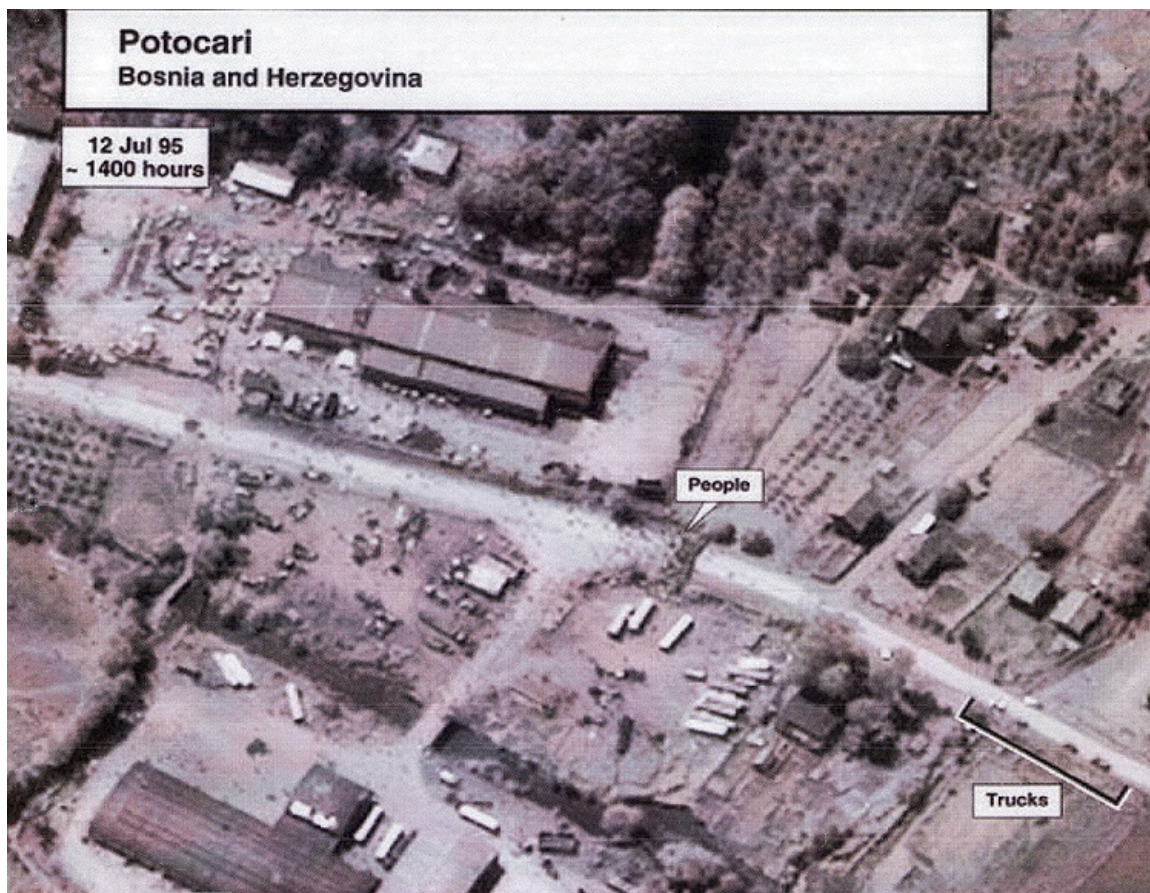


International Decision Making in the Age of Genocide: Srebrenica 1993-1995
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Session 4: Endgame – Lessons from Srebrenica



Potočari, July 12, 1995, US government photo

TOM BLANTON: Our intention this afternoon is to look very intensively at the aftermath of the fall of Srebrenica, including the experiences of Colonel Karremans, Rupert Smith, and Carl Bildt in talking with General Mladić. I want to ask Michael Dobbs to lead off with a couple questions about the situation on Srebrenica on July 11, and the choices, or lack of choices, faced by Colonel Karremans and Dutchbat.

SHASHI THAROOR: Before we start, may I just briefly put a marker for our later discussion on lessons. I object to John Shattuck's suggestion that this somehow reveals a bankruptcy

of UN peacekeeping. I have tried to explain why peacekeeping was inappropriate to apply to this situation and how we pointed this out repeatedly to the Security Council.

TOM BLANTON: I'm counting on you to challenge it.

MICHAEL DOBBS: We want very quickly to look at what happened after the fall of Srebrenica. As you know, many of the Muslim men from Srebrenica, led by the armed remnants of the Bosnian 28th Division, tried to escape the enclave. They gathered in the northern part of the enclave at a place called Šušnjari and attempted to make a breakout, through the encirclement by Bosnian Serb troops.

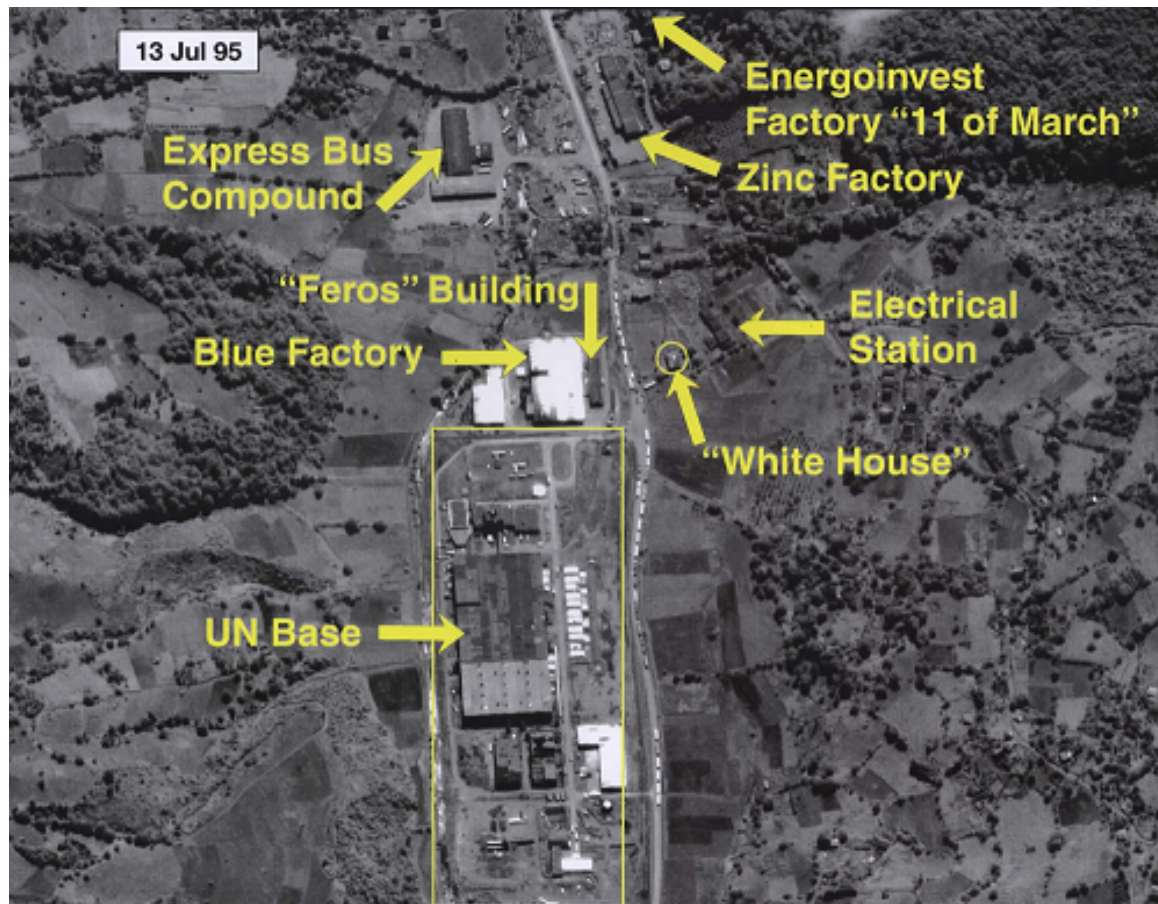


Detail from CIA map, showing attempted breakout by Muslims from Srebrenica

There was another group of civilians, mainly women and children but also a few hundred men, who took refuge at Dutchbat headquarters in Potočari, which is just north of Srebrenica. We actually have an overhead reconnaissance photograph of the scene at Potočari on July 12 at 2:00 p.m. Another reconnaissance photograph, the following day, July 13, shows a line of buses outside the UN base, a few hundred meters down the road.¹ As we now know, Mladić allowed the women and children to enter the buses, for transportation

¹ The July 12-14 photographs were probably taken by low-flying NATO reconnaissance aircraft searching for Dutchbat soldiers seized by the RSA as hostages. Later photographs were taken by American U-2 spy planes, covering 30 square kilometers of territory.

to Bosnian government positions, but took the men away for “screening” for alleged war criminals.



Potočari, July 13, 1995, US government photo

We also have a July 11 document [sent at 6:27 p.m. local time] with instructions to Colonel Karremans from General Hervé Gobilliard, who was acting UNPROFOR commander in Sarajevo in the absence of General Smith.² His [instructions](#) are: "Concentrate your forces into the Potočari Camp, including withdrawal of your OPs. Take all reasonable measures to protect refugees and civilians in your care." Prior to that he said, "Enter into local negotiations with BSA forces for immediate ceasefire."

We also have a report dated July 12 from Colonel Karremans in which he replies to the points made by General Gobilliard.³ By this time, he has met twice with General Mladić

² Gobilliard to Sector NE (Info: CO Dutchbat), "[Orders for defence of Dutchbat and protection of refugees in Srebrenica](#)," July 11, 1995.

³ Karremans to Janvier, "[Meeting with Gen Mladić on 11 and 12 July 1995](#)," Dutchbat Compound Potočari, TK95114, July 12, 1995.

at the Hotel Fontana down the road in Bratunac. He is reporting on what he calls "a catastrophic sequence of events" that he witnessed and his direct talks with Mladić. He basically says that he is unable to carry out Gobilliard's instructions. He states, "There are more than 15,000 people within one square kilometer, including Dutchbat, in "an extreme vulnerable position: [the sitting duck position](#). He [adds](#) that he is "not able to defend these people," or defend his own battalion. There are heavy guns all around the compound, within direct sight of the compound.⁴ Colonel Karremans, you had the misfortune of being thrust into these very one-sided talks with Mladić. Could you give us your impressions of him and the choices you faced following the fall of the enclave?

THOM KARREMANS: Sure. We all know what happened between July 6 and 11. We discussed that yesterday and this morning. As I said before, this was a war. All of a sudden, it's over and you are confronted with 25,000 refugees. Somebody asked me some years ago, "Why didn't you take all the refugees in your camp?" That was impossible. You can't put 25,000 refugees on a few square meters.⁵ A lot of things happened very, very fast. You had to make many decisions within a shrunken battalion staff. There is hardly any time to think about the decisions you have to take. You take decisions in split seconds. Sometimes, the decisions were not good, or not well thought out, but we felt that most of the decisions we took were correct.

When I was asked to start negotiations [with the Bosnian Serbs], I asked whether somebody on a much higher level can conduct these negotiations?⁶ I could conduct negotiations but after six days with no sleep, no drink, no food, negotiating with the local authorities, running my own battalion, I was not in the mood to start negotiations, to be honest. I asked for someone higher up to negotiate, but got no answer, so I went to

⁴ According to the Karremans July 12 cable, Mladić had deployed two artillery pieces, two tanks, three multiple launch rocket systems, and one anti-aircraft gun within "[direct sight](#)" of the Dutchbat compound.

⁵ According to the Karremans July 12 cable, there were about 2,500 refugees inside the Dutchbat compound at Potočari, and a further 15,000 refugees "[in the direct vicinity](#)."

⁶ On July 12, Akashi appointed [a joint civilian-military team](#) led by UN civil affairs official Ken Biser and UNPROFOR chief of staff, Gen. Kees Nicolai, to travel to Srebrenica to manage the crisis. See Akashi to Annan, "Situation in Srebrenica," UNPROFOR Z-1142, July 12, 1995, [paragraph 7](#). General Smith agreed that CO Dutchbat should not negotiate with Mladić by himself as he was "talking from the jail." See Rupert Smith, "Aftermath of Fall of Srebrenica," July 13, 1995, [paragraph 4](#). He noted, however, that the Serbs were "refusing to deal with HQ UNPROFOR," in Sarajevo, and "it seems HQ UNPF" in Zagreb.

Bratunac, the small city outside the enclave. On my way to the Fontana hotel in Bratunac, I was sitting in my vehicle thinking about what I should say. Then I saw, to the left and right of the road, those mortar platoons. When I arrived at the hotel, I expected General Živanović, the Commander of the Drina Corps, or his successor, General Krstić. I had never seen Mladić before in my life and there he was. Now everybody has seen the pictures. I would not like to expand on that, because it was not a pleasant situation for me either, I must say.⁷

I mention the word “[refugees](#)” several times in this document. I told Mladić several times that I was there to make good arrangements for the refugees. Imagine that there are about 5,000 refugees inside, and about 20,000 outside, the compound. We had already foreseen the humanitarian disaster that was emerging. We had no medicines to deal with that. I had 110 severely wounded persons on the compound. My thought was that I cannot start negotiating in a military sense, but I can try to make arrangements for the wounded and for the population. In the beginning, he didn't listen, but the second time I was there, [at 11:00 p.m.], he started listening.

It was more or less a one-direction conversation. He was ordering rather than asking. That is what I can remember from those two talks in the evening. The next morning I went for the third time with three people representing the refugees, one woman and two men. They were able to explain what was going on from their perspective.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Mladić told them that they had a choice, “[to survive, stay, or vanish](#).”⁸ It was agreed that there would be an evacuation. The local people said they wanted to be evacuated, but an important question arose: who would organize the evacuation? Would it be the UN that organized the evacuation? Or would Mladić organize the evacuation himself? At one point it seemed that UNPROFOR would organize the evacuation in which case there presumably would not have been a separation of men and women. But it turned out that it

⁷ Karremans held three meetings with Mladić at the Hotel Fontana at Bratunac, at approximately [8:00 p.m.](#) and [11:00 p.m.](#) on July 11, and [10:00 a.m. on July 12](#). A Bosnian Serb cameraman took video of the meetings, which was then [transcribed by ICTY researchers](#), becoming part of a “Srebrenica trial video.” Karremans was joined by Muslim representatives for the second and third meetings.

