflict comprehensively, figuring out not only how to get things started, but get them to the finish line. By formulating a Balkan "endgame," Lake hoped they would be able to figure out how to get there. Lake charged Vershbow, Senior Director of the NSC's European Directorate, with drafting a strategy that would increase the American military leverage and flexibility in the diplomatic process.⁴⁹

At a morning briefing several days later, Lake briefed President Clinton on this discussion.⁵⁰ He wanted to gauge the President's willingness to take a chance on a new initiative. Failure might damage the Administration even further, and success still meant sending 20,000 American soldiers into Bosnia during an election year. The status quo was untenable, replied the President. He was willing to take the risk of new ideas, because they were not getting anywhere with the old mindset. After this discussion, Lake continued to brief the President periodically on the drafting status of what the NSC began to call the "endgame" paper. These briefings served a certain bureaucratic purpose -- they helped assure that the President remain informed on current NSC thinking, allowing Lake to "prime" the President against the views of other agencies that might run counter to an emerging NSC strategy.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996; Peter Bass interview, September 10, 1996.

⁴⁹ Vershbow interviews, July 23, 1996, and September 26, 1996; Vershbow interview with Brian Lapping Associates, "Death of Yugoslavia," Roll C7; Bass interview; Woodward, p257-58.

⁵⁰ Episode described in Woodward, p258.

⁵¹ Bass interview.

While the NSC began work on its policy review, senior State Department officials were also exploring ways to break the Balkan impasse. Throughout the spring, top Department and Administration officials had met informally for their own brainstorming sessions to discuss the stalled diplomatic program. Several times over the past few months, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott had invited to his house a small group, including Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff, Deputy National Security Advisor Berger, Director of Policy Planning James Steinberg, and occasionally CIA Director John Deutch. On another occasion the same group had met at Tarnoff's house. The talks discussed the overall direction of U.S. policy and possible new approaches. Like Lake and Albright, the sense among these officials was that the Administration's policy on Bosnia needed to change course. "In a variety of ways," Peter Tarnoff recalled, "each of us came to the conclusion that there had to be a higher level of U.S. intervention and therefore a higher level of risk -- political and human -- for the Administration." From these meetings Steinberg had drafted a summary proposal calling for an international conference that would bring the Bosnian, Serb, and Croatian governments to recognize each other and agree to a common solution for the region.⁵²

Meanwhile, though, officials like Frasure doubted that the Administration was willing to risk what would be necessary for peace. His negotiations with Milosevic had led him to believe that the Serbian President's asking price was far higher than the U.S. was willing to pay. On June 23, he circulated his thoughts to senior State Department officials, suggesting grimly that the most prudent course for the Administration was to "write off the Bosnia policy."⁵³ Frasure's memorandum pulled no punches, arguing that "over the last three years, we have handled this extraordinarily difficult issue ineptly. Within the Administration there have been competing policies on Bosnia... we have not imposed upon ourselves discipline, choice or prioritizing." Echoing Albright, Frasure argued that as the events on the ground that summer flowed "increasingly out of our control," the U.S. "unfortunately no longer can muddle through." The UN's top political leadership, French and British were signaling that unless things got better fast, they wanted UNPROFOR out -- once they did so, the 40104 "doomsday machine" would start. With events spinning out of control, Frasure argued, the Administration had no good options. The only choice to make, in Frasure's memorable phrase, was about "which waterfall" it wanted to go over.⁵⁴

Observing that "a lingering death" of Bosnia was not in the U.S. best interests, Frasure argued that the Administration's main priority should be the "avoidance of a substantial U.S. military presence in Bosnia, in particular in the extraction of UNPROFOR, which could lead to casualties and would highlight the reality that we're at the end of a failed adventure." Frasure suggested a focus on extracting UNPROFOR as quickly and painlessly as possible⁵⁵; forestalling any more American diplomatic missions

⁵² Peter Tarnoff interview, October 23, 1996; Jim Steinberg interview, August 20, 1996. See memorandum for Secretary Christopher from Steinberg, untitled, May 1995, S/P files.

⁵³ See memorandum faxed to Strobe Talbott, "Bosnia," June 23, 1995. All quotes below are from this memorandum unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁴ Chris Hill phone interview with author (notes), December 19, 1996. See also Rosegrant, p13.

⁵⁵ Frasure had always felt that the RRF was meaningless and UNPROFOR was a "dead duck" and would be gone by fall. In this memorandum, he asserted that with UNPROFOR deterioration irreversible, "the Rapid Reaction Force should be seen in that light. We will be scrambling to pay for a force that cannot,

(while allowing the European negotiator Carl Bildt to push the diplomacy as far as it would take him -- which, in the view of most U.S. officials, was probably nowhere); hanging tough on no lift of the arms embargo; pursuing a modest "covert" program to arm the Bosnians; and emphasizing containment of the conflict.

Frasure conceded that the President could gain little by this approach, but it would minimize the political and foreign policy disaster that might follow if the Administration fell over another part of the waterfall -- and was sucked into the Balkan whirlpool via 40104. "There will be no credit for any of us in this one," Frasure gloomily concluded. "[The policy] is beyond redemption now and should be brought to an end before the 1996 presidential campaign commences. Otherwise we will be handing a sharp sword to this Administration's political opponents next year. And we can expect they will use it."

