

★ PRESIDENTIAL SERIES ★



BOSNIA, INTELLIGENCE, AND THE CLINTON PRESIDENCY

01 OCTOBER 2013
William J. Clinton Presidential Library
Little Rock, Arkansas



The Role of Intelligence and Political Leadership in Ending the Bosnian War

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-  Serb-controlled area
-  Croat-controlled area
-  Muslim-controlled area
-  UN-declared "Safe Area"
-  20-kilometer zone

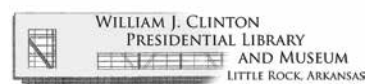
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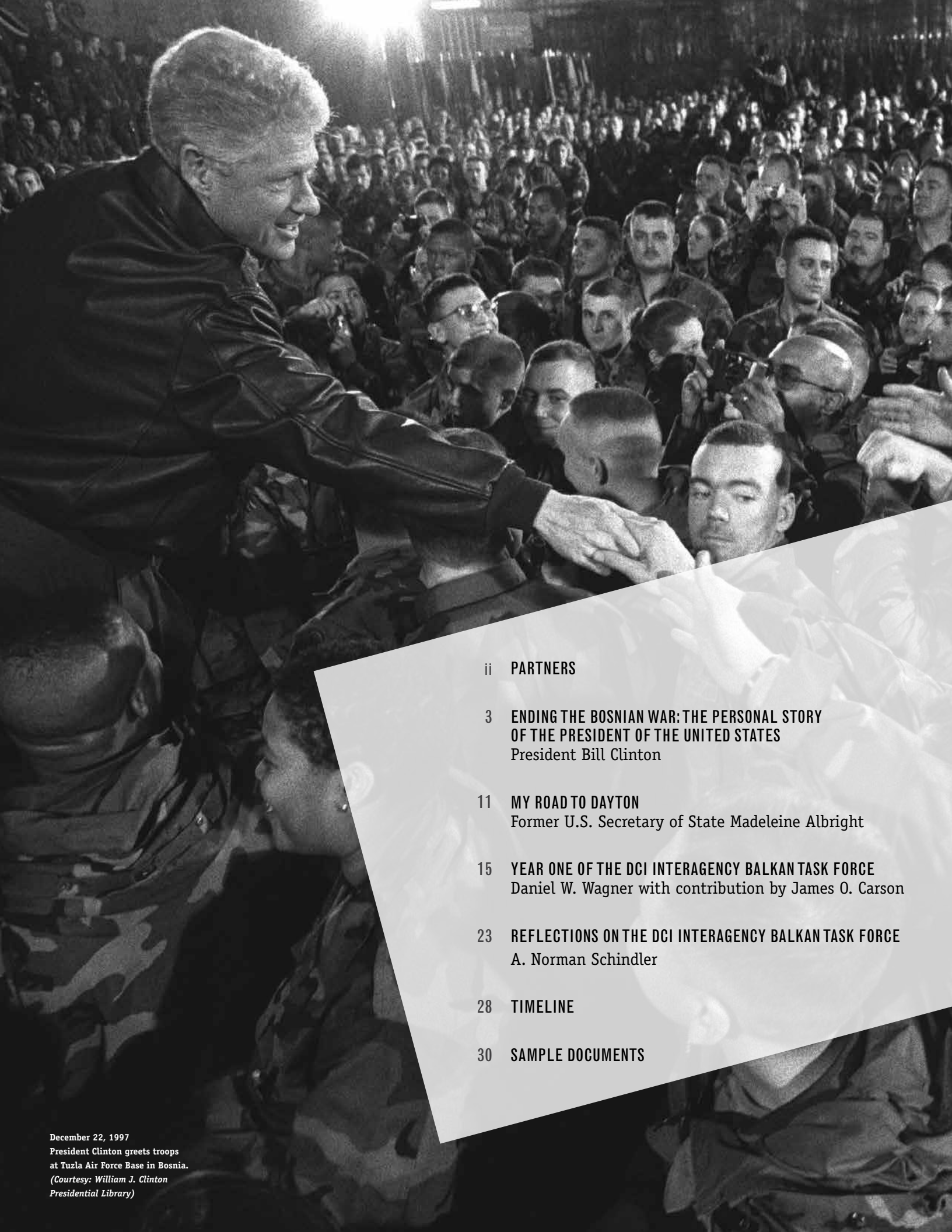
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March 18, 1994
President Clinton addresses the Croat-Muslim
federation accord signing ceremony. (Courtesy:
William J. Clinton Presidential Library)