⁸ Second Fontana meeting. At the first Fontana meeting, Mladić told Karremans that he did not want to send UNPROFOR peacekeepers back home “[in coffins](#).”

was Mladić who brought the buses and Mladić who controlled the evacuation.⁹ Can you tell us how it ended up that Mladić was allowed to organize the evacuation?

KEES NICOLAI: I can say something about that. Immediately after we stopped the air attacks, we realized the terrible situation of the refugees. We knew we had to do something about that. After a discussion that lasted ten minutes or so, we were sure that our next mission would be to evacuate the civilian population to a safe area where they could be treated. There was no water, no food, and no medicine for them in Srebrenica, as Colonel Karremans has described. Moreover, it was very dangerous. The refugees were unprotected, in the open air. The situation could change at any moment.

It was clear that they had to be removed from that place as soon as possible. Soon afterwards, I had a telephone call with our Minister of Defense. I told him that we had decided to start negotiations to arrange an evacuation. He agreed immediately, so there was support for our decision from The Hague. Around the same time, I had a short telephone call with Mr. Muratović [the Bosnian minister responsible for relations with UNPROFOR]. He was very upset that we had stopped the air strikes. He said that was contrary to our mission, but we explained that we could not do anything else due to the situation in which the civilians found themselves.

Shortly afterwards, I contacted Colonel Karremans to order him to start negotiations with the local Serb authorities. At that moment, I was not aware that Mladić was there. The first priority was to get the refugees out. Events went in a direction different to the one we had planned. We were taken by surprise the following day by Mladić when the buses arrived around noon. The evacuation started earlier than we planned. Arranging transport should not have been a problem for us but it was necessary for UNPROFOR to ask permission from the Bosnian Serbs to enter their territory, what route we could use, and so on.

⁹ Mladić announced that he would [provide the buses for the evacuation](#) at the third Hotel Fontana meeting at 1000 on July 12. The buses arrived in front of the compound [around 1:00 p.m. on July 12](#). According to the December 2012 ICTY judgment in the case of General Zdravko Tolimir, Mladić had issued [an oral order requisitioning the buses](#) late on the evening of July 11. In an intercepted conversation at 1250 on July 12 discovered by ICTY investigators, Mladić closely monitored the dispatch of buses. "[We'll evacuate them all](#)," he told a subordinate. "Those who want to [go] and those who don't want to."

It seems that Mladić had foreseen what would happen and arranged buses one or two days before. There was only one option left for us, which was to send peacekeepers in jeeps or on the buses to control the evacuations. This was not a success. Many jeeps were stopped along the way and stolen. The attempt to control the evacuation failed in many respects. It was more like a deportation than an evacuation.

MICHAEL DOBBS: There was little you could do to influence the way it took place?

THOM KARREMANS: I'd like to add something on that. Things went so fast. We were all astonished see all of those trucks and buses the next day already. In my talks with General Mladić I had given him a sequence of events, beginning [with evacuation of the wounded](#), saying we were also relying on the Red Cross. Obviously he didn't listen. I have always said that this was a pre-planned operation from his side. You are not able to organize so many buses and vehicles within a couple of hours. He didn't give us the chance to make proper arrangements.

On the other hand, as General Nicolai said, there was an urgent need to do something for the people. There was no food for them, there was no shelter for them. People [had hung themselves](#), given births. It was like a village of 25,000 people all packed together. I still see these things in my mind. In this situation, you have to take some decisions. Everything went so fast with the deportation of the locals.

One last thing: I sent two officers with the first convoy of buses. They managed to reach Tuzla and went to see Colonel Brantz. Colonel Brantz phoned me and said, "Your two officers are here, they've seen some things along the way, but you can't see everything when there are forty buses behind you." Then they suggested putting a soldier on every bus, but I had almost no soldiers left. We said, "Okay, we will send one or two jeeps with every convoy." They were all stolen on the way. I asked Mladić later what happened with those vehicles. He said, "I don't know. There are different groups of paramilitary who grabbed them and stole them." I said, "You know better." That was not an option either. Then I sent some vehicles to facilitate the communication between Potočari and Kladanj

[transfer point between Serb and Muslim-controlled territory] for communications. All those vehicles were also stolen.¹⁰

MICHAEL DOBBS: Mladić insisted that the refugees be screened for possible war criminals. He said the men could not go with the women and children because there were allegedly war criminals among them and he needed to screen them. Was there a possibility of influencing him on that question?

THOM KARREMANS: He first [asked me](#) if I could “deliver the local military and civilian authorities” to him. I said, “They’re not there and if they were here, I don’t do that.” He then said that he [wanted to screen the men](#) and look for war criminals.¹¹ We all know what happened outside the safe area. In wars, you should be permitted to ask someone, what he did during the war, but it is not permitted is to kill them. That is what happened.

MICHAEL DOBBS: And you didn't think that was a possibility?

THOM KARREMANS: Not at that moment. Also, there were not so many men left I must say. There were some in the compound. We know that amount because their names were put on the piece of paper.¹² The vast majority of the men outside the compound were already on their way to Tuzla.

TOM BLANTON: Muhamed?

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: Just to clarify, the number of the men inside the compound in Potočari does not really represent the number of men who were separated and taken to different execution sites.¹³ We know this through the re-tracing of the mass graves. We

¹⁰ See also Netherlands Ministry of Defense, [“Report based on the debriefing on Srebrenica,”](#) October 4, 1995. According to the Dutchbat debrief, it proved “virtually impossible to provide proper escorts for the convoys.”

¹¹ According to the Dutchbat debrief, Mladić announced that [“able-bodied men were to be screened for possible involvement in war crimes”](#) at the third Fontana hotel meeting on July 2. He said that the evacuation of the woman and children and wounded would start at 1300.

¹² According to the Dutchbat debrief, the male refugees drew up [a list of 239 men of fighting age](#) who had taken refuge on the compound, with the intention of submitting it to the ICRC. At least 60 men refused to be registered.

¹³ Bosnian Serb forces refused to allow Muslim men gathered outside the compound to board the buses. Most of the men who nevertheless managed to board the buses were removed before the buses reached government-

know which execution site was used for the men from Potočari, which site was used for the people captured in Cerska, and so on. Based on the assessment that we were able to make, a little over 2,000 men were separated in Potočari and taken to different execution sites.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Was it as many as 2,000?

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: Yes. If you take the number of 8,000 plus [total disappeared], out of this 8,000 plus people, around 2,000 came from Potočari and around 6,000 came from the woods.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Right, but there were two groups in Potočari. There was a group of around three hundred inside the Dutchbat base. The others were outside the Dutchbat base.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: That's exactly what we agree about. You're talking about the number of the people within the fence of the Dutch compound. You're not talking about 20,000 civilians outside of the fence of the compound, and among these 20,000 there is at least 1,500 people who have been separated and taken to execution sites.

TOM BLANTON: Zeid just showed me the prosecutor's opening statement in the Mladić trial on the other side of town, in which he argues that Mladić decided on the mass executions on the night of July 11, apparently in between the two meetings with Colonel Karremans. Zeid, could you quickly summarize what the prosecution believes, based on the evidence they accumulated. It reinforces the sense we have of the decision-making on Srebrenica as a constant push, lack of reaction, push more, lack of reaction. It is a rolling decision model that is pertinent to the lessons we draw from Srebrenica and when it is possible to push back.

controlled territory. Muslim males were detained in the so-called "white house" in Potočari, and taken to execution sites via Bratunac.

ZEID RA'AD AL HUSSEIN: You are absolutely right. The prosecutor in the Mladić case, Peter McCloskey, contended that the murder plan began to reveal itself on the night of July 11.¹⁴ They are not actually sure whether it's after the first meeting with Colonel Karremans [at 9:00 p.m.] or the second meeting [at 11:00 p.m.] when [Srebrenica civilian representative] Nesib Mandžić was also there, but they make reference in the prosecution statement to the language that Mladić used. He draws a stark binary choice of “survive, stay or vanish.”



Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein

Then he says to Nesib, “The future of your people is in your hands, bring the people who can secure the surrender of weapons and save your people from destruction. Everything is in your hands. Bring some prominent people from around here. In the words of the prosecutor, “Here we can see that Mladić is obsessed with the salvation and destruction of the Muslim people. This is no idle chatter for the camera as it was this very

¹⁴ See [Prosecutor's opening statement](#), Mladić trial, ICTY, May 17, 2012. The Prosecution case in the Mladić and other trials closely follows a “[Srebrenica Military Narrative](#),” prepared by the ICTY expert, Richard Butler. Mladić began marshaling transportation assets on the evening of July 11. BSA personnel began [separating men from women and children](#) shortly after the arrival of the first buses outside the Dutchbat compound around 1230 on July 12.

evening that Mladić and his officers [made their first decisions](#) on the plan to murder the Muslim men and boys."

The following morning [July 12], there's the third meeting with Colonel Karremans. The prosecutor notes that Lieutenant Colonel Vujadin Popović [a commander of the Drina Corps] met briefly with Captain Momir Nikolić [intelligence officer in the Bratunac Brigade] outside the Fontana hotel. Popović told Nikolić that the able bodied men in Potočari would be separated from their families and killed. Popović asked Nikolić to provide the locations in the immediate area [where the men could be temporarily detained]. They then started to look at the old brick factory.

It would therefore seem that the decision to take Srebrenica was made on July 9, and the decision to convert a strategic political plan into a mass atrocity was taken within those few hours on July 11.¹⁵ Yesterday I met with colleagues at the ICTY. They said that nothing had changed. They would not disclose their thinking on the case, but they believe this opening statement says it all. They also believe that Mladić was in a highly agitated, vengeful and highly emotional state at the time that decision was taken.

The reason we are meeting here is because of the decision that was taken that night. Could we have anticipated this emotional state and this desire to commit mass murder? Muhamed mentioned earlier today that the people of Srebrenica knew what was going to happen, but we, the internationals, were surprised and shocked by it, even though we had been working with all sides for three or four years. The question is, why were we so shocked? We should dissect the events of that evening to understand why Mladić took the decision he took.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Do you have an answer to that?

ZEID RA'AD AL HUSSEIN: I think Rupert has an answer because he told me the other night that he has a theory that could work.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Since Rupert and Carl met with Mladić shortly afterwards, perhaps they could speak to the dichotomy between what people like Muhamed were convinced was

¹⁵ See, for example, ICTY judgment in the case of General Tolimir, [paragraph 1046](#), which states that "a plan to murder the able-bodied men from the Srebrenica enclave had materialized by the morning of 12 July."

about to happen and the international community not being willing to believe it. By the way, we had a very similar discussion last year in the case of Rwanda. The Czech representative on the Security Council, Karel Kovanda, [talked about](#) “a failure of imagination.” Nobody really believed that a genocide would take place. In the case of Rwanda, they did expect massacres, but nobody on the Security Council expected the scale of the genocide that took place.

TOM BLANTON: Let me add a caveat to that. There was an expectation that the massacres would be at the level of Burundi the previous year, which was 100,000 people dead.

MICHAEL DOBBS: But Kovanda used the phrase, “a failure of imagination.” Perhaps we see something similar here.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: The assessment of what was going to happen in Srebrenica is not my personal assessment only. The process of separation [of the men trying to escape across the mountains from the women and children who sought refuge with Dutchbat] happened at a small junction, just before the gas station, on the road to Potočari. There is a small road that leads left, to the village of Sućeska. I passed by [Dutchbat’s] last position, in the center of Srebrenica, near the central mosque, on the night on July 11. The street on which I had spent most of my life was already blocked. Bullets were buzzing around when I managed to get out of that particular location.

We then took a decision. Those who cannot walk [to government-controlled territory] will die anyway. They will go with the women and children and elderly to Potočari and pray to God that some mercy would be shown to them. Everyone else who wanted to have at least some chance of survival would come with us [over the mountains]. You saw thousands of people, anyone able to walk, kids who were nine, ten years old, and whole families including women and children, everyone walking in the direction of Sućeska. They knew that going to Potočari meant certain death. When I said goodbye to my mother at that particular location, I honestly believed that I was never going to see her again. That was the feeling of most people at that particular moment in Srebrenica.

RUPERT SMITH: You can see what I thought from the report I wrote on July 13.¹⁶ I got back to my headquarters [in Sarajevo] on the evening of July 12. It took a little over twenty-four hours to get into Sarajevo from Split, going down the Mount Igman trail. It was not a quick move. Fairly early on the morning of July 13, I dictated that document [to his military assistant, Lt Col. Baxter], as much to clear my own head as to inform anyone else. Not long after that, I formed a picture of what was happening from various briefings, talking to other people, reading reports.

With hindsight, the picture isn't too wrong. I had a picture in my head of a group of armed men, the defenders of Srebrenica, withdrawing out of the pocket towards Tuzla. I have a picture of large number of refugees clustered around Col. Karremans and his battalion. There was a serious refugee problem. I have Hasan Muratović on my back beating me up because I am the UN, I have failed. He makes clear that there is going to be no help from Bosnia with these refugees, the UN must deal with them all. As soon as they come over the border with Republika Srpska, they are going up to Tuzla. Hasan makes clear to me, "They're your problem. You solve it. You caused this." I have a big argument running. I leave Hasan, go to President Izetbegović and say, "This won't work, they're your people, we've got to do this together." Slowly Hasan calms down and we get something going.

TOM BLANTON: One of your conversations with Hasan is recorded in a memorandum of your meeting with Prime Minister Silajdžić dated July 13, 1995.¹⁷

RUPERT SMITH: We need to get the logistics going, pull the helicopters together, and get the tents and everything else to Tuzla where the refugees are expected. That does not take too long. I have the staff to get it going. My immediate concerns are about Thom [Karremans] who is in the position of "[talking from the jail](#)." I then receive a message, late at night, to get myself to Belgrade.¹⁸ We go back up over Mount Igman, helicopter to Split

¹⁶ See Smith to HQ UNPF Zagreb, "[Aftermath Fall of Srebrenica](#)," HQ UNPROFOR, MHHQ 48, July 13, 1995.

¹⁷ See Capt. Emma [E.L.] Bliss, Memcon of "[Meeting Gen Smith/Prime Minister Silajdžić](#)," July 13, 1995. During the meeting, both Muratovic and Silajdžić expressed concern about "[unconfirmed reports of atrocities](#)." Muratovic agreed that all refugees be housed at Tuzla airport "because there was plenty of space and UNHCR would be unable to hide the problem from the world." Previously, Muratovic opposed the evacuation of Srebrenica residents. See Akashi to Annan, "[Situation in Srebrenica](#)," UNPROFOR Z-1142, July 12, 1995.