As Frasure circulated his memorandum, Steinberg worked on his own thoughts for a new diplomatic strategy. He believed that there was still hope to salvage U.S. policy. Drawing on his earlier call for an international conference, Steinberg tried to develop a plan on how to get there. Steinberg's proposal, circulated to Holbrooke, Frasure, Tarnoff, and Christopher's Chief of Staff Tom Donilon, hoped to combine negotiations based on the Contact Group proposal with the sanctions relief-mutual recognition package Frasure had discussed with Milosevic. Such an approach would, Steinberg argued, bring together what had been two separately pursued tracks of previous U.S. initiatives in order to include both Pale and Croatia in the package. The core of the plan was a Presidential summit where the three Balkan Presidents would recognize each other and agree on a set of principles to govern negotiations among the Pale and Sarajevo leaders. In return for Milosevic recognizing his neighbors and bringing the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table, the Serbian President would receive some sanctions relief. By combining intra-Bosnian negotiations with a regional settlement, Steinberg hoped to create broader incentives for the parties to reach agreement. Although Steinberg was not sure his plan would work, his memorandum reflected the emerging consensus within the Administration that something new must be done to catalyze the diplomatic process.⁵⁶

The Frasure and Steinberg proposals came together after the Department's top officials met in the office of the Secretary of State on June 30. This was the first official meeting of the group that had met at Talbot's house several weeks before. The discussion focused on amendments to Steinberg's initiative, and Frasure offered his analysis of the situation as well.⁵⁷ The next day, Frasure drafted a new memorandum to the Secretary proposing an amended version of Steinberg's paper.⁵⁸ From a more optimistic perspective, Frasure explained that "we probably have one more roll of the diplomatic dice." He sought to simplify the Steinberg package by dropping Croatia from the mutual recognition agreement and installing Milosevic as the negotiator for Pale. Frasure's amendments avoided the complications of bringing Milosevic to concede Eastern Slavonia (which would be the prerequisite for his recognizing Croatia) and of convincing the Bosnian Government to negotiate with the madmen of Pale. Frasure suggested that in return for Milosevic's assistance, the Contact Group should be more

indeed will not, be allowed to attempt to reverse the deterioration in the UN role... [The RRF] is chapter one on UNPROFOR withdrawal."

⁵⁶ "A Diplomatic Initiative for ex-Yugo," no date.

⁵⁷ Steinberg interview.

⁵⁸ See memorandum from Frasure to Christopher, "Bosnia -- Choosing Which Waterfall We Will Go Over," July 1, 1995.

flexible on sanctions relief, willing to lift the sanctions if necessary, rather than simply suspend them.⁵⁹ As a final note, Frasure reiterated his strong view that the Administration end its *ad hoc* approach toward Balkan policy -- "If we decide that the crisis has now come and at all cost we must avoid UNPROFOR departure/40104 and we need a diplomatic solution, then we must make that choice, impose discipline and stay the course."⁶⁰

This Steinberg-Frasure hybrid proposal was raised by Secretary Christopher in a July 6 "Night Note" to the President. In one sense, this "Night Note" was the documentary culmination of the State Department's policy reformulation effort over the past few weeks.⁶¹ Christopher wrote that after Bildt's run with Milosevic failed (as Frasure predicted it would), the Europeans would likely ask the U.S. to get involved. Then, the Administration could respond with this new diplomatic initiative, increasing the pressure on the Bosnian Serbs and providing "a plausible basis for urging that UNPROFOR should stay the course."⁶²

Frasure's earlier sentiment that the Administration's main priority should be avoiding a significant military ground presence in Bosnia reflected the views of many on the State Department's Seventh floor. From the perspective of officials outside State, particularly at the NSC, the Secretary and his top advisors were too cautious to support U.S. troops in Bosnia -- whether to help UNPROFOR withdraw or implement a peace agreement.⁶³ As Frasure's references to the 1996 elections suggest, the Secretary was not convinced that the American people would support such a move. In the July 6 "Night Note", the Secretary revealed that his main concern with the "failure scenario" lay in limiting U.S. costs in the event of an UNPROFOR withdrawal mission.

"I think you need a wider variety of options than now provided by NATO Operation Plan 40104, with its heavy reliance on large numbers of U.S. ground troops," the Secretary wrote. "With all respect for the NATO planners, the 'all or nothing' character of 40104 does not seem to me to take into account the wide variety of circumstances in which withdrawal may actually take place -- or the strength of public and congressional opinion against the commitment of U.S. ground troops." Christopher felt that the military's 40104 planning was not "sufficiently nuanced; that it was an all-or-nothing approach." He was troubled by the fact that 40104 "assumed that the NATO troops would have to fight their way in and fight their way out... [it] assumed the need basically to occupy the country in order to assure [UNPROFOR] withdrawal." Whereas the Secretary of State understood that the U.S. was committed to 40104, he felt that it "was the worst of all possible choices," as the U.S. "would have to put its troops on the

⁵⁹ In his June 23 memorandum, Frasure had suggested that the US remain "alert for a chance to cut a deal with Milosevic -- some will see it as a craven deal. That will be a less awful waterfall than 40104. But we will need to make a conscious decision to do this and stop our posturing vis-a-vis Milosevic."