ENDING THE BOSNIAN WAR: THE PERSONAL STORY OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES¹

President Bill Clinton

In 1989, as the Soviet Union crumbled and communism's demise in Europe accelerated, the question of what political philosophy would replace it was being answered in different ways in different countries. The westernmost part of the former Soviet empire plainly preferred democracy; a cause championed for decades by immigrants to the United States from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic states. In Russia, Yeltsin and other democrats were fighting a rear-guard action against Communists and ultra-nationalists. In Yugoslavia, as the nation struggled to reconcile the competing claims of its ethnic and religious constituencies, Serbian nationalism prevailed over democracy under the leadership of the country's dominant political figure, Slobodan Milosevic.

In 1991, Yugoslavia's westernmost provinces, Slovenia and Croatia, both predominately Catholic, declared independence from Yugoslavia. Fighting broke out between Serbia and Croatia, and spilled over into Bosnia, the most ethnically diverse province of Yugoslavia, where Muslims constituted about 45 percent of the population, Serbs were just over 30 percent, and Croatians about 17 percent. The so-called ethnic differences in Bosnia were really political and religious. Bosnia had been the meeting place of three imperial expansions: the Catholic Holy Roman Empire from the west, the Orthodox Christian movement from the east,

and the Muslim Ottoman Empire from the south. In 1991, the Bosnians were governed by a coalition of national unity headed by the leading Muslim politician, Alija Izetbegovic, and including the militant Serbian nationalist leader Radovan Karadzic, a Sarajevo psychiatrist.

At first Izetbegovic wanted Bosnia to be an autonomous multi-ethnic, multi-religious province of Yugoslavia. When the international community recognized Slovenia and Croatia as independent nations, Izetbegovic decided that the only way Bosnia could escape Serbian dominance was to seek independence, too. Karadzic and his allies, who were tied closely to Milosevic, had a very different agenda. They were supportive of Milosevic's desire to turn as much of Yugoslavia as he could hold on to, including Bosnia, into a Greater Serbia. On March 1, 1992, a referendum was held on whether Bosnia should become an independent nation in which all citizens and groups would be treated equally. The result was an almost unanimous approval of independence, but only two-thirds of the electorate voted. Karadzic had ordered the Serbs to stay away from the polls and most of them did. By then, Serb paramilitary forces had begun killing unarmed Muslims, driving them from their homes

¹ This essay is excerpted from Bill Clinton, *My Life*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.



April 1993
Bodies of Bosnian Muslims
killed around Vitez, Bosnia
Herzegovina. (Courtesy: ICTY)

in Serb-dominated areas in hope of carving up Bosnia into ethnic enclaves, or “cantons,” by force. This cruel policy came to be known by a curiously antiseptic name: ethnic cleansing.

The European Community envoy, Lord Carrington, tried to get the parties to agree to peacefully divide the country into ethnic regions but failed because there was no way to do it without leaving large numbers of one group on land controlled by another; and because many Bosnians wanted to keep their country together; with the different groups living together in peace, as they had done successfully for most of the previous five hundred years.