¹⁸ See [diary entry](#) of General Christopher Elliot, military aide to General de La Presle, ICTY, courtesy of Rupert Smith.

and then fly to Zagreb and onto Belgrade to get to the meeting with Milosević in Belgrade. I will let Carl describe the meeting as a whole. I can fill you in on my side meeting with Mladić.

Regarding the number of refugees in Srebrenica, I was about 4,000 people out in my calculations. We had been feeding less people than were actually there. There was a mismatch in our figures between men and women and children. Our calculations were about 4,000 bodies out. As a result, we were not looking for a lot of people. We thought there were about 4,000 people to find. The ICRC was also of the opinion that they were looking for about 4,000 people. I thought most of these missing people were in Bratunac.

When I talked with Mladić in Belgrade [on July 14-15], I asked for access for ICRC and UNHCR to the area in general. I also asked for the ICRC in particular to be given access to the 4,000 prisoners that I believed were held in Bratunac. We did not have the proper picture at this time.¹⁹ I had an idea in my head of a breakout by an armed military force in a war. I was not too fussed if the Bosnians did not want to defend their positions in Srebrenica and were withdrawing to Tuzla. It was their war, and that was their problem. They decided to go there. My focus was on the refugees, access to prisoners, and what to do with Dutchbat. How do we get them out? That was where I was by the time I got on the road to meet with everybody in Belgrade and Zagreb.

Based on what I later learned from the courts and so on, my theory is that Mladić and his officers convince themselves that they have a sizable force, much bigger than I think it is, loose in their rear area. Their tiny military minds get very upset with the idea that this force is threatening their defenses from the rear. They do not have enough people

¹⁹ Estimates of the number of missing men from Srebrenica following its July 11 capture by the Bosnian Serbs were confused. A July 13, 1995 cable from Akashi to New York, based on information from UNHCR Special Envoy Anne Willem Bijleveld in Tuzla noted that the fate of “4,000 males of draft age” awaiting screening in Bratunac was of “obvious concern to everyone here.” See Akashi to Annan, “Situation in Srebrenica,” Z-1154, July 13, 1995, [paragraph 2](#). The State Department’s press guidance of July 14 expressed concern over the fate of “[up to 3,000 men and boys](#)” held in the Bratunac area. A UNPROFOR Sector NE report from July 17, 1995, reported that “[up to three thousand](#)” Muslim men had been killed en route to Tuzla, and a further 2,000-3,000 taken to a stadium in Bratunac. UN human rights commission envoy Tadeusz Mazowiecki told journalists on July 24 after a visit to Tuzla that “some 7,000 people from Srebrenica” were missing and “[an enormous number of crimes](#)” had occurred.

Bosnian Serb estimates of the captured men were significantly higher than the official UN estimates. A July 13 intercept of a conversation between unidentified Bosnian Serb officers refers to “[about 6,000](#)” male prisoners captured from the attempted breakout, in addition to the 1,000-2,000 male refugees from Potočari transferred to Bratunac.

to deal with this threat and take care of these prisoners, as well as what is going on around Sarajevo and their offensive into Žepa. The simple solution is: kill the prisoners.

MICHAEL DOBBS: It is very difficult to get into Mladić's head, but he did [say when he entered Srebrenica](#) [on July 11], "The time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region." There may have been a mixture of rational thinking, as you describe it, and a simple thirst for revenge.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: I have to disagree. The killings of Srebrenica prisoners did not happen only on July 11, 12, or 15. It took me 37 days to fight my way out. There were killings every day. If someone wanted to just kill a few thousand people and get rid of them, they did not have to chase us around for months and kill everyone they found. No one was arrested and no one was exchanged. The notion that they killed the prisoners because it was a practical thing to do and they had insufficient personnel to guard the prisoners does not comport with my own experience. For me, these executions were the final step in the ethnic cleansing process in [eastern] Bosnia-Herzegovina. Žepa was to go and Goražde as well. Anyone who was found was exterminated.

Anyone captured even a month after the fall of Srebrenica [on July 11] was killed. I found hundreds of people [on Udrc mountain], which is on the way to Zvornik. They had tried to get through to Tuzla. The Serbs built positions not only facing the Bosnian Army in Tuzla but positions facing the incoming group of people from Srebrenica. Those who survived those killings came back to Udrc. I made the craziest decision I have ever made then, but a decision that obviously saved my life. I decided to walk back to Srebrenica. I was twenty years old, and I recruited six other youngsters to join me. These six people were fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen.



Durakovic's 37-day trek to freedom

We were crazy enough to come up with the idea to walk back into Srebrenica, the heart of the ongoing genocide. Everyone I left in Udrč, all my neighbors, all my friends, all my schoolmates, were too exhausted to go back to Srebrenica. It did not make any sense: they were already half way to Tuzla, they would either make it or break it. They decided to stay there and have never been seen since. The execution parties and search parties eventually caught up with them somewhere, took them to execution sites, and killed them. The Srebrenica killings went on for two months, even three months. There are reports of people who came out alive from Srebrenica six months after the fall of Srebrenica.

CARL BILDT: We can all have our theories of what actually happened, but it's speculation. We don't know exactly what was in Mladić's mind. I have my ideas, not too dissimilar to what Rupert is saying. But let us go through my part in the political talks that were taking place at that time. I had been in Belgrade previously [on July 7] and met Milosević to

negotiate the Contact Group sanctions re-imposition formula. I had also been asked to engage more on the enclaves issues. I was focused somewhat more on Sarajevo than on the eastern enclaves because there were 400,000 people who were running out of food. The UN forces were not able to resupply over Igman and reach UNHCR and WFP, and the others.



Carl Bildt, left, with Cameron Hudson and Abiodun Williams

We had a restriction on the political talks that we could conduct. When I met with President Izetbegović in Sarajevo, he was very firm that we should not talk to the Pale leadership. Formally speaking, I was an EU representative so my line of command (if there was such a thing was at that time) was to the Spanish, who had taken over the presidency of the EU from the French on July 1. I was also in frequent contact with Dick Holbrooke. The US had de facto backed off all political talks at that time, so I was the only channel they had. Since we could not talk to Pale, which was a slight disadvantage, we decided to see if we could split the Serb leadership and engage with Mladić.

We knew that Mladić was under military strain. He had long lines, he was lacking soldiers, he was urging us all to arrange a ceasefire, he wanted to close down the war,

needless to say on his terms. This was the reason why, prior to the meeting in Belgrade on July 7, we had sent a message to Milosević (I can't remember through which channel) saying that it would be interesting to see Mladić if he passes by. According to my notes, the July 7 meeting was one of those usual meetings with Milosević which lasted nine hours. You went back and forth over everything, over endless Serb meals. Towards the end of that session, I had a conversation with Mladić in the evening. I was keen to listen to him to discover the mood of the man, the mindset of the man, but the substance dealt with the enclaves. According to my notes at the time, I mentioned his strangulation of the enclaves.

There were some other issues related to inter-Serb rivalries, both the tension between Mladić and Karadžić and the rather acute tension between Milosević and Mladić. There was a [partial] Yugoslav blockade of Republika Srpska, which hit them quite hard, primarily on two issues, beer and cigarettes. This might sound trivial today, but beer and cigarettes are important for the morale of an army. The Bosnian Army controlled the Sarajevo tobacco factory, which was in operation and proved a strategic asset. There were no breweries whatsoever in Republika Srpska territory. A fairly minor issue you might think, but Milosević and Mladić spent quite a bit of time on it.

I returned to Belgrade on Friday, July 14. By that time, of course, it was obvious that Srebrenica was on the top of the agenda. You have Mladić's notes of his meeting on the evening of July 14 with Milosević, Bildt, and General de La Presle and July 15 with General Smith.²⁰ There was also a UK diplomat present, David Austin, but he is not indicated. You also have Akashi's notes from the July 15 meeting that included Akashi, Bildt, Stoltenberg, and Milosević, as well as Mladić.²¹ There are some differences between the accounts, but essentially they say the same thing. On both days, we brought up the [question of access to Srebrenica](#) for UNHCR and ICRC. We were aware of the fact that men and boys had been separated from the women and the children who had gone to Kladanj. They still held the men.

Of course, the Serbs would say "military men." The definition of "military age" was somewhat liberal, to put it mildly. They claimed these men were prisoners of war.

²⁰ Ratko Mladić, "[Meeting with Milosević, Bildt and General de La Presle](#)," personal diary, July 14, 1995, 2115 hours. Mladić, "[Meeting with UN and Milosević](#)," July 15, 1995.

²¹ Akashi to Annan, "[Meeting in Belgrade](#)," UNPF-HQ, Z-1175, July 17, 1995.

As you can see Mladić approved, in his own handwriting, the [principle](#) of “ICRC access to prisoners of war.” I still find it strange that he takes notes of this. There are many mysteries here. The most difficult aspect of our discussions turned out to be the resupply of UN forces inside Sarajevo, notably the French, who had already started to shoot back against the Serbs, primarily with their heavy mortars. The French were starting to run out of ammunition inside Sarajevo and wanted to resupply. Mladić was not keen to allow us to have free resupply of ammunition to the UN forces. We insisted and eventually he, under strong pressure also from Milosević, agreed to open up the route via Kiseljak.

Things were also happening at the UN. Under the pressure of a Security Council resolution, the Secretary-General instructed Mr. Akashi to retake Srebrenica.²² The immediate action that Boutros-Ghali took was to instruct Mr. Stoltenberg to go to Pale and hold talks with the Pale leadership.²³ We considered this to be a major mistake and managed to stop it. That is why Mr. Akashi, Mr. Stoltenberg, and General Smith were called to the [follow up meeting](#) with Milosević and Mladić in Belgrade on Saturday morning.

There was also the question of how to re-establish a dialogue between Generals Mladić and Smith, which had broken off with the air strikes against the Pale ammunition dumps on May 25-26. We were meeting in the former Tito hunting lodge at Dobanovci, outside Belgrade. There was a discussion between the generals, who included General Smith, General Mladić, General de La Presle, and General Elliot. I was there for part of this fairly heavy discussion. One of the questions discussed, needless to say, was the release of the Dutch hostages. At the time, this meeting was highly secret, which meant that the agreement we concluded, primarily on the resupply of Sarajevo, was not made public. Instead, a meeting was set up between General Smith and General Mladić on July 19.²⁴ They

²² UNSC Resolution 1004, passed on July 12, 1994, [states](#) that the Secretary-General should “use all resources available to him to restore the status as defined by the Agreement of 18 April 1993 of the safe area of Srebrenica in accordance with the mandate of UNPROFOR...”

²³ Ratko Mladić, [“Meeting with UN and Milosević,”](#) July 15, 1995.

²⁴ See Baxter to UNPF Zagreb, [“Meeting Notes,”](#) Commander HQ UNPROFOR, July 19, 1995. Mladić agreed to provide ICRC representatives with access to the prisoner reception points [“by the end of 20 July,”](#) a promise that he failed to honor. The ICRC was not permitted access to detention centers until the end of July, when they were granted access to the Batkovic camp in northeastern Bosnia, as well as “a number of empty detention centres in the Bratunac area”. According to the UN Srebrenica report, they were only able to [“register 164 prisoners from Srebrenica.”](#) For Mladić account, see [diary entry for July 15, 1995](#). Akashi raised the question of the Srebrenica missing with Milosevic on August 12, repeating demands for ICRC access to the detainees. Milosevic agreed that

were supposed to deliver on everything at that meeting, which was meant to be officially reported. This was part of our strategy of splitting the Pale leadership. We wanted to keep the Mladić channel as secret as we could from the Pale leadership.

TOM BLANTON: So you negotiated full access to the area for UNHCR and ICRC on July 15, but wait until July 19 to work out the specifics? Was it not supposed to be immediate access?

CARL BILDT: It was immediate. The July 19 meeting dealt more with Sarajevo access.

RUPERT SMITH: There's nothing I disagree with, I just want to flesh this out slightly. My memory is helped [by an entry of the diary of General Elliot](#), who was at the time military assistant to General de La Presle.²⁵ My memory is that we went straight to the meeting in the [Dobanovci] hunting lodge. I was by impressed by how clearly Mladić and Milosević were as one, using familiar terms to address each other. This was a close relationship. The generals were then sent into a corner "to deal with the modalities," in the usual phrase. However much Mr. Mladić agreed on the night before, as you can see from his notes, we went straight back into argument on the morning of July 15.

TOM BLANTON: About the access?

RUPERT SMITH: About how we do all this. I will quote [some notes from our discussion on July 15](#). "General Mladić was in an expansive, good humored, confident mood following the fall of Srebrenica. General Smith was cool, correct and stuck to the point. Mladić never once referred to Karadžić, nor the need to pass any decisions arrived at through Pale. During the first discussions Mladić stated that the use of air power was unjustified and 'a terrible thing.' He returned to this many times and demanded that General Smith forswear its use. Mladić was told that the use of air power was in his hands. If he gave no reason for it, it wouldn't be used. If he did, it would be. General Smith was resolute on this, even when it

Mladić "[must stick to his promises](#)," but said he was "having difficulties" communicating with Mladić. See Akashi to Annan, "The missing population from Srebrenica," [Z-1416](#), August 14, 1995.

²⁵ See Gen. Christopher Elliot [diary entry](#), ICTY, courtesy of Rupert Smith. Elliot was military assistant to General Bertrand de La Presle, an advisor to French President Jacques Chirac and former UNPROFOR commander.

looked as though it might derail the whole discussions (which, I have to say, had the rest of the audience sitting on the edge of their seats). This is just to flesh out the point that Carl's just made. "Mladić deferred, each time, eventually – as a result, the [deterrence of air power was repaired](#) to some degree."

Quoting again from the document, "the other sticking point was freedom of movement for UNPROFOR convoys." Mladić talks about Žepa and says he is not going to attack Goražde. He [gives](#) "a detailed account of the taking of Srebrenica, almost appealing for admiration or sympathy."

So we have this quite irritated argument and discussion on how we do this, but finish up with [those heads of agreement](#) fleshed out in a document that we then take back to the lunch which occurs about four in the afternoon. They receive a stamp of approval and we [Smith and Mladić] are told to meet again on July 19.

You will see in this document that, as they fly back to Zagreb (I am not there but I am being talked about), Bildt expresses concern that "General Smith might stick so closely to his principles next Wednesday [July 19] that a solution with Mladić will not emerge." There is [concern](#) that "General Smith would escalate, not negotiate, leading to a war." There was a debate about this. De La Presle makes a comment that it was wrong for me not to be in communication with Mladić since March. As a result of this, Elliot [says](#) that Smith needs "correct political guidance." We arrange a link so that Carl and I are communicating. For the first time, I'm being connected with a political process. Carl, have I got that memory right about the communications?