⁶⁰ In a cover-note on Frasure's memorandum, Peter Tamoff wrote to the Secretary that "we now need a more systematic review of the components of an Izetbegovic-Milosevic deal for mutual recognition, as well as of the nature of the Bosnian settlement. We should make every effort to launch the strategy with the UK, France and Germany by the end of the coming week."

⁶¹ "Night Notes" were frequently used by Secretary Christopher as a way to communicate directly and often informally to the President, typically to raise a specific topic or two. These were sometimes used in the form of trip reports to the President from the Secretary.

⁶² Memorandum for the President from Secretary Christopher, "Night Note," July 6, 1995. Vershbow explains that the proposal did not go very far, and was never pursued formally after this.

⁶³ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996; Bass interview.

ground to crown a failure and not to achieve a success.”⁶⁴ President Clinton apparently saw some merit in Christopher’s suggestion for more options, as he scribbled “agree” in the margins and passed the memorandum to his National Security Advisor to take action.⁶⁵

The Fall of Srebrenica

While Washington worked to reformulate its diplomacy, Bosnia seemed to slip further away. On July 6, the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) began its assault on the eastern Bosnian UN safe area of Srebrenica. The tiny enclave, located just miles away from the Serbian border, was home to 40,000 Bosnian Muslims, many of them refugees who had fled there when the Serbs expelled them from their homes in eastern Bosnia. In April 1993, the United Nations had declared the town and its surroundings a “safe area,” which implied that a tiny garrison of Dutch peacekeepers would help protect the refugees from Serb attack. But as the Bosnian Serbs began to close in on the enclave, it soon became clear there was little the Dutch could do by themselves. The Western Allies hoped that the Serb assault would only shrink the enclave, not overrun it entirely, but Serb artillery and armor continued to press on the few remaining defenders of the enclave. The UN soldiers quickly abandoned their observation posts and fled to their base at nearby Potocari. At the last moment, the UN called in NATO close air support, but by this point there was little that could be done. While NATO planes destroyed two Serb tanks, on July 11 the Serb forces overtook the town, driving out tens of thousands of refugees and taking many more captive – and, as it later came to light, murdering thousands of Muslim men.⁶⁶

This crisis seemed to hammer the near-final nail in the coffin for the West’s Bosnia policy, highlighting even more for U.S. decision-makers the need to act. Humiliated once again, the UN began to talk openly of a pullout.⁶⁷ The fallout from the debacle -- a refugee crisis and possible UN withdrawal -- would almost certainly weaken the already feeble Muslim-Croat Federation in Bosnia.⁶⁸ The U.S. sent their Charge in Belgrade, Rudolph Perina, to see Milosevic. The Serb leader was unrepentant, responding to Perina’s demarche with a “why blame me?” attitude, implying that he had no influence

⁶⁴ See July 6 Night Note; and Christopher interview, October 22, 1996.

⁶⁵ The State Department may have done some “priming” of its own with this memorandum. In a note to the Secretary offering editorial changes on the night note, Deputy Secretary Talbott suggested that on 40104, they emphasize the danger -- which Talbott wrote was “acutely on the President’s mind” -- that the plan may result in a large number of casualties and a possible quagmire. See note to the Secretary from Talbott, no date, cover of draft night note. Despite the President’s interest, there is no evidence that the Pentagon began to explore other planning options; however, Christopher later noted that the “night notes may have been a spur to energize [the President] to try to find a different strategy.” See Christopher interview, October 22, 1996.

⁶⁶ For background, see Honig and Both, pp1-48; Silber and Little, pp345-361.

⁶⁷ See Samantha Power, “Bosnian Serbs Seize ‘Safe Area’; Fall of Srebrenica Enclave Challenges UN, Prompts Warnings of Pullout,” *Washington Post*, July 12, 1995.

⁶⁸ The Muslim-Croat Federation was the result of a cease-fire between Bosnian Croat and Muslim forces and a renewed commitment to restore an alliance between the two sides. This deal, formally inaugurated at a March 2, 1994 White House ceremony, had been the result of diligent brokering by US officials over the previous six months. See Memo to Secretary Christopher from Holbrooke, “Srebrenica: Implications for the Federation,” July 19, 1995; and Silber and Little, Chapter 25.

with the Bosnian Serbs.⁶⁹ Although it was never proven that Milosevic was involved in supporting the assault on the safe area, his attitude only amplified the inadequacy of Western policy.⁷⁰

As the Bosnian Serb Army began to round up Muslim men and boys and forcibly deport Muslim women, Western leaders scrambled to figure out how to respond. The Bosnian Serbs, in perhaps their most flagrant violation of the war, had not simply challenged the UN mission, they had run right through it. Soon after Srebrenica fell, another safe area, Zepa, appeared next. The UN guarantees to protect the enclaves had proved meaningless as the Serbs captured territory right under the eyes of UN observers. Now the peacekeepers were forced to be participants in ethnic cleansing, assisting in the deportation of women, children, and the elderly, in the hope that their presence might help curb some of the atrocities seen earlier in the war. But as the West would soon find out, the UN presence did little even of that.