In April 1992, the European Community recognized Bosnia as an independent state for the first time since the fifteenth century. Meanwhile, Serbian paramilitary forces continued to terrorize Muslim communities and kill civilians, all the while using media to convince local Serbs that it was they who were under attack from the Muslims and who had to defend themselves. On April 27, Milosevic announced a new state of Yugoslavia comprising Serbia and Montenegro. He then made a show of withdrawing his army from Bosnia, while leaving armaments, supplies, and Bosnian Serb soldiers under the leadership of his handpicked commander, Ratko Mladic. The fighting and killing raged throughout 1992, with European Community leaders struggling to contain it and the Bush administration, uncertain of what to do and unwilling to take on another problem in an election year, content to leave the matter in Europe’s hands.

To its credit, the Bush administration did urge the United Nations to impose economic sanctions on Serbia, a measure initially opposed by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the French, and the British, who said they wanted to give Milosevic a chance to stop the very violence he had incited. Finally, sanctions were imposed in late May, but with little effect, as supplies continued to reach the Serbs from friendly neighbors. The United Nations also

continued to maintain the arms embargo against the Bosnian government that originally had been imposed against all Yugoslavia in late 1991. The problem with the embargo was that the Serbs had enough weapons and ammunition on hand to fight for years; making it virtually impossible for the Bosnians to defend themselves. Somehow they managed to hold out throughout 1992, acquiring some arms by capturing them from the Serb forces, or in small shipments from Croatia that managed to evade the NATO blockade of the Croatian coast.

In the summer of 1992, as television and print media finally brought the horror of a Serb-run detention camp in northern Bosnia home to Europeans and Americans, I spoke out in favor of NATO air strikes with U.S. involvement. Later, when it became clear that the Serbs were engaging in the systematic slaughter of Bosnian Muslims, especially targeting local leaders for extermination, I suggested lifting the arms embargo. Instead, the Europeans focused on ending the violence. British Prime Minister John Major attempted to get the Serbs to lift the siege of Bosnian towns and put their heavy weapons under UN supervision. At the same time, many private and government humanitarian missions were launched to provide food and medicine, and the United Nations sent in eight thousand troops to protect the aid convoys.

In late October, just before our election, Lord David Owen, the new European negotiator, and the UN negotiator, former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, put forward a proposal to turn Bosnia into a number of autonomous provinces that would be responsible for all government functions except defense and foreign affairs, which would be handled by a weak central government. The cantons were sufficiently numerous, with the dominant ethnic groups geographically divided in a way that Vance and Owen thought would make it impossible for the Serb-controlled areas to merge with Milosevic’s Yugoslavia to form a Greater Serbia. There were several problems with their plan, the two largest of which were that the sweeping powers of the canton governments made it clear that Muslims couldn’t safely return to their homes in Serb-controlled areas, and that vagueness of canton boundaries invited continued Serb aggression intended to expand their areas, as well as the ongoing, although less severe, conflict between Croats and Muslims.

By the time I became President, the arms embargo and European support for the Vance-Owen plan had weakened Muslim resistance to the Serbs, even as evidence of their slaughter of Muslim civilians and violations of human rights in detention camps continued to surface. In early February, I decided not to endorse the Vance-Owen plan. On the fifth, I met with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada and was pleased to hear him say he didn’t like it either. A few days later, we completed a Bosnian policy review, with Warren Christopher announcing that the United States would like to negotiate a new agreement and would be willing to help enforce it.



On February 23, UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali agreed with me on an emergency plan to airdrop humanitarian supplies to the Bosnians. The next day, in my first meeting with John Major, he too supported the airdrops. The airdrops would help many people stay alive, but would do nothing to address the causes of the crisis.

By March, we seemed to be making progress. Economic sanctions had been strengthened and seemed to be hurting the Serbs, who were also concerned about the possibility of military action by NATO. But we were a long way from a unified policy. On the ninth, in my first meeting with French president François Mitterrand, he made it clear to me that, although he had sent five thousand French troops to Bosnia as part of a UN humanitarian force to deliver aid and contain the violence, he was more sympathetic to the Serbs than I was, and less willing to see a Muslim-led unified Bosnia.