CARL BILD: Absolutely. Just to expand on that, I was an EU representative operating closely together with the UN representative, Thorvald Stoltenberg. That gave me access into the UN system, although they were separate. I reported to the EU Presidency. The US role was fairly significant. I had an US diplomat with me for communications. We had a security problem when we were in Belgrade which meant that we used the facilities of the US Embassy. We met in the secure room of the US Embassy for all of our internal deliberations. We also had a secure link to Holbrooke at the State Department to make certain that he was in the picture.

We also had a link set up in case there were problems with the agreement for the resupply of Sarajevo, which Mladić profoundly disliked [but Milosević accepted]. The French military set up a satellite link between Belgrade, where I was, and where Rupert was, somewhere out in the mountains of Bosnia. It was to be used to put Milosević in communication with Mladić if Mladić started to backtrack on what had been agreed. That did not happen. Mladić did not backtrack at that meeting, but we were preparing for the eventuality.

TOM BLANTON: By the time the ICRC or anybody else got to Bratunac, what was there? None of that agreement was honored?

RUPERT SMITH: Bits were. Dutchbat came out. That was part of that agreement. But access to the area was not honored until the end of July. We met again on July 25.²⁶ The memo states that “Mladić confirmed that he would [allow ICRC access to Srebrenica](#) although we understand this is still to take place.” By July 25, we still have not had that access that was promised on July 15 and July 19.

TOM BLANTON: In effect, he has stalled the negotiation continuously.

HASAN MURATOVIĆ: I would like to come back to the question of refugees. As Mr. Karremans and Mr. Nicolai said, things went much faster than anybody expected at that time. What was the Bosnian government position and what I was doing? I tried to put all pressure and all responsibility on the UN. We had no access to Srebrenica. Only UNPROFOR had any access. We expected UNPROFOR to organize itself and start doing something about the refugees in Srebrenica. My supposition was they had helicopters, APCs, transportation, and very good connections with all humanitarian organizations. We thought they would go there, and organize the transport of people to free territory.

TOM BLANTON: Colonel Karremans is shaking his head.

²⁶ See Baxter, “[Meeting notes General Smith/General Mladić 25 July](#),” UNPROFOR Commander, July 26, 1995.

HASAN MURATOVIĆ: I always pressed for transportation by UNPROFOR. I thought that Dutchbat was stronger than they were in reality. I did not expect them to be in the position in which they were. I thought they could stop the transportation [by the Bosnian Serbs]. I insisted that people be transported by air, by helicopters. We put pressure on UNPROFOR to bring in their transportation resources for the transportation of refugees. I knew they had transportation resources. We did not expect Mladić to organize the transports so quickly himself. I ran between General Smith, Ambassador Menzies of the United States, and Tuzla. They provided me transport by helicopter or by APC. I ran to Tuzla, came back.



Hasan Muratović, with Zlatko Lagumdžija, L

We expected the refugees to arrive in Kladanj. Although I said at that time, that we were not responsible for the refugees and the UN has to place them in Tuzla airport, you will see from these reports that we [housed many more refugees than UNPROFOR](#).²⁷ I knew that this was going to be a problem later on. They could have asked other countries to take

²⁷ For details on handling of refugees and collection centers, see Biser to Moussalli, "[Srebrenica/Tuzla Update](#)," July 17, 1995.

refugees (transporting them out of Tuzla airport) which would have been much easier for us than if they were scattered around Bosnia-Herzegovina. As for those that left Srebrenica and were on their way through the forests to Tuzla, I kept calling Ambassador Menzies, telling him, “The sky is clear, it's a sunny day, you have APCs, satellites, planes. Please track what has happened to the thousands of people moving from Srebrenica to Tuzla.” How come they did not know anything about such a mass of people?

I had two major problems to deal with. One was tracking what happened to the people who left Srebrenica. The second was how to bring those that were in Srebrenica to free territory. When I was in Tuzla, I was assisted by UNPROFOR in getting a phone call to one of our translators from Dutchbat in Srebrenica. I told him, “You must take all possible care with Dutchbat not to allow people to get on buses or trucks organized by Mladić.” He told me, “I cannot do anything, they are already entering the buses.” That was at the time when the transportation started.

In his book, Mr. Akashi said that I did not receive him very nicely when he came to Sarajevo.²⁸ [*Laughter*] I always fought with UNPROFOR. Not with all of them. I separate the humanitarian side of the UN, which was irreplaceable and recognized by the Bosnian government, from the military side, which failed completely.

TOM BLANTON: Colonel Karremans, you wanted to respond briefly here?

THOM KARREMANS: Yes, I would like to respond. First, concerning your remark about trucks and vehicles, I had no diesel from March 1995. This made it necessary to restrict use of my APCs and trucks. If there was a diesel transport through Zvornik, Mladić or his men stole it. That was the case for many, many months. I used the diesel from UNHCR, as I told you yesterday. I needed diesel for my communications system, for my radios, and also for the generators. We literally lived in the dark from March onwards. I extracted diesel from my trucks and APCs. The only vehicles that could be driven were my jeeps. That was it. There was no way we could transport 25,000 refugees. Second, Mladić offered me the

²⁸ Yasushi Akashi, *In the Valley Between War and Peace*, 26-27. Akashi wrote he was “shocked” by the “vehemence” displayed by Muratovic during a visit to Sarajevo in January 1994, and the “extreme” severity of the criticism of the UN by the Bosnian government.

possibility before Srebrenica fell of [leaving the safe area with my battalion](#).²⁹ I said “No, I will not do that, because there are still wounded people here.”

ZEID RA'AD AL HUSSEIN: When talking to the prosecutors at the ICTY, from what I could understand, Mladić was guided by the same logic during those three days, July 13-15, as before. A decision was taken on the night of July 11 was to execute the [military-aged] men in Potočari.

Mladić did not know the size of the column [attempting the breakout], how many people were making their way out. As they attacked the rear of the column, more and more men identified themselves. The Bosnian Serbs discovered (1) they were not being exposed, because day by day the UN was not saying anything, and (2) in the meeting on July 15 in Belgrade, it was clear that we did not know what they were doing.

They felt they were getting away with it. Since they were getting away with it, and they were doing it efficiently, they just continued the business of mass killing. This logic continues all the way through. They must have been surprised to a certain degree because the bodies were on display at certain locations. Mladić was there, driving up and down, but the UN did not know that this was going on. The same logic is still in application.

We have not discussed what happened in Croatia, during the fall of Western Slavonia in May 1995.³⁰ It is interesting as the reverse of what happened after Srebrenica. The Croatians took the area away from the Serbs. That operation also involved buses provided by the Croatians where the Serbs were separated but later found. There were no mass executions in that case. Mladić was disturbed by this operation. At the back of his mind, in organizing buses to cart off people, there may have been an echo of what he understood had happened in Croatia to the north.

²⁹ See Bosnian Serb “[ultimatum](#)” to Dutchbat, recorded by Major Franken.

³⁰ The Croatian army recaptured the Serb breakaway region of Western Slavonia in May 1995 during “Operation Flash.” According to a July 1995 Human Rights Watch report, the Croats detained “[approximately 1,500 Serbs](#)” of draft age. While some Serbs were mistreated initially, the ICRC was able to gain access to the detainees, who were eventually released. The report described allegations of “massive” human rights abuses by UN officials, including Akashi, as “[unfortunate and premature](#).”

TOM BLANTON: This brings us to the question of what we knew, and when did we know it. As reported in *The Independent* on July 17, Belgrade television screened a video on July 14 which includes a few frames of a pile of bodies outside the Kravica warehouse near Srebrenica.



Based on that video, the Belgrade correspondent of *The Independent*, Robert Block, wrote a story headlined “[Bodies pile up in horror of Srebrenica](#),” which also mentioned abortive attempts by the ICRC to visit Bratunac and the [separation of men and women](#).³¹

On July 18, Akashi receives a note from Annan (signed by Shashi Tharoor) in New York asking about “widespread and consistent” reports of atrocities committed by the Bosnian Serbs following the takeover of Srebrenica.³² He [complains](#) that we have “received nothing on the subject from UNPROFOR.” Akashi responds on July 19, estimating the total number of “unaccounted” as between 4,000-8,000.³³ The response also [notes](#) that the BSA “still refuse to grant ICRC access to detainees.”

³¹ See Robert Block, “[Bodies pile up in horror of Srebrenica](#),” *The Independent*, July 17, 1995.

³² Annan to Akashi, “[Human Rights Violations by Bosnian Serbs](#),” UN 2381, July 18, 1995.

³³ Akashi to Annan, “[Disposition of Displaced Persons from Srebrenica](#),” UNPF-HQ, Z-1198, July 19, 1995.

I would like to ask Mr. Akashi about this response. It is a mathematical response rather than a response dealing with the kind of account published in *The Independent*. It is an analysis of the numbers missing, emphasizing “the imprecise nature of these figures.”

Shashi Tharoor, you are hearing from the media and credible observers, including UNHCR. Could you comment on that and this message? Mr. Akashi, could you comment on the reply and collection of evidence?

SHASHI THAROOR: We were obviously in daily and frequent contact with UNPROFOR while all of this was unraveling. When the men and boys were separated, we recommended that we have an UNPROFOR armed person on board each bus to ensure that no harm was done to them. This was a phone conversation. That turned out not to be practical because the Serbs would not agree to it. We did not realize that UNPROFOR itself was disarmed when we gave that idea to them. In any case, from the next day onwards, stories of massacres started appearing. They started with media reports, and we also got information from some of the permanent missions in New York, including the US mission. We were worried that we were getting nothing at all from our own people. We wanted to get the record straight as the Security Council was clamoring for an authoritative briefing. We were getting lurid accounts in the papers and nothing we could tell the Council. That is what this request was all about.

TOM BLANTON: Mr. Akashi, how did you read that request and what reports did you have at that time?

YASUSHI AKASHI: We had bits of information which we were trying to piece together. As you can see from our response, it was a desperate process assembling all this into a fax to get down to the truth of the matter. I got a different impression of Mladić from the meeting with Milosević on July 15 from Rupert, who described Mladić as “[expansive](#),” I believe.³⁴ I observed Mladić closely and thought he looked completely different from his usual, self-confident self. Rupert was calm and rational, but Mladić's mood changed suddenly from cool to excited and agitated. He was losing his usual composure. I thought something must

³⁴ The “[expansive, good humored, confident](#)” description of Mladić came from General Elliot, not General Smith.

have happened to him in the preceding days. In hindsight, very drastic things had been happening. My impression of Mladić on July 15 was that something was amiss but I could not make out the reason for his unusual attitude.

TOM BLANTON: The moment, at least on the US side, when it becomes crystal clear is the [July 25, 1995 cable](#) from Ambassador Galbraith in Zagreb [forwarded to Tony Lake and other NSC officials by Sandy Vershbow], which was based on refugee accounts compiled by [UN official] Tone Bringa in Tuzla.³⁵ Tone, can you just briefly describe how that story reached Peter, because it certainly woke up Washington?



Tone Bringa, right, with Peter Galbraith

TONE BRINGA: Can I encourage you not to lose sight of the ideology that motivated and justified Mladić's actions? There is something called "priming" when you look at the steps in a genocide. Mladić had been priming his own Serb population in preparing for genocide. I do not know if the people who worked at UNPROFOR read the "Prijeedor report" by the UN

³⁵ Galbraith to SecState, "[Possible Mass Execution of Srebrenica Males is reason to save Žepa](#)," AmEmbassy Zagreb, Zagreb 02788, July 25, 1995. NSC official Sandy Vershbow forwarded the Galbraith cable to the NSC advisor, Tony Lake, and his deputy, Sandy Berger, the same day with the comment, "[the fact of Serb mass killings at Srebrenica is becoming increasingly clear. Grim reading.](#)"

Commission of Experts and the conclusions they drew.³⁶ The report qualified the events in Prijedor district after April 30, 1992, which were illustrative of the larger dynamics in Bosnia, as “[crimes against humanity](#).” It predicted that an international court would rule that “these events constitute genocide.” What was taking place in Srebrenica did not appear out of nowhere. I needed to say that.

Concerning the July 25 Galbraith cable, I was working for the Analysis and Assessment Unit in Akashi's office, UNPF HQ in Zagreb. I was exasperated at the time by what I perceived as a sense of business as usual at the HQ while all this was going on. We heard reports, but what mostly triggered me to act in some way was all these women arriving as refugees to Tuzla, saying, “Where are our men? We want our men, where are they?” We waited. A week passed and they didn't turn up. I thought, “What can I do, I'm an anthropologist, maybe I can go there and talk to people and maybe pick up something.” I asked permission to go to Tuzla. I then learned that some human rights officers were going to Tuzla. In fact, they are mentioned in the July 19 cable from Akashi to Annan, replying to the question “what are you planning to do?” Akashi [says](#), we're sending UN officers “with specific human rights training.” I went with them.

There were two human rights officers, Peggy Hicks and Grace Kang. We went to the UN base there [at Tuzla airport]. They asked over the loud speakers for anyone to come forward who had just arrived from Srebrenica. We did not wait long when a man came running. He was very agitated. He said, “I'm looking for my wife and children, I can't find them but I have to talk to you first, I have to talk to the UN, I have something to tell you.” Peggy Hicks then said that Grace Kang should talk to him. I sat in on that interview.³⁷ The way they work, they have a checklist and ask very specific questions. Since I understand Bosnian, I was able to listen directly to what the man said, without the help of the interpreter. It was very clear to me that he was speaking the truth. A human rights officer is always concerned with credibility. They have dealt with people who make up stories. As

³⁶ The UN released a summary of the “Prijedor report” on May 24, 1994. See “[Final report of the commission of experts established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 \(1992\)](#),” S/1994/674, particularly [paragraph 182](#). The Intelligence and Research bureau of the State Department had issued warnings about “attempted genocide of Bosnian Muslims” as early as January 1993. See Mulholland to Kanter, “[Bosnia: Actions contributing to Genocide](#),” US Department of State, January 11, 1993.

³⁷ The interview took place on July 22. See Grace Kang, “[Report of Human Rights Violations](#),” July 22, 1995.

this man's story unfolded, however, I had a terrible realization about the fate of the missing boys and men of Srebrenica. I realized that this mass killing of unimaginable proportions had taken place and that he was just one of a handful of survivors.³⁸

I had no doubt that his story was true and that he was talking from personal experience. He was very concentrated as he spoke. His language was factual and to the point, his descriptions were detailed, he was citing specific place names and giving the exact chronology of events. It was not the kind of vague statement that I often had seen from people who were reporting things they heard on the news. He showed me [the marks of the rope around his wrists](#), and a graze to his temple caused by a gunshot wound. That was the bullet that was meant for him. He survived because he was protected by dead bodies falling on top of him. They dug these ditches that they then fell into. That night, he heard somebody else's voice, the voice of another survivor. They escaped in the night to the safe area.