French President Chirac responded to the crisis on July 13, with a bold and somewhat unrealistic proposal to lead the U.S. and other Western Allies in a massive military intervention to retake the safe area from the Serbs.⁷¹ In a call to President Clinton, Chirac said that "the fall of Srebrenica, the probable fall of Zepa tomorrow and the threat to Gorazde represent a major failure of the UN, NATO and all democracies." Chirac's proposal amounted to an all-or-nothing approach -- either the Allies throw "all of their forces in the effort" to restore Srebrenica or they pull-out entirely.⁷² The initiative itself made little military sense; even if the costs of such an operation were worth it, it was far from clear what the Allies' next step would be. President Clinton urged Chirac to think more seriously about protecting Gorazde and, importantly, consider laying out the rules of engagement between the UN and NATO to protect the enclaves. After the call, Clinton reacted with incredulity to his aides: "Can you believe he proposed that? Then what do we do? Do we go out and then they take it back? Or should we take over the whole country?"⁷³

As Clinton spoke with British Prime Minister John Major and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, they wondered aloud whether the French President was serious, or whether he was simply bluffing to capture the moral high ground, knowing the other Allies would

⁶⁹ "Demarche to Milosevic on Srebrenica," Cable, Belgrade 3374, July 12, 1995. The attitude displayed that day by the Serb leader was classic Milosevic. Former Ambassador Warren Zimmermann has observed that of Milosevic's character traits, a common one was "the pains he took to avoid direct responsibility for aggressive actions." See *Origins of a Catastrophe*, p125.

⁷⁰ [REDACTED]

⁷¹ "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the President and French President Jacques Chirac, July 13, 1995," NSC memorandum, July 17, 1995.

⁷² In retrospect, Chirac's proposal was previewed three days before in a July 10 meeting in Paris with US Ambassador Harriman and visiting Assistant Secretary Holbrooke. During this discussion, Chirac lamented that nothing had happened since the decision to deploy the RRF -- "things have to change." See "Chirac's views on Bosnia," Cable, Paris 16415, July 11, 1995; and "French Views on Bosnia," Cable, Paris 16445, July 11, 1995. In an even earlier conversation with Secretary Christopher, French Foreign Minister de Charette had likened the current situation to the February 1994 pre-NATO ultimatum period when UNPROFOR was unable to ensure either peace or the safety of humanitarian convoys into Sarajevo. See "The Secretary and French Foreign Minister De Charette, July 5, 1995," Cable, State 160553, July 6, 1995.

⁷³ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996.

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stand in the way of such an action.⁷⁴ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili's conversations with a French counterpart seemed to confirm the latter view, as French military planners looked beyond Srebrenica to discuss defending the safe area of Gorazde. But while Chirac's plan might not be the answer, the Allies recognized they had to do something. On July 14, John Major invited the Contact Group, NATO, and other UN contributors to meet in London the next week.⁷⁵

Some U.S. officials initially had "mixed feelings" about this idea. Although Christopher saw this as a "bolder step than [Major] had ever taken," there was some skepticism that such large, multilateral gatherings produced more rhetoric than substance. Nevertheless, the Administration decided to accept Major's offer. In doing so, they set out aggressively to shape what the Allies would agree to at the meeting.⁷⁶ As a start, they would have to stop blaming each other for their failures.⁷⁷ If the West were to come together and fail to take resolute action, the Allies would once again appear to be fiddling as Bosnia burned. Yet it was not clear that a consensus would be easily forged. The French had backed down from their earlier proposal of retaking Srebrenica but were now arguing for reinforcing UNPROFOR troops in the enclave of Gorazde. Such a move would require the United States to use its helicopters to transport 1,000 French peacekeepers into the enclave through potentially hostile fire. The American military found this proposal "defective for a variety of reasons."⁷⁸ It would likely result in American casualties, would force NATO to bomb Serb air defenses in a preemptive strike, and would not dramatically improve the ability of the enclave to hold out against Serb armor and artillery. From Chirac's perspective, the military significance of the act was not as important as the political gesture. Such a bold move would demonstrate the West's determination to stand by that safe area.

U.S. officials agreed that they needed to draw a line and hold it against further Serb attacks if they were going to restore any credibility to the UN mission. The overrunning of Srebrenica, Secretary of Defense Perry believed, presented the U.S. and Europe with a dichotomous choice: "we reached a point where you either have to declare the UN mission a failure and pull it out of there, or you have to be prepared to take strong military action." Perry and Shalikashvili determined that the only way to stop the Bosnian Serbs was to threaten them with overwhelming military force. The President

⁷⁴ Chirac apparently also discussed this with the Bosnians. On July 13, Bosnian PM Haris Silajdzic called Secretary Christopher to urge that the US support Chirac's proposal, and that protection was needed for Zepa and Gorazde. See "The Secretary and Bosnian PM Silajdzic," Cable, State 169976, July 15, 1995.