On the twenty-sixth, I met with Helmut Kohl, who deplored what was happening and who, like me, had favored lifting the arms embargo. But we couldn't budge the British and French, who felt lifting the embargo would only prolong the war and endanger the UN forces on the ground that included their troops but not ours. Izetbegovic was also in the White House to meet with Al Gore, whose national security aide, Leon Fuerth, was responsible for our success in making the embargo more effective. Both Kohl and I

told Izetbegovic we were going to do our best to get the Europeans to take a stronger stand to support him. Five days later, we succeeded in getting the United Nations to extend a "no fly" zone over all Bosnia, to at least deprive the Serbs of the benefit of the monopoly on airpower. It was a good thing to do, but it didn't slow the killing much.

In April, a team of U.S. military, diplomatic, and humanitarian aid personnel returned from Bosnia urging that we intervene militarily to stop the suffering. On the sixteenth, the United Nations accepted our recommendation for declaring a "safe area" around Srebrenica, a town in eastern Bosnia where Serb killing and ethnic cleansing had been especially outrageous.

At the end of our first one hundred days, we were nowhere near a satisfactory solution to the Bosnian crisis. The British and French rebuffed Warren Christopher's overtures and reaffirmed their right to take the lead in dealing with the situation. The problem with their position, of course, was that if the Serbs could take the economic hit of the tough sanctions, they could continue their aggressive ethnic cleansing without fear or punishment. The Bosnian tragedy would drag on for more than two years, leaving more than 250,000 dead and 2.5 million driven from their homes, until NATO air attacks, aided by Serb military losses on the ground, led to an American diplomatic initiative that would bring the war to an end.



August 21, 1995
President Clinton holding an impromptu meeting with the government and negotiating team following a shuttle mission in which three U.S. negotiators died in route to Sarajevo. (Courtesy: William J. Clinton Presidential Library)

I stepped into what Dick Holbrooke called “the greatest collective security failure of the West since the 1930s.”

of nationalism over democracy as the dominant ideology of post-Communist Yugoslavia; (4) the reluctance of the Bush administration to undertake another military commitment so soon after the 1991 Iraq war; and (5) the decision of the United States to turn the issue over to Europe instead of NATO, and the confused and passive European response. To Holbrooke’s list I would add a sixth factor: some European leaders were not eager to have a Muslim state in the heart of the Balkans, fearing it might become a base for exporting extremism, a result that their neglect made more, not less, likely.

My own opinions were constrained by the dug-in positions I found when I took office. For example, I was reluctant to go along with Senator Dole in unilaterally lifting the arms embargo, for fear of weakening the United Nations (though we later did so in effect, by declining to enforce it.) I also

didn’t want to divide the NATO alliance by unilaterally bombing Serb military positions, especially since there were European, but no American, soldiers on the ground with the UN mission. And I didn’t want to send American troops there, putting them in harm’s way under a UN mandate I thought was bound to fail. In May 1993, we were still a long way from a solution.

In early August, as the budget drama moved to its climax, Warren Christopher finally secured the agreement of the British and French to conduct NATO air strikes in Bosnia, but the strikes could occur only if both NATO and the UN approved them, the so-called dual key approach. I was afraid we could never turn both keys, because Russia had a veto on the Security Council and was closely tied to the Serbs. The dual key would prove to be a frustrating impediment to protecting the Bosnians, but it marked another step in the long, tortuous process of moving Europe and the UN to a more aggressive posture.

September was also the biggest foreign policy month of my presidency. On September 8, President Izetbegovic of Bosnia came to the White House. The threat of NATO air strikes had succeeded in restraining the Serbs and getting peace talks going again. Izetbegovic assured me that he was committed to a peaceful settlement as long as it was fair to the Bosnian Muslims. If one was reached, he wanted my commitment to send NATO forces, including

U.S. troops, to Bosnia to enforce it. I reaffirmed by intention to do so.