I returned by helicopter back to Zagreb with Grace Kang and implored her, "Do you realize the enormity of what you just heard? Do you realize what this story means? Please write a strongly worded report and make sure it doesn't end up in a drawer at the UN." By then I knew how these reports were often watered down and maybe ended up in some drawer. Peggy Hicks wrote the report back in Zagreb.³⁹ She also had another survivor story, as far as I can remember.

³⁸ The 35-year-old survivor is referred to as "O.H." in an August 3, 1995 cable from Galbraith. [AmEmbassy Zagreb to SecState, "[Human Rights abuses – Srebrenica](#)," Zagreb 02953, August 3, 1995]. According to the initial July 25 cable, the man survived a mass execution on July 14, 1995 by [hiding beneath a pile of bodies](#). A Bosnian army [military intelligence document dated July 20, 1995](#) stated that Osman Halilovic, aged 35, and Nedzad Avdic, aged 17, had "[crossed our defence lines into the free territory](#)" on July 18, 1995. The two men described how they were [captured in the Konjević Polje/Nova Kasaba area](#) on July 12 and taken on July 14 to [a mass execution site at a dam near the village of Petkovci](#), 35 kilometers to the north. The place names in the initial Galbraith cable were confused, sometimes erroneous, and only clarified as the result of a subsequent investigation by ICTY.

³⁹ Peggy Hicks was a member of the Human Rights Office, reporting to the head of Civil Affairs, Michel Moussalli. Moussalli forwarded the report to Akashi on July 31. See Moussalli to Akashi, "[Srebrenica human rights report](#)," July 31, 1995. Akashi forwarded the report to Annan in New York on August 12, in code cable [Z-1406](#), in response to Annan's request for further information about alleged atrocities committed by the Bosnian Serbs. See Annan to Akashi, "[Srebrenica: Investigation](#)," New York 2665, August 10, 1995. The Annan cable was triggered in part by a [presentation by Madeleine Albright](#) to the UN Security Council, identifying possible mass graves.

Hicks had earlier sent a July 21 memo to Moussalli, "[Recommendation Concerning Srebrenica Missing and Detained](#)", that urged the Security Council to focus "[urgent](#)" attention on "the issue of the missing and detained from Srebrenica." See also Biser to Moussalli, "[Sector Northeast Human Rights Update](#)," July 21, 1995.

As I read her report, I remember that my hands fell down on the table with the paper. This must have been the rock bottom of my time at the UN. I was completely despondent because the report talked about accounts that were still “unconfirmed and unsubstantiated.” I thought, “What do I do?” My first thought was, “I’ll take this report and go straight into my boss, Akashi, next door, and resign on the spot.” But I was a completely insignificant person and it would have had no consequence whatsoever. I was concerned that the report should reach someone who would realize the implication of it and then act. People didn’t act then. That evening, I had dinner with Peter, who I’d gotten to know as a person who acted. I told him about what I’d heard and said to him, “Please do something.”

MICHAEL DOBBS: Peter’s cable got the attention of the White House. It was circulated by Sandy Vershbow who wanted to join us today but was unable to. Sandy was Jenonne's successor as Director of European Affairs at the National Security Council. So the alarm bells went off in Washington?

TOM BLANTON: And triggered the road to Dayton, no?

PETER GALBRAITH: It got the attention of people at the top although you can see that some people were probably tired of my recommendations.

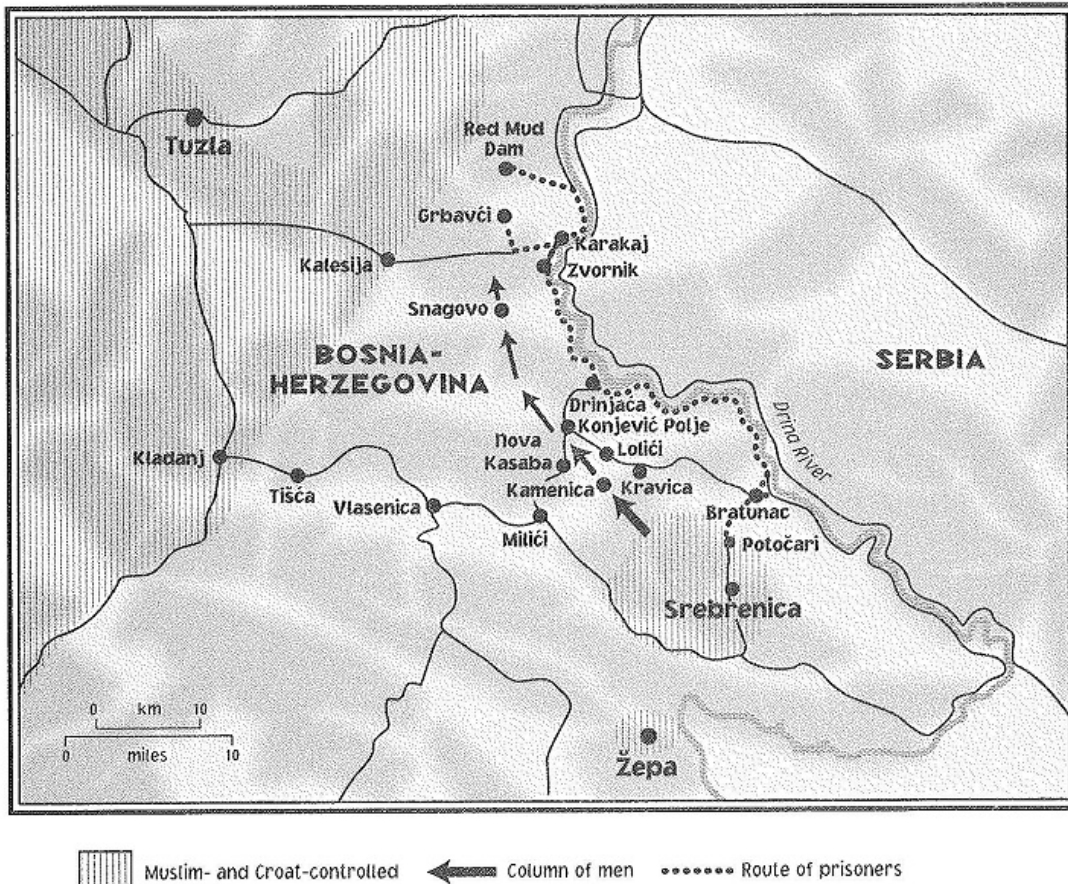
TOM BLANTON: There is a [line](#) in here, “Whatever you think of Galbraith’s recommendation re Žepa...”⁴⁰

PETER GALBRAITH: That was probably a common reaction to my cables to the extent that they were read. The cable mentions a place, Konjević Polje, which enabled people to look for satellite photographs that matched up with the dates. I have subsequently learned that this may not have been the place where the mass execution described by the survivor took

⁴⁰ Galbraith urged the US government to act “[to prevent a similar tragedy at Žepa](#).” Žepa fell to the Serbs two days later, on July 27, 1995.

place.⁴¹ The cable also triggered the mission by John Shattuck, which reinforced the whole thing.

COLUMN AND CONVOY ROUTES, JULY 14, 1995



I think that the question here, to be honest, is about the UN. My understanding is that the Peggy Hicks report was a compilation of refugee accounts rather than one story. It was written in a way that was so qualified it was not going to attract attention.

What surprises me is that there was not a team out collecting these stories right from the beginning. I know that our own embassy had people out in the refugee camps all the time. You had many more resources than we did. When the story came in, you have the

⁴¹ The July 25 and August 3 Galbraith cables erroneously reported that the [mass execution described by the survivor took place at Konjević Polje](#), when in fact it took place at Petkovci dam, 35 kilometers away. This led CIA analysts to focus their original search for evidence of mass graves along a five kilometer stretch of road between Konjević Polje and Nova Kasaba, rather than Petkovci dam. ICTY investigators later discovered [the remains of 33 individuals](#) buried at the Nova Kasaba/ Konjević Polje site, far fewer than the [809 sets of remains](#) associated with the executions at Petkovci dam. See Dusan Janc, "[Update to the Summary of Forensic Evidence](#)," April 21, 2010.

head of your human rights unit saying, “I have to downplay this because of the head of the mission.” The question is: why? My suspicion is that you knew there were different views between the Americans and the UN and did not want to inflame the Americans. Is that a correct assumption? It might inflame Madeleine Albright.

YASUSHI AKASHI: I have not thought about the things you have just mentioned. It never occurred to me.

JOHN SHATTUCK: I can just carry this a little bit further. Peter called me probably even before this cable was received in the White House. I wasn't under instructions to follow up on his message but it was obviously very compelling. I immediately started working to try to get out there. The background was that I was frustrated by the [inability to get the kind of information](#) that normally one gets from the ICRC and UNHCR about the missing men after the fall of Srebrenica almost two weeks earlier.⁴² I had tried through [ICRC president] Cornelius Sommaruga, with whom I was working closely on other matters, to see what ICRC might have. They had nothing. They said they hadn't been given access to the area. The same was true for UNHCR.

The first tangible information came from Peter's phone call and Tone's trip. I started trying to go out right away, literally that day. I thought it was extremely important, but the “atmospherics” were difficult. Neither the White House nor the State Department would clear my trip right away because of the rather delicate negotiations and discussions that were underway in London with the troop contributing nations. The feeling was that nothing should be further spotlighted on what was going on in Srebrenica.⁴³

I had further difficulty with diplomatic security which would not clear my trip for a couple of days. All of this was cleared up because of the interventions of Madeleine

⁴² See Shattuck to The Secretary, [“Defense of the Safe Areas in Bosnia,”](#) Information Memorandum, July 19, 1995. Shattuck cited “credible reports of summary executions” and reported that “tens of thousands of people” had not been accounted for.

⁴³ Senior officials from 16 NATO countries, including the United States, plus Russia met in London on July 22 to forge a common policy on Bosnia. The meeting ended with threats of NATO air strikes if the Serbs attacked Goražde. See Michael Dobbs and Fred Barbash, [“Allies warn Serbs to avoid Goražde,”](#) Washington Post, July 23, 1995.

Albright, Richard Holbrooke, and Warren Christopher.⁴⁴ The Secretary of State had been quite ambivalent about Bosnia but realized the importance of this trip. When I got to Zagreb, I met with Tone and obviously Peter, and got further information from them. We decided immediately that I should go to Tuzla and try to find more of these men, not only the one that Tone met, but others. I spent a day and a half there, talking to several survivors including [a 55-year-old crippled bricklayer] Hurem Suljic, who became my principal witness.⁴⁵ I was able very quickly to credit his report because of the specificity of the information he provided and the wounds that he had suffered, including grazing wound on his temple, when he fell into a pit with bodies. There were at least two others with similar accounts.



Hurem Suljic, CNN interview

There was one remarkable thing that I remember he said, which was Mladić's behavior throughout this time. Mladić came and addressed the men as they were being rounded up. Each time he assured them that they would eventually be able to leave. He said

⁴⁴ Holbrooke viewed Shattuck's trip as "an important opportunity to assert some basic truths", but insisted on "close coordination" over his press statements to ensure that "John's brief can be separated from, but reinforce, our negotiations." See undated "[Msg for Amb G\[albraith\] from A/S Holbrooke](#)", Galbraith papers, NDU.

⁴⁵ See Spiegel/Shattuck to SecState, "[Shattuck Mission to Bosnia](#)," US mission Geneva 005948, August 2, 1995. The "[55-year-old crippled man](#)" in the cable is a reference to the bricklayer Hurem Suljic whose crippled condition made it impossible for him to join the breakout attempt. He sought refuge with Dutchbat in Potočari, and was taken to Bratunac following the separation of the men from the women and children. His survival of a mass execution near the town of Orahovac on July 14 is described in Rohde, *Endgame*, 298-300.

they were being held as prisoners and he was trying to calm them. To me that indicated a high degree of intentionality on his part. As someone who had gathered a lot of evidence related to ethnic cleansing and earlier genocidal events like Prijedor, I understood this as an extension of what had happened earlier in the war. This was not something completely different from what had been going on in Bosnia up until then, or indeed Croatia. It is important for the record to stress that the novelty of Srebrenica was the scale of the killing (at least 7,000 men, the largest genocide in Europe since the Second World War), not the nature of it, which was part of the overall ethnic cleansing campaign.

[After I returned to Washington] I was contacted by a young CIA officer who informed me that he and several others of his colleagues had seen the cables that I had filed. They took it upon themselves to determine whether there were aerial photographs connected with the names and places that I had described in the cables. It was through their efforts to identify aerial photographs that we were able to get the evidence of freshly dug mass graves that Madeleine Albright took to the Security Council on August 10.⁴⁶ This was not a top-down decision. The people who read my report essentially tasked themselves

⁴⁶ Albright to SecState Washington DC, "[Amb Albright Briefs Security Council on Possible Mass Graves Near Srebrenica](#)," US Mission to the UN, USUN 03086, August 11, 1995. The Albright presentation included [a photograph of a group of prisoners](#) in a field in the Konjević Polje/Nova Kasaba area, as well as a photograph of "[disturbed earth](#)" nearby. For reasons explained above (see FN 35--TKTK), Albright misidentified the place of the mass killing as Konjević Polje/Nova Kasaba. She repeated the garbled account originally reported by Galbraith in her 2003 autobiography, *Madam Secretary*, page 188.

For problems in interpreting overhead imagery, see interview with Jean-Rene Ruez, lead ICTY investigator for Srebrenica, "[Les enquêtes du TPIY](#)," *Cultures & Conflits*, 65 (printemps 2007). "When Madeleine Albright showed the [July 27] photos of multiple graves at Nova Kasaba [to the UN], she linked the photos in good faith with the previous image of the soccer stadium of Nova Kasaba. On the July 13 photo, large groups of prisoners can be seen in the Nova Kasaba soccer stadium...The logical conclusion for anyone seeing these photos is the following: people are on a soccer field, graves appeared nearby afterwards, therefore these people are in the graves." [Ruez explained that this was not the case](#). "We already knew in August 1995 that this site was not the site of [mass] executions. It was a [prisoner] collection site where, according to the testimony that we had, individual murders took place." The prisoners visible in the July 13 photo of the soccer stadium were "transferred to Bratunac," to be executed elsewhere. Ruez's conclusion: "This shows that [technological intelligence cannot be disconnected from the human reality](#), that is to say eyewitness testimony followed by verification on the ground." [Translation from French.]