⁷⁵ See "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with Chancellor Kohl of Germany, July 13, 1995), NSC memorandum, July 15, 1995; and "Telephone Conversation Between UK Prime Minister Major and President Clinton, July 14, 1995," Cable, State 175869, July 22, 1995. Clinton and Major also discussed the possibility that Congress would lift the arms embargo with enough votes to override a veto. "This issue has me in a fun-house," the President told Major. "Our citizens have good motives. Compassion and neo-isolationism are leading to support for lifting the arms embargo. They don't want our soldiers there, but they badmouth the UN and want to give them arms."

⁷⁶ See Tarnoff interview; Christopher interview, October 22, 1996.

⁷⁷ Secretary Christopher said as much to his British counterpart, Malcolm Rifkind, during a July 15 phone call to discuss London. See "The Secretary and British Foreign Secretary Rifkind," Cable, State 171422, July 17, 1995.

⁷⁸ As explained by Christopher; see October 22, 1996 interview.

concluded, also convinced that the Serbs only understood power. "The only time we've ever been effective is when the NATO air threat has been credible," he said.⁷⁹

Accordingly, Perry suggested that the goal of London should be to present a clear ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs -- "don't even think about going into Gorazde or any other safe areas. If you do, you will be met by a massive air campaign. Not a bomb or two, not a pinprick, but a massive air campaign." To defend the safe areas, Perry argued, they would have to change the rules of engagement. NATO had to be empowered to conduct operations without the UN "dual-key," the system which required UN civilian approval for use of NATO air power in Bosnia.⁸⁰

While the Administration worked on refining its position to defend the remaining safe areas, the NSC continued on another track to develop a longer-term diplomatic strategy to find a way out of the Balkan morass. The President was growing increasingly anxious with the situation, frustrated that his policy was "stuck in a rut." Understanding the President's frustration, Lake briefed Clinton on the details of the "endgame" strategy paper that his staff had been developing since late June. He showed him a draft of the paper he planned to present at a July 17 Foreign Policy Team breakfast. To add some drama to the proceedings, Lake asked the President to drop-by the morning meeting.⁸¹

The morning of July 17, Christopher, Perry, Shalikhvili, Albright and Berger went to Lake's West Wing office for the breakfast meeting. Lake's presentation surprised most of the other Principals, whose minds were focused upon the current Srebrenica crisis and upcoming London conference. Albright expressed her support for the draft, yet Christopher, Perry and Shalikhvili were skeptical. The strategy risked drawing the United States further into the conflict, and its provisions on aiding the Bosnians militarily might further strain relations among the Allies.⁸²

As Lake planned, the President entered the room and took a seat as his advisors discussed the document. He spoke briefly, telling his advisors that the present course was not sustainable, although he was not sure what to do. He repeated his earlier thought that to regain leverage, the U.S. had to restore the credibility of NATO airpower. Clinton left the meeting, and the Principals finished their discussions. Lake asked the other agencies to prepare their own thoughts on the direction of Bosnia policy. In a few weeks, he said, they would submit a series of strategy papers to the President in order to develop those ideas into a new diplomatic initiative.⁸³

The heart of the NSC's July 17 endgame paper was the risks the U.S. should be willing to run in the event that a diplomatic settlement failed.⁸⁴ If UNPROFOR withdrew, it argued, the U.S. should insist on a multilateral lifting of the arms embargo or else assist the Bosnians through a covert arms program. The U.S. should also supply

⁷⁹ Perry interview, January 13, 1997; Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996; Woodward, pp260-61.


⁸⁰ Perry interview. The two principal documents underlying the dual-key concept are: UN Security Council Resolution 836, approved June 4, 1993, which authorized the possible use of airstrikes to support UNPROFOR's mission; and the August 9 "Decisions Taken at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 9th August 1993," which approved the operational details for such strikes. The August 9th decision, proclaimed that only the UN Secretary General could authorize "the first use of air power in the theater."

⁸¹ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996; Woodward, p261.

⁸² Atop the State Department's copy of the Lake draft is Talbott's handscrawled notation: "Sec, Perry, Shali don't like, Tony and Mad do." See Talbott interview, July 30, 1996.

⁸³ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996; Bass interview; Woodward, p261.

⁸⁴ "Bosnia Endgame Strategy," NSC memorandum, July 17, 1995.



 military advisors to train the Bosnians. The aim would be to level the playing field in Bosnia, to help the Bosnians gain by force of arms roughly what the Contact Group map had promised them on the negotiating table. To this end, the Americans would be prepared to support NATO air strikes against the Serbs, but for a limited time. Once the playing field was leveled, the Bosnians would be on their own. For Milosevic, the proposal outlined that it was time for him to put up or shut up -- any relief from sanctions would be predicated on his recognition of Bosnia and curbing military support for Pale. If Milosevic cooperated, the U.S. would increase the rewards offered. Such an approach entailed a level of commitment from the White House -- and a degree of risk -- that the Frasure/Steinberg proposal at State did not. At the same time, it provided the Serbs with new incentives -- both positive and negative -- to negotiate.