After Black Hawk Down, whenever I approved the deployment of forces, I knew much more about what the risks were, and made much clearer what operations had to be approved in Washington. The lessons of Somalia were not lost on the military planners who plotted our course in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and other trouble spots of the post-Cold War world, where America was often asked to step in to stop hideous violence, and too often expected to do it without the loss of lives to ourselves, our adversaries, or innocent bystanders. The challenge of dealing with complicated problems, like Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia inspired one of Tony Lake's best lines: "Sometimes I really miss the Cold War."

In the second week of February 1994, after the brutal shelling of the Sarajevo marketplace by Bosnian Serbs had killed dozens of innocent people, NATO finally voted, with the approval of the UN secretary-general, to bomb the Serbs if they didn't move their heavy guns more than a dozen miles away from the city. It was long overdue, but still not a vote without risk for the Canadians, whose forces in Srebrenica were surrounded by the Serbs, or for the French, British, Spanish, and Dutch, who also had relatively small, and vulnerable, numbers of troops on the ground.

Soon afterward, the heavy weapons were removed or put under UN control. Senator Dole was still pushing for a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo, but for the moment I was willing to stick with it, because we had finally gotten a green light for the NATO air strikes, and because I didn't want others to use our unilateral abandonment of the Bosnian embargo as an excuse to disregard the embargoes we supported in Haiti, Libya, and Iraq.

On February 28, NATO fighters shot down four Serb planes for violating the no-fly zone, the first military action in the forty-four-year history of the alliance. I hoped that the air strikes, along with our success in relieving the siege of Sarajevo, would convince the allies to take a strong posture toward Serb aggression in and around the embattled towns of Tuzla and Srebrenica as well.

On March 18 1994, Presidents Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia and Franjo Tudjman of Croatia were at the White House to sign an agreement negotiated with the help of my special envoy, Charles Redman, that established a federation in the areas of Bosnia in which their population were in a majority, and set up a process to move toward a confederation with Croatia. The fighting between Muslims and Croats had not been as severe as that in which both sides had engaged with the Bosnian Serbs, but the agreement was still an important step toward peace.

On November 10, 1994, I announced that the United States would no longer enforce the arms embargo in Bosnia. The

move had strong support in Congress and was necessary because the Serbs had resumed their aggression, with an assault on the town of Bihac; by late November, NATO was bombing Serb missile sites in the area.

By the fall of 1995, Dick Holbrooke had persuaded the foreign ministers of Bosnia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia to agree on a set of basic principles as a framework to settle the Bosnian conflict. Meanwhile, NATO air strikes and cruise missile attacks continued to pound Bosnian Serb positions, and Bosnian and Croatian military gains reduced the percentage of Bosnia controlled by the Serbs from 70 to 50 percent, close to what negotiated settlement would likely require.

On the morning of November 21, Warren Christopher called me from Dayton to say that the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia had reached a peace agreement to end the war in Bosnia. The agreement preserved Bosnia as a single state to be made up of two parts, the Bosnian Croat Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic, with a joint resolution of the territorial disputes over which the war was begun. Sarajevo would remain the undivided capital city. The national government would have responsibility for foreign affairs, trade, immigration, citizenship, and monetary policy. Each of the federations would have its own police force. Refugees would be able to return home, and free movement throughout the country would be guaranteed. There would be international supervision of human rights and police training, and those charged with war crimes would be excluded from political life. A strong international force, commanded by NATO, would supervise the separation of forces and keep the peace as the agreement was being implemented.

The Bosnian peace plan was hard-won and its particulars contained bitter pills for both sides, but it would end four bloody years that claimed more than 250,000 lives and caused more than two million people to flee their homes. American leadership was decisive in pushing NATO to be more aggressive and in taking the final diplomatic initiative. Our efforts were immeasurably helped by Croatian and Bosnian military gains on the ground, and the brave and stubborn refusal of Izetbegovic and his comrades to give up in the face of Bosnian Serb aggression.