An ICTY investigation later established that the Nova Kasaba sites (NKS 1-4) contained the remains of 33 people. A senior U.S. official told the Washington Post that the Nova Kasaba imagery was found in the archives of the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) on August 2, and reported in the National Intelligence Daily, a classified newsletter circulated to senior policymakers, on August 4. See Dobbs and Smith, "[New Proof Offered of Serb Atrocities](#)," Washington Post, October 29, 1995.

It took the CIA another month to identify the Petkovci dam massacre site. David Rohde was arrested at the Petkovci [Red Dam] site on October 28, on a return trip to Bosnia, following a tip-off from a "Washington-based U.S. Intelligence official." [See Rohde, *Endgame*, 342-343].

to find the aerial photographs. The tasking had not yet gone out to produce aerial photography [on suspected war crimes]. It would have been much more valuable if it had been gathered earlier.

I frequently attended the seventh floor meetings at the State Department which were held every morning, usually chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott that included the Assistant Secretaries of State. When the subject of Bosnia was discussed, particularly in 1994 and early 1995, it was difficult to inject a lot of factual information about what was going on the ground that I was receiving from embassies or from my own staff. There was a great deal of skepticism about my use of the term genocide. State Department legal advisors constantly pushed back against my use of the term because it would imply an obligation on the signatories of the Genocide Convention to take appropriate action in response. That was the whole point of using the term, obviously. I had the same problems in the case of Rwanda.⁴⁷

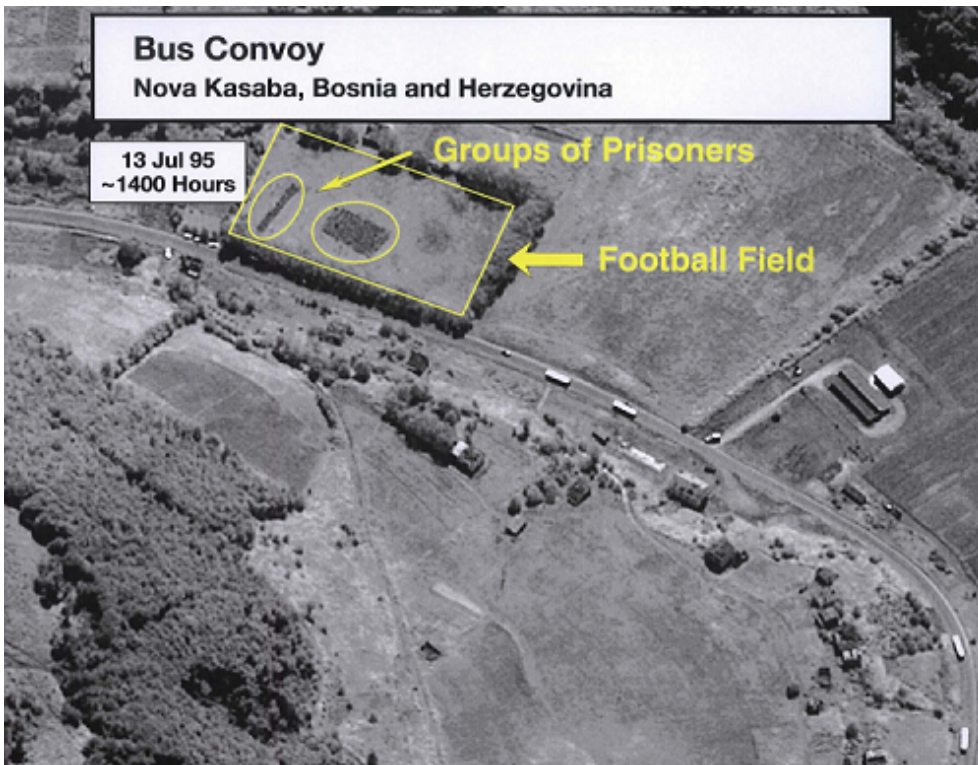
When I came back from these interviews in Tuzla and submitted a detailed report to the Secretary of State on August 4, you could have heard a pin drop in the room.⁴⁸ Virtually everyone came up to me afterwards, not to congratulate me but simply to say thank you for finally producing what should have been evident long before, but was being pushed back.

TOM BLANTON: In his book, *All the Missing Souls*, David Scheffer says he talked to George Tenet on July 19, and agreed to “produce a daily update on humanitarian and war crimes developments.” George had just become Deputy Director at the CIA and David was working for Madeleine at that time. I think there were multiple places that the request was coming from.⁴⁹ Let’s ask David Rohde for his part of the story. You took a crumpled fax version of a photograph that Madeleine had shown at the United Nations on August 10 and walked along the road between Nova Kasaba and Konjević Polje. Is that correct?

⁴⁷ Article I of the 1948 Genocide Convention states that signatories confirm that genocide “[is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.](#)” The article can be interpreted as meaning that signatories have a duty to intervene to prevent genocide. For hesitation about using term genocide in case of Rwanda, see [Rwanda conference transcript, 2-14.](#)

⁴⁸ Shattuck to The Secretary, “[Bosnia Trip Report,](#)” Information Memorandum, August 4, 1995. The memo stated that “atrocities have taken place on a massive scale” and “hundreds if not thousands” of unarmed refugees had been killed, “[many by mass executions.](#)”

⁴⁹ David Scheffer, *All the Missing Souls*, 104.



Nova Kasaba prisoners, July 13



Photo shown in UN on Aug. 10 that guided Rohde to gravesite

TOM BLANTON: In his book, *All the Missing Souls*, David Scheffer says he talked to George Tenet on July 19, and agreed to “produce a daily update on humanitarian and war crimes developments.” George had just become Deputy Director at the CIA and David was working for Madeleine at that time. I think there were multiple places that the request was coming from.⁵⁰ Let’s ask David Rohde for his part of the story. You took a crumpled fax version of a photograph that Madeleine had shown at the United Nations on August 10 and walked along the road between Nova Kasaba and Konjević Polje. Is that correct?

DAVID ROHDE: Yes, on August 17. It was by accident. I was entering Serb-controlled territory from Serbia to cover Serbs fleeing the Croatian advance into Krajina [Operation Storm]. Instead of letting me go directly to Banja Luka, the border guard said you have to go to the [Republika Srpska capital] Pale first. I was able to spend two days searching around the area, but it started with a mistake by the border guard. If you look at the photograph, you will see burial sites NKS-1 and NKS-2, where I found empty ammunition boxes. There was a decomposing leg jutting out of the grave at NKS-3. I later spent two weeks in Tuzla where I spoke with Hurem Suljic, and found half a dozen other men who mentioned not just the Nova Kasaba site, but at least six other execution sites. I got the number wrong. I estimated maybe 3,000 dead. I was amazed by it all.⁵¹

I have a question about Žepa, which was effectively written off on July 21 with the London declaration. You state in your July 25 cable that [Žepa should be saved](#).⁵² There were 15,000 people in the enclave. The Bosnians were holding the Serbs off on July 21, 10 days after the fall of Srebrenica. Actually, Žepa does not fall until July 25. I have had Bosnians ask me about the conspiracy theory: cleaning up the map, getting rid of the enclaves. Why was Žepa written off? They held out for two weeks.

⁵⁰ David Scheffer, *All the Missing Souls*, 104.

⁵¹ Rohde summarized his initial findings in articles for the Christian Science Monitor, [“Evidence Indicates Bosnia Massacre,”](#) August 18, 1995, and [“How a Serb Massacre was Exposed,”](#) August 25, 1995. Ordered to proceed to Pale, he found himself on the road between Konjević Polje and Nova Kasaba, near the site of the photograph of the reported atrocities.

⁵² Galbraith argued in his July 27 cable that the London declaration [“implicitly writes off Žepa,”](#) by drawing the line at Goražde.

PETER GALBRAITH: To add some additional history, I had been back in the United States. I have to say that Christopher was not very fond of me. We really hadn't interacted that much but he agreed to see me after Srebrenica. He was afraid of another, rather high profile resignation, which I was at that point considering. Dick Holbrooke was also considering resigning, although he later would deny that, but we did have that conversation. My meeting with Christopher was around July 18 or 19. I argued that we should not be writing off Žepa.⁵³

When the London declaration came out on July 21, I was on Brioni [Tito's former private island] with Tudjman and Turkish president Suleyman Demirel. The reaction was astonishment because it had also written off Bihać.⁵⁴

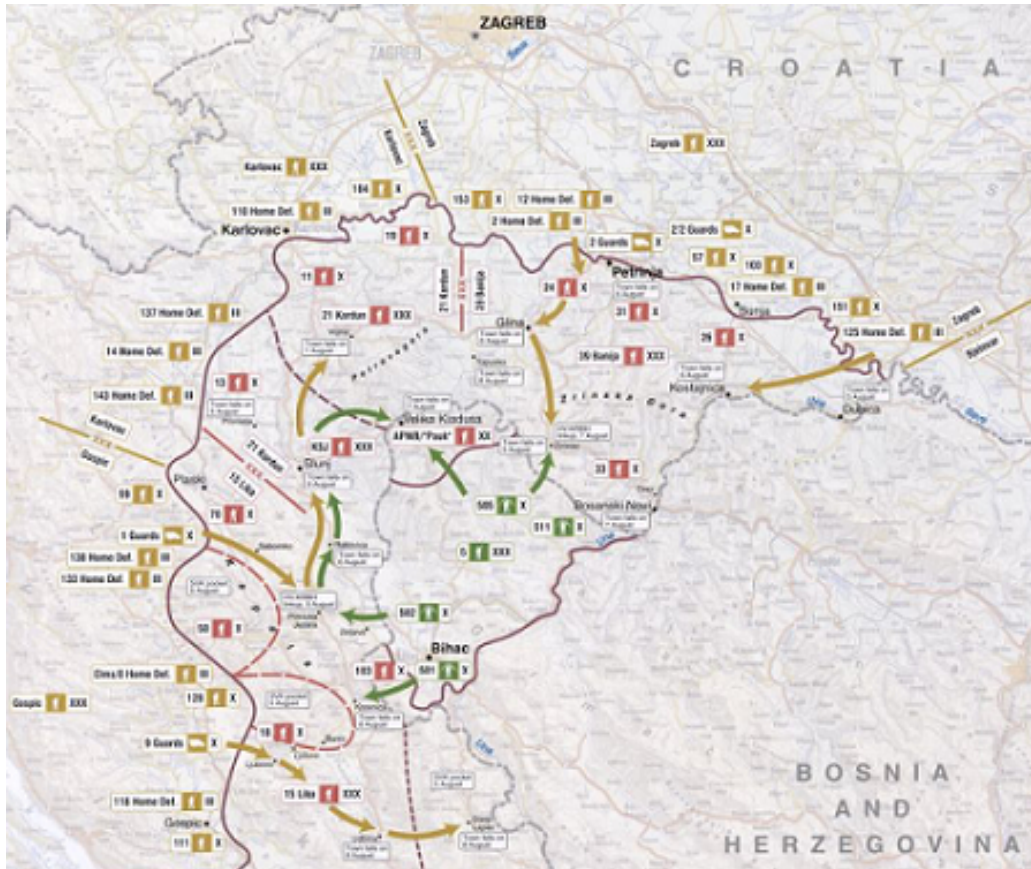
All of this then set off the sequence of events that brought the war to an end. The Croats had already decided that they would take military action in November 1995 to retake the Krajina. That is why they had an eight month extension of the UN mandate, which was now called UNCRO, instead of the usual six months. Why November? Because it is winter in northern Bosnia and much harder for Serbia to resupply the Krajina. If you are coming up from the coast [in the case of the Croatian army], it was not so bad. In fact it is a good time. Second, they were really trying to get their tourist economy back up. Having a war in the middle of the tourist season was not a good thing.

The Croats saw the opportunity that was presented after Srebrenica, because the Bosnian Serbs and the Croatian Serbs proceeded to attack Bihać. The Croats were concerned that if Bihać fell it would be to their strategic disadvantage. The Serbs would no longer need to defend both internal lines around the Bihać enclave and external ones facing the Croats. The inside of the donut would disappear and those forces could then be transferred to face Croatia. The Croats saw the opportunity that existed and were already proceeding with a campaign up the Livno valley [south of Bihać]. The question was:

⁵³ See Galbraith diary entry, [July 20, 1995](#). Galbraith argued that a public statement drawing the line at Gorazde "could have disastrous consequences for the 16,000 people at Žepa."

⁵⁴ See Galbraith diary entry, [July 21, 1995](#), which notes that Turkish delegation was "openly contemptuous" of the London declaration. Tudjman pointed out lack of reference to Bihać.

what would be the response of the United States?



Portion of CIA map on Operation Storm, August 4-8, 1995

Remember, as I mentioned yesterday, the Croats had already asked on November 12, 1994 what our position would be if they were to go through the Krajina to relieve the siege of Bihać.⁵⁵ As my cables to Washington explain, they planned to take the whole thing. The [reaction](#) from Washington was swift and strong: we do not want a wider war. I disagreed, but those were my instructions. On July 21 [1995] the defense minister Šušak told me at lunch that Croatia again planned to relieve the siege of Bihać by going through Slunj. Once again Croatia wanted to know what the US reaction would be. There was the usual back and forth with Washington. At one point the instructions are: tell them not to do it, but not very strongly, i.e. a sort of green light. The message that I eventually delivered at the beginning of August to Tudjman on Brioni was: we appreciate why you're willing to expend blood and treasure to save the people of Bihać. On my own, I then added

⁵⁵ Galbraith diary entry, [November 12, 1994](#).

tougher language about refugees and protecting UN personnel. The administration would say that it was a "no light" but Tudjman interpreted it as a green light.⁵⁶

This sequence of events was very much triggered by what happened in Srebrenica. The Croatian offensive [known as Operation Storm] retook the Krajina in four days, [between August 4 and 8]. It continued into Bosnia, aided later by NATO air strikes. As we see from the debates about Iraq and Afghanistan, it is boots on the ground that matter. For better or worse, the boots on the ground were Croatian, precisely because we did not want to have another Srebrenica. In one of my cables that is also in the diary, I warn that a BSA takeover of Bihać could produce 40,000 dead if the Serbs behaved as they did in Srebrenica.