The London Conference

Meanwhile, the Administration continued to grapple with the more immediate problem of the London conference that Prime Minister Major had organized for July 21. Along with the NSC strategy paper, Lake had presented at the July 17 meeting an NSC options paper discussing how to respond to the French proposal to reinforce Gorazde.⁸⁵ General Shalikashvili had already met with the French and British chiefs of staff on July 16 to discuss options on how to respond to the Serb offensive; the three proposals he took home from London were 1) the French idea of deploying 1000 reinforcements lifted by U.S. helicopters and supported by air power; 2) the U.S. proposal of a NATO rigorous air campaign minus the problematic UN "dual-key" decision-making system; or, 3) the British inclination to preserve the status quo.⁸⁶ The military officials did not reach any consensus, but the French repeated their determination to make a stand at Gorazde. At the July 17 breakfast meeting, Lake presented a revised version of these options, excluding the British proposal. Significantly, both options envisaged a more robust air campaign to protect the safe areas. They decided to discuss these ideas in more detail the next day.

At a breakfast meeting on July 18, the Principals debated these options further. Vice President Al Gore made an impassioned appeal to urge the President not to "acquiesce to genocide."⁸⁷ The Administration could not ignore the horrible images from Srebrenica, Gore argued passionately. Throughout the U.S., the press had featured a photo of a young girl, who had hung herself from a tree rather than face the harrowing fate of the displaced from Srebrenica. Although there was little the Americans could do to protect the tiny enclave of Zepa, which was now coming under Serb assault, they could not write off the 65,000 Bosnians of Gorazde. The French proposal, while dramatic, was too risky -- it seemed to set-up a situation ominously close to a past French debacle, Dien Bien Phu. Instead, the Principals decided formally to push at London the policy of introducing a decisive, broad air campaign in defense of Gorazde, with preemptive strikes against enemy air defenses (SEAD, in Pentagonese) and no dual key. This decision set the stage for the robust new position that was in fact adopted three days later in London.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ "Options Paper: Position on French Request for Assistance in Defense of Gorazde," NSC memorandum, July 17, 1995.

⁸⁶ On Sarajevo, Shalikashvili recommended more aggressive air options to reduce the shelling. "CHODs Meeting in London," memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, July 16, 1995.

⁸⁷ Vershbow interview, September 26, 1996; Woodward, p262.

⁸⁸ Vershbow interview, July 23, 1996. The Principals had discussed this at the breakfast meeting the day before, but hadn't made a firm decision until July 18. Some at State felt that if the Allies could not agree

The President understood that such a decision had implications beyond Bosnia; namely, it would shape America's relationship with Europe and role in the post-Cold War world. U.S. credibility, both within the NATO alliance and throughout the international community, would be on the line. Moreover, the credibility and solidarity of the entire Atlantic alliance was at stake -- if Europe and the U.S. couldn't bring peace to a conflict in their own backyard, what could they do? "The issue was not taking some [UN] peacekeepers hostage," Secretary Perry recalled, "the issue is taking the whole policy of the international community hostage." Albright said that the U.S. had to be firm with its Allies, almost presenting them with a *fait accompli*. "We need to tell them this is it," she said. Agreeing, the President told his advisors that they would "need to press the UK and French to go our way. The U.S. can't be a punching bag anymore."⁸⁹

The Americans had made a decision; now they needed to get their Allies on board.⁹⁰ In a conference call that day, Christopher spoke with the foreign ministers of Spain and Germany, who shared his concern with the "potentially disastrous outcome" of non-agreement in London.⁹¹ Everyone recognized that they needed to come to a consensus; the Americans' sought to convince their Allies that the U.S. plan was the only realistic option. The next morning, July 19, Clinton spoke with Chirac in an effort to convince the French President to support the U.S. approach. "We propose issuing a clear warning to Bosnian Serbs that any attack on Gorazde or Sarajevo will be met by a sustained air campaign that will actually cripple their military capability," the President told Chirac. This strategy would modify the dual-key in order to take the veto out of the hands of the UN civilian leaders, who had been feckless in responding to Serb provocations in the past.

Chirac, however, expressed concern with the American proposal. The peacekeepers already on the ground were too vulnerable. "The minute we attack ... they [Bosnian Serbs] will retaliate by taking hostages or attacking with massive artillery." Clinton responded that Chirac's point was moot -- any French reinforcements would be just as vulnerable as the troops already there. Prior to any air campaign, UNPROFOR would have to restructure itself by moving troops out of vulnerable areas. And the Serbs might seize on that time to attack Gorazde or Sarajevo, capturing one of the enclaves before NATO could start bombing. Although they could not reach an agreement, the two presidents ended their conversation by agreeing to talk with their military advisors and consult each other the next day.⁹²

to the air option, then the UN should withdraw from Bosnia. See memorandum to Secretary Christopher from Holbrooke (draft), "Options," July 17, 1995. At NATO, discussions had been underway since June on possible actions, including a more robust air campaign, to restore the Alliance's credibility and show the parties that the Allies were serious; see John Feeley interview, September 26, 1996.

⁸⁹ Perry interview; Vershbow interview, September 26, 1996.

⁹⁰ To this end, State Department aides drew up a sixteen point "gameplan" for lobbying (as would be expected, very few events coincided with the plan). See "Game Plan," no date, COS files.

⁹¹ "Secretary's Conversation with Spanish FM Solana and German FM Kinkel, July 18, 1995," Cable, State 173739, July 20, 1995. Whether bluff or not, Christopher told Kinkel that he was so concerned that London may end in deadlock, he was having second thoughts about attending and asked if it would be possible to cancel the meeting (Kinkel said no).