The final agreement was a tribute to the skills of Dick Holbrooke and his negotiating team; to Warren Christopher, who at critical points was decisive in keeping the Bosnians on board in closing the deal; to Tony Lake, who initially conceived and sold our peace initiative to our allies and who, with Holbrooke, pushed for the final talks to be held in the United States; to Sandy Berger, who chaired

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December 22, 1997
 With peace achieved, President Clinton reads books to children at Tuzla Air Force Base in Bosnia. (Courtesy: William J. Clinton Presidential Library)



the deputies' committee meetings, which kept people throughout the national security operation informed of what was going on without allowing too much interference; and to Madeleine Albright, who strongly supported our aggressive posture in the United Nations. The choice of Dayton and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base was inspired,

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and carefully chosen by the negotiating team; it was in the United States, but far enough away from Washington to discourage leaks, and the facilities permitted the kind of "proximity talks" that allowed Holbrooke and his team to hammer out the tough details.

On November 22, after twenty-one days of isolation in Dayton, Holbrooke and his team came to the White House to receive my congratulations and discuss our next steps. We still had a big selling job on the Hill and with the American people, who, according to the latest polls, were proud of the peace agreement but were still overwhelmingly opposed to sending U.S. troops to Bosnia. After Al Gore kicked off the meeting by saying that the military testimony to date had not been helpful, I told General

Shalikashvili that I knew he supported our involvement in Bosnia but that many of his subordinates remained ambivalent. Al and I had orchestrated our comments to emphasize that it was time for everybody in the government, not just the military, to get with the program. They had the desired effect.

We already had strong support from some important members of Congress, especially Senators Lugar, Biden, and Lieberman. Others offered a more qualified endorsement, saying that they wanted a clear "exit strategy." To add to their numbers, I began to invite members of Congress to the White House, while sending Christopher, Perry, Shalikashvili, and Holbrooke to the Hill. Our challenge was complicated by the ongoing debate over the budget; the government was open for the time being, but the Republicans were threatening to shut it down again on December 15.

On November 27, I took my case for U.S. involvement in Bosnia to the American people. Speaking from the Oval Office, I said that our diplomacy had produced the Dayton Accords and that our troops had been requested not to fight, but to help the parties implement the peace plan, which served our strategic interests and advanced our fundamental values.



Because twenty-five other nations had already agreed to participate in a force of sixty thousand, only a third of the troops would be Americans. I pledged that they would go in with a clear, limited, achievable mission and would be well-trained and heavily armed to minimize the risk of casualties. After the address I felt that I had made the strongest case I could for our responsibility to lead the forces of peace and freedom, and hoped that I had moved public opinion enough so that Congress would at least not try to stop me from sending in the troops.

In addition to the arguments made in my speech, standing up for the Bosnians had another important benefit to the United States: it would demonstrate to Muslims the world over that the United States cared about them, respected Islam, and would support them if they rejected terror and embraced the possibilities of peace and reconciliation.

On December 14, I flew to Paris for a day, for the official signing of the agreement ending the Bosnian war. I met with the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, and went to a lunch with them hosted by Jacques Chirac at the Élysée Palace. Slobodan Milosevic was sitting across from me, and we talked for a good while. He was intelligent, articulate, and cordial, but he had the coldest look in his eyes I had ever seen. He was also paranoid; telling me he

was sure Rabin's assassination was the result of betrayal by someone in his security service. Then he said that everyone knew that's what had happened to President Kennedy, too, but that we Americans "have been successful in covering it up." After spending time with him, I was no longer surprised by his support of the murderous outrages in Bosnia, and I had the feeling that I would be at odds with him again before long.