JOHN SHATTUCK: I would like to just add one footnote. The Krajina offensive ended up being strategically valuable from a diplomatic standpoint in Dayton. It provided very concrete evidence that the Serbs actually were also victims of the war that was brought to an end in Dayton. I think that it gave the Dayton process, particularly the human rights spotlighting that I started doing around that time, more credibility in Belgrade than it might have otherwise had. I spent time reporting on what had happened to the Serbs who were forced out of the Krajina area. Those reports provided credibility for the push forward to Dayton.

Soon after the change in US policy, Richard Holbrooke became the point person for the whole peace process. As we moved toward Dayton, my job was to travel in the war zones and gather evidence of fresh human rights abuses that were being committed in real time on the ground and provide this information by phone to Holbrooke.⁵⁷ He would then use this information with Tudjman or Milosević when they denied that certain things had happened or claimed ignorance. Holbrooke would then be able to confront them with the reports I'd given him and threaten renewed NATO air strikes. After being sidelined for much of this period in US policy, the human rights elements moved to the top of the list. Obviously Madeleine Albright's involvement was crucial here as well.

⁵⁶ See Galbraith diary, [August 1, 1995](#). Galbraith told Tudjman that Croatia could not expect "any help from the United States" if the military operation went wrong. Tudjman interpreted this as American acquiescence, even though Galbraith explicitly told him that it was not a "green light."

⁵⁷ For coordination between Holbrooke and Shattuck, see [undated Holbrooke note to Galbraith](#).

PETER GALBRAITH: There is a lesson here. One of the distinctions between what happened in [Croatian-controlled] western Slavonia and the Krajina and what was going on in Republika Srpska was that the Croats could not say “no” to US demands for access. Even when the UN was locked down after Operation Storm, we were able to get people in and were able to report on the human rights violations from the beginning. We raised these violations, particularly the systematic looting and burning of homes and the later killing of the isolated population. I wanted Tudjman to be called to account for some of this. The story is not perfect, however. Holbrooke was adamant. He wrote me a note [on August 16] saying “NOT NOW, NOT HERE, NOT YET,” when I wanted to raise the human rights violations in the Krajina and challenge Tudjman’s statement that Serbs who had fled during Operation Storm could never return.⁵⁸ As Bob Frasure had written, “we hired this junkyard dog [Tudjman] and shouldn’t be complaining about it now.” So, human rights was higher on the agenda but maybe not quite as high as John and I might have wanted.

DAVID ROHDE: I just want to follow up though on Žepa. You [Peter Galbraith] tried to get it back on the agenda, but you lost the battle.

PETER GALBRAITH: It was a lonely battle. I do not think I had a single ally in the administration. I was obviously in Zagreb, [so I do not know everything happening in Washington]. I had raised the Žepa issue personally [with Christopher](#) on July 17 or 18, so at least it was on the table. As far as I know, nobody pursued it. Holbrooke was more or less sidelined at that point. He was on vacation in Colorado.

JAMIE RUBIN: This is a Rashoman-like situation: there are a lot of things going on [from so many different perspectives]. I was fortunate to be with Ambassador Albright when there was a major policy review on Bosnia. The President of the United States decided that he did not like the policy anymore. In June 1995, Madeleine provided a paper to the Principals Committee suggesting for the first time that we no longer support UNPROFOR.⁵⁹ If you look

⁵⁸ Holbrooke to Galbraith, [handwritten note](#), August 16, 1995.

⁵⁹ According to the State Department “Road to Dayton” study, page 11, Albright presented her “Elements of a New Strategy” paper to Clinton’s Foreign Policy team on June 21, 1995, calling for the withdrawal of UNPROFOR, the lifting of the arms embargo against the Bosnian government, and [“airstrikes to protect Muslim-held territory.”](#)

at all of Tony Lake's memos prior to this moment, the emphasis is always “we want to strengthen UNPROFOR, we want to keep UNPROFOR, UNPROFOR has to be there, it will look bad if we lose UNPROFOR.” Until you decide that UNPROFOR is not your first principle, and that you have some other goal as a first principle, what happened later would not have happened.



Clinton meeting on Bosnia, August 21, 1995, CIA collection

It was a simple little one and a half page paper, and she spoke to about seven people, but my phone rang off the hook. Someone had to be the first to say that our willingness to pull UNPROFOR out was time limited and that we would no longer agree to extract UNPROFOR after a certain date. That was the first sign that UNPROFOR must end, since the British and the French and the others needed that the promise.

I don't agree with Peter [Galbraith] that it was boots on the ground that ended the war, if that is what you were saying. I think all these things together changed the situation. The President of the United States was partly influenced by what Chirac was doing with

Albright noted Chirac's statement that “the position of leader of the Free World is vacant,” saying that it “has been chilling my bones for weeks.”

this rapid reaction force.⁶⁰ [Refers to 2009 book by Taylor Branch, “The Clinton Tapes”], a contemporaneous record of what Clinton was doing. We did not find out until later that Branch was meeting with the President. [In his interview with Branch], Clinton describes how Chirac was trying to outperform him but had to admit privately that he couldn't do anything without US helicopters.

What I am saying is that after Srebrenica, and building up to Srebrenica, there was a moment when the capitals decided that the policy has to change at the highest level. This did not happen because of the good work of the U.S. Ambassador in Croatia or, with all due respect, John, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights. The whole government was operating. There was a major paper written by Christopher, a major paper written by Tony Lake and Sandy Vershbow, and one by Ms. Albright.⁶¹ This is what led to a new policy where the national security advisor went to capitals, and said, “that's it guys, it's time for a new strategy.” On the famous Christopher trip to Europe [in May, 1993], we said we would wait and see what the Europeans thought, now we are not asking, we are telling the allies what we are going to do, and that there is a limitation on our willingness to extract UNPROFOR. Once those words were uttered, everybody started paying serious attention. That meant that UNPROFOR was going to end at some point. I won't bore you with any more details, but this is the turning point in my mind. Maybe that's my Rashoman problem but I vote with the heads of state on this one.

TOM BLANTON: Rupert Smith, you were in command in Bosnia at that point, did you see it this way? Was it this moment?

RUPERT SMITH: To go back to the atrocities and the killing, we were beginning to understand that there had been mass executions around the time of [my meeting with General Mladić on July 19](#). I know that Žepa hasn't fallen. We are already taking measures to get extra people into Žepa to make sure we have got a presence there that I can rely on. Straight after the meeting [with Mladić] on July 19, I go to the London Conference, which was a complete eye opener to me. None of what was happening at this high level was being

⁶⁰ See White House memo, “[Bilateral meeting with President Jacques Chirac of France](#),” June 14, 1995.

⁶¹ See State Department paper “[Endgame Strategy](#),” NSC paper, “[Strategy for the Balkan Conflict](#),” prepared on August 3-4, 1995, and Albright, “[Memorandum for the National Security Advisor](#).”

told to me whatsoever. I get off an airplane and am driven straight to the Prime Minister [John Major]. I do not see the Chief of the Defense Staff. I am told by my Prime Minister that the next time there is an attack on Goražde, on the British battalion, we are going to bomb. We are going to bomb and not stop bombing until the attack stops, and you Smith are going to have the key.

We then have a very difficult conversation because I will not accept it unless the threat is for everybody, not just Goražde.⁶² I am sent away. I go and find Janvier and tell him what I am doing and he agrees. He has been told the same thing by France and is very worried about it too. There is much ringing in the night, I explain about Bihać and Žepa. I have breakfast with the newly appointed defense secretary Michael Portillo, who says, "You'll have to trust me, we will change the decision over the weekend but it's precooked for Goražde and we won't get through the conference on Friday if we change it now."

I then go to [Lancaster house], the site of the conference on Friday, July 21. It is a hot sweaty day. We have a most peculiar conference in which this precooked message is rammed down everyone's throat. I can barely understand what everyone is saying. You were all in a bubble that I wasn't in. I kept trying to get across to people that I still had hostages everywhere. They are busy making their plans, and I'm busy putting people into Žepa and so on. The next month was a very lonely month. Our headquarters leaked like a sieve so I couldn't tell anyone what was happening and what I was planning. What I wanted to do was to have the fight in the only place I could have it, which was Sarajevo because the French wouldn't move their guns out of range of French soldiers, who were all in Sarajevo. My real fear was that the proximate cause of this attack would come outside of Sarajevo. I would then have real problems. No one understood this and I couldn't explain it to anybody.

⁶² In his book "Utility of Force," Smith writes that he had not expected "[this complete change of policy](#)," focusing on just one enclave. In private briefings for journalists, U.S. officials conceded that the allies had "written off" Žepa in addition to Srebrenica as it was "militarily not feasible" to return to the status quo. See, for example, Wolf Blitzer, "[White House Interpretation of London meeting](#)," July 22, 1995.

The great problem was to conceal the potential from Mladić. We all know about the rapid reaction force, but we did not get the French guns up the hill on Mount Igman until the [middle of August](#).⁶³

MICHAEL DOBBS: You also withdrew British troops from Goražde at this point, right?⁶⁴

RUPERT SMITH: That was part of the decision to bomb. There was a huge fight between me and Hasan Muratović towards the end of August when he calls me every name under the sun. I am telling everyone that we're not going to bomb because I've still got to get the Brits out. In the end, they drive out through Serbia. It was a very lonely month and I was not helped by any of you guys on that side of the room. [Reference to western governments/UN]. You were busy. There is a move in Rugby football called "the hospital pass," when you pass the ball to a man with half the enemy's scrum coming straight at him. [Laughter]

JAMIE RUBIN: General, we [Americans] call that the "kill your buddy pass".

RUPERT SMITH: I was given hospital pass after hospital pass all through that month. It started with Žepa, which everyone had written off. Carl does a wonderful thing in Serbia with Hasan and Izetbegović getting the Bosnian fighters out. We slowly get everyone else out. We are working across a barrier of mistrust of the last nine months as we do that.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: I think this is a good moment for me to give you the view from the ground rather than the bubble of the policy making. I made it to Žepa two days before Žepa fell [on July 25]. I did not know which day was which. Sometimes I would pass out and would wake up and look up at the sun. Maybe I had slept for two hours, maybe for twenty-four hours, I couldn't really tell. Eventually, when we came to Žepa, I realized we had broken through the line.

⁶³ Madeleine Albright to Secstate, "[Bosnia/Croatia](#)," USUN Cable 03232, August 24, 1995. Albright [quoted Annan](#) as saying that the French artillery was deployed, but Bosnian Croats were preventing other RRF convoys from crossing the border.

⁶⁴ In "Utility of Force," Smith describes how he withdrew the British battalion from Goražde on the night of August 28-29, via Serbia, following the Markale market place shelling in Sarajevo. He "[turned the UN key](#)" after he learned that the British were out of Goražde, and no longer at risk of being seized as hostages by Mladić.

The first guy I met on the Bosnian side did not look like a Bosnian soldier at all. I had a hand grenade which I was trying to keep for myself in case I had to commit suicide rather than fall into Serb hands. I pull out the pin and am ready to roll the hand grenade towards this guy. Eventually I recognize him [as a Bosnian soldier] from my previous trips to Žepa from 1992 to 1995. He tells me the whole story about what happened, how the civilians had been taken out, the options offered by the Žepa command.

I did not like any of the options, so I chose my own option. I agree with you, General Smith, when you say it was a very lonely month. Two days later, I found myself no longer at the front line because the lines have collapsed. It was every man for himself once again. I decided to take my band of brothers, the six kids that I brought with me from Srebrenica, go into the canyon of the Drina river with as much supplies as we possibly could. We barricaded ourselves into one of the caves. If you ever travel down the river of Drina, you will see it is a beautiful canyon and easily defendable. You have to be a mountain goat to attack anyone at that particular location. One man can stop the battalion. I spent a long time thinking what really went wrong in Žepa. Shashi told us earlier that the UN "did not know what happened on July 10, and did not expect what was going to happen on July 10," but you certainly knew what was coming in terms of Žepa. After twenty years, and many sleepless nights, I would like to hear some answers.

TOM BLANTON: Carl Bildt? Then I want to take a five minute coffee break and come back and focus on the lessons.

CARL BILDT: Žepa is an interesting story As Rupert said, Žepa was written off immediately. It was assumed that Žepa was going to fall within hours [of the fall of Srebrenica]. Amazingly, it did not fall immediately. The Bosnian Army fought for a very considerable amount of time. The Bosnian leadership wanted help in getting the population out, which was done with UNPROFOR. At a certain point, I got a strange message from Hasan [Muratović] who said he wanted to meet me immediately. I flew to Split, and he managed to get to Split. He said, "Our remaining forces in Žepa need to get out. It's too dangerous to take them out towards Sarajevo, I want them to go out to Serbia." He asked me to go to Milosević and get him to clear the way for the Žepa soldiers to cross the Drina, which was

dangerous with the Mladić forces there. I said, “Do they know the road?” Yes, they knew the road because it was the normal weapons smugglers road. They are supplied from Serbia to a large extent. I went immediately to Milosević and met him in the middle of the night, near the Bulgarian border. He immediately gave orders, which resulted in the soldiers exiting Žepa through Serbia. That was one of those intriguing things that happened in this war.

The Croatian Operation Storm changed the politics of the war, but it was a difficult moment. It was the single largest ethnic cleansing operation of the entire war.⁶⁵ It completely changed the humanitarian challenge as well. We are living with the consequences right up until today.

[BREAK]

TOM BLANTON: In our final session, we want to look at the lessons to be drawn from this horrible genocide. We are trying to create a record that will help the next set of graduate students become policy makers, politicians, soldiers. The shorter and more to the point you can make your remarks, the better. Joris Voorhoeve.

JORIS VOORHOEVE: There were long delays in receiving and sharing information about Mladić’s actions. These delays were also the subject of the Netherlands parliamentary inquiry. It is clear that by around July 15-16, there were very serious indications of many, many people being killed. The indications came from the international media, from individual Dutchbat members who had been transported from A to B and had [seen many bodies](#) along the way. I am very grateful for the work of Ambassador Shattuck and others in bringing out the first stories about these horrible events. In general, I think we can see from Srebrenica, from Darfur, from Cambodia much earlier, that we, in free countries, have great difficulty accepting the extent of very disturbing information about human rights violations. We sometimes have a tendency to belittle very serious evidence.

How do we deal with nasty news and put ourselves in the shoes of those who commit such crimes so that we can better predict what is going to happen. I must say, from the Dutch side, we were not good at dealing with discordant information that you don't

⁶⁵ Between 150,000 and 200,000 Serbs fled the Krajina during Operation Storm, according to contemporaneous news reports.

want to believe but is true anyway. It took the Netherlands army leadership several months to get the complete picture for reasons I will not go into now. I was very grateful to the media and the Americans on the spot near Tuzla for bringing out the first stories.