⁹² "French President Chirac and President Clinton, July 19, 1995," NSC memorandum, July 19, 1995. After this call, Foreign Minister de Charette followed up with Christopher. Their conversation proved no more fruitful. See "The Secretary and FM De Charette, July 19, 1995," Cable, State 174561, July 21, 1995.

The Americans fared somewhat better with the British, perhaps because Her Majesty's Government feared the French proposal more than the American one. After getting off the phone Chirac, Clinton called the British Prime Minister. The President briefed him on his conversation with Chirac, and Major responded that he agreed that the French proposal was too risky. The British would likely support the American plan, which Major said was the best one on the table. Both presidents realized that such a strategy was itself a gamble. Nevertheless, Clinton said, "it is better to go out with a bang than with a whimper; otherwise we go out with our tail between our legs." Major insisted that they not go down the military route "one-legged," without a plan for a political settlement. With the current diplomatic policy review likely in mind, the President agreed that "if we make a bold military thrust, we should accompany it with a bold diplomatic initiative."⁹³

Christopher continued his talks with the allied foreign ministers. The Dutch were particularly concerned by the London conference because their 308 peacekeepers were still being held near Srebrenica. Their foreign minister, Hans van Mierlo, spoke with Christopher on July 19 and 20, urging him to prevent the Allies from taking a strong position until the Dutch peacekeepers were out of harm's way.⁹⁴ By July 20, the Allies began coalescing around the U.S. plan. That morning, the British formally decided to support the U.S..⁹⁵ That afternoon, Chirac called and spoke with Clinton at the White House.⁹⁶ "I am still against airstrikes," the French President said. "But I will not oppose them. What is essential is to draw a red line around Gorazde and then make sure it is respected." Though the French had strong reservations with the American plan, they would back it. "If everyone agrees with your solution and they all agree to reject my solution, then obviously I won't oppose it because I don't want to take the responsibility of having tomorrow's conference fail," Chirac said.⁹⁷

In London, the U.S. delegation was "pleasantly surprised" at the degree of outrage and determination among the Europeans: "they were at a point where they too were ready to admit that the situation was unsustainable... and that they would be willing to sustain some greater risk." Nevertheless, the outcome of London was not assured. French Foreign Minister de Charette continued to press the French proposal, and he and

⁹³ "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the President and British Prime Minister Major, July 19, 1995," NSC memorandum, July 20, 1995.

⁹⁴ See "The Secretary's Conversation with Dutch FM Van Mierlo," Cable (draft), July 19, 1995; and July 20, 1995.

⁹⁵ This came with official approval from John Major's cabinet, after a day of talks on July 19 in Washington between visiting British Foreign Secretary Rifkind and US officials. The UK and the US were already very close on the key issues, and these talks fleshed out some of the details. See UK memorandum to Christopher, Lake, Tarnoff and Holbrooke from UK Ambassador Sir Robin Renwick, July 18, 1995.

⁹⁶ "Memorandum of the President's Conversation with President Chirac, July 20, 1995," NSC memorandum, July 21, 1995. Clinton had also talked with Bosnian President Izetbegovic, to whom he reassured that the US would work hard at London to secure an agreement on airstrikes and elimination of the dual key. See "Presidential Telephone Call with Bosnian President Izetbegovic, July 20, 1990," Cable, State 180778, July 28, 1995.

⁹⁷ Chirac's reluctant support was in contrast to de Charette's message to Christopher earlier that day. During a phone call, the French Foreign Minister told the Secretary that he was skeptical that the US plan would work, and that the "conferees [at London] were unlikely to agree on the means but at least agree on the objectives." See "Secretary's Conversation with Foreign Minister de Charette, July 20, 1995," Cable (draft), July 21, 1995.

Christopher had several sharp exchanges.⁹⁸ On two occasions, John Major came to Lancaster House and privately told Christopher that the meeting might break down. "I can't hold this together," the Prime Minister said. After hours of tense debate skillfully--and in the eyes of U.S. officials, helpfully--chaired by Malcolm Rifkind, the meeting achieved consensus.⁹⁹ As Christopher announced to the press, the six central accomplishments of the conference were: 1) unanimous reaffirmation that UNPROFOR would remain in Bosnia; 2) commitment to defend Gorazde with NATO air power; 3) RRF actions to stabilize the situation around Sarajevo; 4) support for on-going efforts to address humanitarian needs; 5) reaffirmation of the desire for a diplomatic settlement; and 6) steps by UNPROFOR to minimize the vulnerability of its troops.¹⁰⁰

Despite such consensus, the results of London did not come without some tough negotiating.¹⁰¹ Although the French and British presidents had backed the American proposal, their subordinates restated their lingering doubts as Christopher, Perry, and Shalikashvili articulated their plan. "The closer the Europeans get to bombing, the more nervous they get," Secretary Christopher later told the President.¹⁰² Surprisingly, the Russians, who in principle opposed airstrikes against the Serbs, did not undermine the consensus at the meeting. "The Russians were not as distant from our position as I feared," Secretary Perry reported to the President. Russian Defense Minister Grachev did argue against airstrikes on military grounds (asserting that they would not deter the Bosnian Serbs), but he agreed on the basic consensus at London. Perry recalled that "I had a long discussion with Grachev, and got some very positive statements from him [that] we could not let the Bosnian Serbs continue to attack, to violate safe havens; and the alternative, which was pulling the UN forces out, was unacceptable to them."¹⁰³ The Russians did, however, block the Allies from producing a signed statement (as was standard diplomatic practice) from the talks. Instead, the results from London were announced publicly by John Major in a "Chairman's Statement."¹⁰⁴