August 30, 1998
U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright greets
troops at Tuzla Air Force Base deployed in support
of implementing the Bosnian peace settlement.
(Courtesy: Department of Defense)

MY ROAD TO DAYTON

Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright¹

Three factors ended the Bosnian War. The first was overreaching on the part of the Bosnian Serbs. For years, they had bet successfully on the fecklessness of the West, but they didn't know when to fold their hands. The second was the changing military situation. In early August, Croatia launched an offensive to reclaim territory seized by ethnic Serbs. The offensive quickly succeeded, sending a message to the Bosnian Serbs that they weren't invincible and could not, in a crisis, count on help from Serbian President Slobodan Milošević. The third factor was President Bill Clinton's willingness to lead.

After the massacre at Srebrenica, the President's frustration had boiled over, and National Security Advisor Tony Lake had asked for endgame papers focusing on the kind of post-conflict Bosnia we wanted to see. The papers were discussed at a key meeting in the White House Cabinet Room the same week as a presentation I delivered at the United Nations Security Council on Srebrenica. As we had been from the beginning, the President's advisors were divided.

I argued that U.S. troops were going to be in Bosnia eventually, so it made sense to send them on our terms and timetable. Europe had failed to resolve the crisis and, in the process, had diminished both the North Atlantic

Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations. Our reluctance to take charge had weakened our own claim to leadership. The Bosnian Serbs must be forced to agree on reasonable terms or face a rollback of their military gains. If a negotiated settlement were not forthcoming, we should urge withdrawal of the UN mission and train and equip the Bosnian military behind a shield of NATO airpower.

Recommending a similar approach, Tony proposed sending a high-level team to Europe to gain allied backing for the new hard line. Neither the State Department nor the Defense Department suggested doing anything different from what we had been doing, with the Pentagon recommending a "realistic" approach under which we would accept the reality of Serb military power and seek a permanent cease-fire based on the status quo.

Lake summed up: "Madeleine feels the stakes are so high, they affect the administration's leadership at home and abroad, and that we have no choice but to accept a

¹ Madeleine Albright served as United States Ambassador to the United Nations from 1993 to 1997, and as the 64th United States Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001. This article is excerpted from Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003, p. 189-191.

November 21, 1995
Serbian President Slobodan
Milosevic, Bosnian President
Alija Izetbegovic, and
Croatia President Franjo
Tudjman initial the Dayton
Peace Accords. (Courtesy of
Wikimedia Commons)



considerable risk. The biggest fear of State and Defense is that we will become entangled in a quagmire. They favor a more limited approach.”

While Tony spoke, I couldn’t help looking at the President. Bill Clinton was a very good listener. His habit was to sit doodling or writing notes with his other fist clenched against his face or when he had a headache, with a cold can of Diet Coke pressed against his temple. At times, I thought he was disengaged, only to realize later that he hadn’t missed a thing. During my years as UN ambassador, I felt I got more respect from the President than I did from

I had presented my best arguments on the issues that mattered to me most. The President normally began his response to a presentation with a series of questions. This time it was obvious from the moment he started to speak that he had his mind made up. “I agree with Tony and Madeleine,” he said.

most members of the foreign policy team. Where others were sometimes dismissive, he was uniformly attentive and heard me out. I have always found it easier to deal with people who have self-confidence, which Bill Clinton certainly did.

most members of the foreign policy team. Where others were sometimes dismissive, he was uniformly attentive and heard me out. I have always found it easier to deal with people who have self-confidence, which Bill Clinton certainly did.

I now waited tensely as Tony completed his summation and we all turned to the President to see his reaction. For me, it was a decisive

his response to a presentation with a series of questions. This time it was obvious from the moment he started to speak that he had his mind made up. “I agree with Tony and Madeleine,” he said. “We should bust our ass to get a settlement within the next few months. We must commit to a unified Bosnia. And if we can’t get that at the bargaining table, we have to help the Bosnians on the battlefield.”

During the next days, Lake headed for Europe to explain the plans to our allies and Russia. Another team, led by Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Dick Holbrooke, traveled to the Balkans to begin shuttle-style negotiations among the parties. The European response was favorable, and I felt encouraged, but talks in the region had barely begun when, on August 19, three members of Holbrooke’s negotiating team were killed in Bosnia in an accident on a treacherous mountain road. The dead were Ambassador Robert Frasure, Lieutenant Colonel Nelson Drew of the National Security Council, and Joseph Kruzell of the Department of Defense. I admired them all but knew Bob Frasure best. I was relieved that Holbrooke and my former liaison with the Joint Chiefs, General Wesley Clark, who were both in the ill-fated convoy, were safe. I will not forget the sadness of their homecoming, accompanying the bodies of our colleagues.

Our negotiators did not return to Europe until August 28. The Bosnian Serbs chose that moment to overreach again. At 11:10 A.M. on a sunny Monday morning, five mortar

shells came flying out of the hills around Sarajevo to land in the bustling Markale market, killing thirty-seven and wounding eighty-five. I conferred with UN Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping Kofi Annan, who agreed that the joint UN-NATO understanding drafted after the Srebrenica massacre should be applied. On August 30, more than sixty aircraft, flying from bases in Italy and the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Adriatic, pounded Bosnian Serb positions around Sarajevo. French and British artillery joined in. At the time, it was the largest NATO military action ever.

The psychological balance had changed. The Bosnian Serbs could no longer act with impunity, while NATO was no longer barred from using its power. American diplomatic leadership was fully engaged. Belgrade was desperate for sanctions relief, while Milošević received explicit authority to negotiate on behalf of the Pale Serbs.

On September 8, the foreign ministers of Bosnia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia agreed that Bosnia would continue as a single state, but with Bosniak-Croat and Serb entities sharing territory on roughly a 51-49 percent basis. By the end of the month, our negotiating team had gained an agreement on general principles, including the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and democratic state.

On October 5, the parties agreed to a countrywide ceasefire. At the start of November, they were scheduled to arrive in Dayton, Ohio, for talks that would lead to a final settlement. As the countdown entered its final days, Milošević demanded that sanctions against Belgrade be suspended as soon as negotiations began, and lifted entirely when an agreement was signed. Our position had always been to suspend sanctions only when agreement was reached and lift them only after implementation.

Holbrooke warned that Milošević might refuse to show up at Dayton if he didn't get his way and argued strongly that we give in. At a Principals Committee meeting on October 27, I argued that sanctions relief was too valuable a tool to fritter away: we would need all our leverage to get Milošević to meet his commitments. I knew this was the President's position too, because weeks earlier, during a special session of the UN General Assembly, I had found him alone and talked with him about it. I said there were proposals circulating at the UN to lift sanctions before an agreement. He was incredulous and said "No way"—or rather something more colorful. We decided to hold firm.

I was in Chicago when I got a call from Holbrooke. He knew I opposed lifting sanctions. While diplomacy may be practiced between diplomats of different countries, the rules are different between diplomats of the same country. We had a most undiplomatic conversation. As Holbrooke predicted, Milošević then threatened not to come to Dayton. As the rest of us expected, he came anyway.

After three weeks of contentious talks, featuring a tireless negotiating effort by Holbrooke and essential deal-closing by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the Dayton Accords were initialed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base on November 21, 1995. It was Thanksgiving weekend. The war in Bosnia was over.

To me, the outcome vindicated several principles. It showed that the limited use of force—even airpower alone—could make a decisive difference. It showed the importance of allied unity and of American leadership. It showed the possibilities of this new era, in that Russian forces would end up side by side with NATO troops in implementing the accords. And it showed the importance of standing up to the likes of Milošević and Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian Serb military leader.

In 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain revealed the thinking behind the Munich Agreement, which gave Adolf Hitler a green light to take over Czechoslovakia. "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is," he said, "that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing." A year later Chamberlain's own nation was at war, in part, because he had done nothing to help that "faraway country" and its little-known people. America and its allies may be proud that, belatedly or not, we did come to the aid of the people of Bosnia—to their benefit, and ours.

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