The conference delegates agreed to the American proposal on Gorazde -- any confirmed attack on the safe area would be met with a "substantial and decisive" air campaign. Unlike past NATO strikes, the Allies would not respond with limited "pin-prick" attacks on small targets; they would respond disproportionately with a broad campaign throughout Bosnia. Although not announced specifically, it was understood that the dual-key would be modified to remove UN civilian officials -- Secretary General

⁹⁸ This was the first encounter that Christopher had with de Charette, and he traces their subsequent troubled relationship to this first difference. As they part company in London, de Charette bitterly told Christopher that he was going home "without a victory."

⁹⁹ Tarnoff interview.

¹⁰⁰ See "The International Conference on Bosnia: Now We Must Act," Secretary Christopher's press remarks, July 21, 1995, US Department of State *Dispatch*, July 24, 1995.

¹⁰¹ Steinberg interview. Along with the Gorazde issue, representatives at London were to discuss Bihac, the potential for UNPROFOR withdrawal, humanitarian relief efforts, and progress on the Bildt diplomatic track. See memorandum to the Secretary through Peter Tarnoff from Holbrooke, "Your Participation in the London Ministerial on Bosnia, July 21, 1995: Scope Paper," July 19, 1995.

¹⁰² This was during a July 22 meeting with the President to brief him on London results. Christopher was joined by Shalikashvili, Lake, Berger and Tarnoff. See Vershbow interview, September 26, 1996.

¹⁰³ See Perry's memorandum to the President, "Special Defense Report -- London Conference," July 21, 1995; Perry interview.

¹⁰⁴ See Tarnoff interview; for Major's statement, see "International Meeting on Bosnia, Lancaster House, London, Friday, 21 July 1995: 'Chairman's Statement.'"

Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his special civilian representative Yasusi Akashi -- from vetoing the strikes. To emphasize the gravity of these decisions, American, French, and British military commanders would travel to the Balkans to deliver the ultimatum directly to Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic.¹⁰⁵

The most troublesome issue at the conference came as the assembled diplomats considered how NATO would sustain the airstrikes in the face of Serb-hostage taking. While the United States argued vehemently that they could not respond to terror, the fact that U.S. ground troops were not endangered weakened the force of the American argument. But ultimately, the group, in the words of Secretary Perry, "swallowed hard" and accepted the American position, but many hoped the Serbs would never have a chance to test the Conference's resolve. The second sticking point was the Americans' desire to apply these rules, later known as the "Gorazde rules," to the remaining safe areas of Sarajevo, Bihac, and Tuzla (all agreed that Zepa, which was then under attack, was indefensible). Although no final decision was reached at the conference, the representatives decided that the NAC would consider expanding the rules as they hammered out the details of the agreement in the coming days.

With the threat of comprehensive and robust airstrikes conveyed, the U.S. considered the London conference an important accomplishment. Indeed, in retrospect, Perry Christopher and Shalickashvili refer to London as the "turning point" for the international community's approach toward Bosnia. To Perry, the Bosnian Serbs had "overplayed their hand" with the Srebrenica attack; "their strategic judgment that the international community did not have the will to use military force led them to an action that [was] so egregious it actually stiffened the backbone of the international community." Decision-makers at London weren't certain whether their ultimatum would successfully deter the Serbs, and realized that any military action would not be risk-free, "but they just believed that the potential negative consequences of [military action] could not be as serious as the consequences of sending NATO forces to pull out the UN forces in disgrace."¹⁰⁶

"The conference was a turning point," Perry reflected. "At that stage, the whole international community said yes... either we pull out the UN force or we reinforce it with strong military action."¹⁰⁷

Possibly, with such a signal of resolve, the Allies would see a response at the negotiating table. But the more fundamental problems remained. "I fear we are sailing a course between Scylla and Charybdis," Perry wrote to the President. Even if the Allies succeeded in deterring an attack on Gorazde, the London decisions guaranteed neither the survival of UNPROFOR nor a peaceful resolution to the Bosnian conflict. "We have avoided disaster for the moment, but we are lurching toward another," Perry continued. "Our hope is that the momentum from this course change will carry us into a period of calm where we can bring diplomatic efforts to play."¹⁰⁸ Formulating such an effort was to be the next great challenge for policymakers in Washington.

¹⁰⁵ For readout on the meetings, see Perry's July 21 memorandum to the President; Christopher, Albright, Tarnoff, and Hunter interviews.

¹⁰⁶ Perry interview; Perry memorandum to the President, July 21, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Perry interview.

¹⁰⁸ See Perry memorandum to the President, July 21, 1995. For another readout of London, see talking points prepared for Congress, "London Meeting on Bosnia," NSC memorandum, July 22, 1995.