TOM BLANTON: David Harland, you wrote a report that has been widely praised and interviewed pretty much everyone, more or less.⁶⁶ What would you change about your conclusions today?

DAVID HARLAND: A lot more facts are known today. There is a famous, waggish comment, I think by Edward Luttwak [an American military strategist], about the three rules of intervening in other people's conflicts. The first rule is: don't. The second one is: if you do, pick a side. The third one is: make sure your side wins. For the record, I wrote that report with Salman Ahmed, who is now a Special Assistant to President Obama. The conclusions were actually written by somebody else. I would change the conclusions now because I would have changed them then. Obviously, a disaster requires failure at several levels. I agree with David Hannay that the mandate that came out was perfectly workable. It was ugly, it was never intended to operate for an extended period of time, and there was no strategy, but it was manageable.

For me, the absolutely striking level of failure that I would go to is the UNPROFOR level. If the use of close air support had been approved on July 8 or July 10 (I will not contest General Nicolai on July 6), there is every reason to believe that the Serbs would have stopped. I base this conclusion also on conversations with Serbs, including [Karadžić's media advisor] Jovan Zametica, whom I saw as recently as three days ago. People who are now dead would be alive if UNPROFOR had done those things that it was mandated to do but did not have the political will to do. I feel that the principal weakness in UNPROFOR was in Zagreb with Mr. Akashi but also with General Janvier.

There was an entire culture established within the civil service (which Tone described briefly) that all information, including factual information, had to be rendered

⁶⁶ See Report of Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35, "[The Fall of Srebrenica](#)," November 15, 1999, A/54/549. The principal authors were David Harland and Salman Ahmed, who later became a senior State Department official and counselor to National Security Advisor Susan Rice in the Obama Administration.

neutrally. The very first week that I arrived in Sarajevo, the chief UN military was away so I had to sign off the report. The report said that there had been 920 heavy weapons violations by the Serbs and approximately 80 by the Bosnian Army. It went to Zagreb and was reported to New York with a little footnote, saying that there had been a thousand ceasefire violations. What had been a very simple factual story reporting a grotesque action by one side and a limited response by the other was rendered into something totally bland. In my view, the key lesson amid all this mess and dysfunctionality is: don't join UN peacekeeping unless you are willing to violate all the Luttwak rules. If you do, a degree of intellectual honesty and moral courage will allow thousands and thousands of lives to be saved.



[Jenonne Walker](#)

JENONNE WALKER: I wanted the floor largely to pass the buck. It's human nature to hear and remember remarks that support what you already believe. My sense yesterday morning of the consensus around the table was that it's folly to send a traditional UN peacekeeping force into a situation where there is no peace to keep and there is no intention to impose a peace. A carry on folly: to declare a "safe area" when there

is no capability or intention of making it safe. As I said yesterday, the United States had no moral credibility on this because we were not willing to share the risk. At the time, however, we in Washington were very disdainful of the whole safe area notion because there was no capability or willingness [to enforce the safe areas].

We could talk about individual mistakes in Bosnia that all of us made in capitals, in the UN bureaucracy, UNPROFOR, etc. I think the more interesting aspect of lessons learned is not whether to use force in a situation like this, but how to do it effectively. The most provocative thing you can do is not use force when you are being tested. This is why I want to pass the buck to Rupert Smith. I hope everyone here has read his [Bosnia chapter](#) and concluding chapter in *The Utility of Force* on how to use force effectively. I think it should be memorized by everybody in the UN system and everybody with any intention of joining an [international peacekeeping operation].

DAVID HANNAY: Many of the lessons have been learned and are being applied, but it's worth trying to identify them. The Europeans, collectively, had a huge shock in Bosnia that really blew their socks off. They realized that they were unable to prevent an outbreak of serious hostilities in a region where it was assumed that they were the primary providers of security. It produced an enormously strong reaction from which grew the enlargement of the European Union to include the Balkans. As I think everybody now recognizes, the best preventive action you can take in the Balkans is to move Balkan countries towards membership of the European Union. This is not quite the best week to make that little speech but it happens to be true.⁶⁷ We must not lose sight of it because there are ongoing [accession] negotiations with Serbia. There will be negotiations with Kosovo and Albania. One day, I hope, a Greek government will agree to [accession negotiations] with Macedonia. Montenegro is moving towards the EU. Europeans learned a huge lesson from the humiliation that they experienced, first at the beginning of the operation when they could not cope with conflict prevention, and then in the course of the operations when they showed they were not able to do anything without the Americans. That is a lesson learned but it needs to be repeated.

⁶⁷ The conference was held on June 29-30, 2015, at a time when the European Union was riven by dissension over the Greek bailout crisis, and the possibility of Greece withdrawing from the Euro.

Second point. It was shocking to hear during this conference of the complete absence of intelligence available to the UN forces in the safe areas. That is terrible. National intelligence capabilities have got to be tailored in a way that they can be made available to people putting their lives at risk in the pursuit of peacekeeping. This is easier with political intelligence than with military intelligence. Some of us are quite used to doing it with political intelligence. In the seven years I was negotiating on Cyprus, I persuaded my government to let me pass all our political intelligence about Cyprus to the UN, which was done with no leaks and was very useful. We really must take this subject seriously. Since Srebrenica, we now have surveillance drones. It should be fairly obvious that any major peacekeeping operation, particularly one in potentially hostile circumstances such as Bosnia, is going to have to be provided with a surveillance drone capacity. I believe some of that is beginning in the DRC, in the Congo, now.

One of the things that came out of Srebrenica was the concept of the Responsibility to Protect.⁶⁸ If you were writing any of these Security Council resolutions now, you would have to write in elements of Responsibility to Protect. Responsibility to Protect is now under challenge because of the inadequacy of the follow up, for example in Libya. The fault was the not saving of the lives of the inhabitants of Benghazi, but what happened afterwards, after the fall of Gadhafi, the total absence of any serious follow-up.

Experience has shown that if you are dealing with a very difficult situation hovering on the line between peacekeeping and enforcement, as in Bosnia, you really must have an "over the horizon" capability available. Such a capability was made available to the UN in the case of Sierra Leone. It was made available by the French in both Cote d'Ivoire and Mali. It can be made to work. It did eventually work [in Bosnia]. The narrative that the Serbs were forced to the table entirely by air strikes is not in fact the case. The rapid reaction force pounded the hell out of the Serb forces around Sarajevo and helped convince Milosević that he had to give in and go to Dayton. An "over the horizon" capability is very important though it can go badly wrong, as the US discovered in Somalia, if it is not properly handled.

⁶⁸ The Responsibility to Protect, or R2P, stipulates that the international community can take collective action to protect endangered populations if a state fails to meet its responsibilities.

One final point. I am not sure we have seen the last of the dual key issue. Dual key was a bad idea but I do not think you can ever have an operation in which air strikes take place without consultation with the people on the ground. You cannot de-couple those things totally, even though the dual-key system [in Bosnia], which was built up gradually and came crashing down in 1995, was a terrible one that must never be repeated.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you David. Let me call on Ambassador Jacolin to give us some of his lessons.

HENRY JACOLIN: I was not in Bosnia at the time of the fall of Srebrenica. On July 6, I was transferred from Sarajevo to Paris for a medical operation, and did not return until September.

I was convinced from the very beginning that the Bosnian Serbs wanted to definitely clean eastern Bosnia. I made some demographic studies and became convinced that they could not accept a border along the Drina, or in eastern Bosnia, between Serbs and Bosniaks. I was convinced that their ultimate goal was to move the border between Bosniaks and Serbs to the middle of the city of Sarajevo, to be more precise, to the Dobrinja district along the Miljacka river. They wanted to make Sarajevo a divided city and to completely cleanse eastern Bosnia of its Muslim population. I was so convinced of this that I sent a series of telegrams to Paris reporting General Morillon's trip to Srebrenica in March 1993 under the title, *Chronicle of an Ethnic Cleansing Foretold*.⁶⁹ That was clear. I constantly repeated to Paris that this was the goal of the Serbs. Paris could not have any doubts that this was to happen one day.

From the beginning, I wrote to Paris that we were overestimating the strength of the Serbs and that it would be possible to stop them if a resolute decision was taken to stop them. I was disappointed when I arrived [in Sarajevo as French ambassador in 1993] because I discovered that UNPROFOR was always negotiating with both sides. They were always trying to get a new and final ceasefire. Some of my telegrams irritated the Matignon [French prime minister's office], Elysée [President's office], and the ministry of defense. I disagreed with Mitterrand's famous remark concerning the arms embargo [against all

⁶⁹ A reference to the 1981 novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Cronica de una muerte anunciada*.

republics of the former Yugoslavia] stressing “*ne pas ajouter la guerre à la guerre.*” [“Do not add war to war”]. I asked myself what I should do as a French Ambassador there in Sarajevo. My conclusion was that the best thing I could do would be to try to change the position of my government. In telegram after telegram, I repeated that this was not a tribal conflict, not a religious war, but a war of aggression by the Serbs.

I managed to change the minds in Paris a little bit. [Foreign minister Alain] Juppé was the first one to understand. He thought very quickly. He took a firm position after the Markale market massacre in February 1994. You may remember that he was the first one to say we must stop the Serbs. There was then a NATO ultimatum which was observed for a few days but it finally dissolved, like sugar in hot coffee, and was totally forgotten. What we achieved for a few days or weeks by starting the withdrawal of heavy weapons totally disappeared because the will of the international community was not maintained.

I was very happy when Chirac announced the formation of the rapid reaction force in June 1995. I was in Paris when the new government was formed [in May 1995 following Chirac’s victory in the presidential election]. I was able to meet very briefly Charles Millon, who had just been nominated Minister of Defense. He asked me, “What should we do Mr. Ambassador?” I told him, “*il faut taper sur les Serbes,*” [“We must hit the Serbs”]. It was the only way out of this war. I also met Hervé de Charette, who had been nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs. He also asked me, “What should we do Mr. Ambassador?” I also told him “*il faut taper sur les Serbes.*” I was happy when the president decided to create the rapid reaction force which was the solution I had been advocating since I arrived in Sarajevo and realized what was going on, on the ground.

DIEGO ARRIA: The first lesson should be for the United Nations. Ten years ago, on the tenth anniversary of Srebrenica, together with Ambassador Jamsheed Marker of Pakistan, I wrote to Kofi Annan, (at that time I was one of his advisors) telling him that the United Nations should not push under the rug the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. After many discussions inside the Secretariat, Kofi arranged for me to participate in a session with Prince Zeid of Jordan and our friend Samantha Power at the Dag Hammarskjöld library, which minimized the importance of what happened in Bosnia. A senior advisor to

Annan said to him, "What Diego is proposing is a self-flagellation exercise." No comments needed on that I guess.

I am trying to finish a book that I call "A Room without a View," inspired by the room used for informal consultations of the Security Council.⁷⁰ As many of you know, the room has a very large window overlooking the East river in New York, but the drapes are always drawn. The permanent members don't want to look outside.

I remember in March 1992 that we admitted the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a new member of the United Nations. David Hannay made a joke [at the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991] about how few people in the Security Council would know the names of the capitals of the 15 new member nations of the Russian Federation. Two months after we recognized these countries as UN members, we proceeded to divide the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic and religious lines (amazingly at the same time when apartheid in South Africa was in its final stage, greatly thanks to the UN contributions). The same United Nations was actively engaged in practicing apartheid in Bosnia-Herzegovina, dividing it into Muslim, Croat, and Serb with the consequences that we see today. Suddenly, the Secretariat and the P5 started referring to the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina as "the Muslim side." I remember raising my hand and saying it's the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The permanent members with the support of the Secretariat turned the conflict into a religious confrontation rather than a conquest of territory by force, which was what was actually happening.

When the Security Council declared an arms embargo on Yugoslavia in September 1991, it sent a message to these new countries: arm yourself as quickly as you can because the United Nations is going to stop you.⁷¹ The major countries knew that the parties [in the former Yugoslavia] that were fully armed were Serbia and Croatia. The Bosnians did not have anything, as we later saw. Bosnia's fate was sealed from the beginning. The international community thought that the Bosnians would give up quickly, but the Bosnians did not play according to the script. Instead of rolling over and playing dead, they fought as much as they could.

⁷⁰ A reference to the E.M. Forster novel, *A Room with a View*.

⁷¹ UNSC, "[Resolution 713 \(1991\)](#)," September 25, 1991.

It was disturbing to me how the Europeans suddenly discovered that there was a Muslim world in the middle of Europe. These people were always there. They suddenly feared that a Muslim nation was emerging in Europe when Sarajevo was probably the most ecumenical city anywhere in Europe. It reminded me of the attitude that the Latin Americans take toward Haiti, discriminating against them because they were black and speak French and not Spanish. The Europeans overnight discovered that the Bosnians were not Europeans, they were Muslims. It is difficult for me to believe that the United Nations were unable to anticipate the events that took place in Bosnia. I said in 1993 that a slow motion genocide was taking place in Bosnia before the eyes of the world.⁷² Less than two years later it happened.

I think that the Dutch have been made a scapegoat for what happened. I agree with what David Hannay said about Europe about (the foreign minister of Luxembourg), Jacques Poos. At the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis he said, "This is the hour of Europe. It is not the hour of the Americans."⁷³ We should have let Europe carry this out and not stained the prestige of the United Nations, as happened with the botched operation Somalia.

JOHN SHATTUCK: I would like to look at what happened afterwards. What we have now in all of Bosnia is a frozen conflict situation. We have a frozen peace. Fortunately the killing has been ended, but it is not really peace. The frozen politics, in my view, are a result of a failure at Dayton.

Along with others, like Madeleine Albright, I fought very hard to try to bring issues of accountability into the Dayton peace process. We hoped that those who were most responsible for the poisonous politics that led up to the war would be arrested and charged by the international criminal tribunal or sidetracked from the political process. That got started a little bit at Dayton with the exclusion of Mladić and Karadžić. The Bosnians were not going to come to the table at Dayton unless Bosnian Serb leaders were sidetracked.

⁷² "Report of the Security Council Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution 819 (1993)," S/25700, April 30, 1993, [paragraph 19](#).

⁷³ Luxembourg was chairing the 12-nation European Community in June 1991 when Slovenia and Croatia moved to break away from Yugoslavia. Luxembourg foreign minister Jacques Poos led a European delegation to Yugoslavia, saying that European governments had a special responsibility to act in a crisis that threatened European stability. See, for example, Alan Riding, "[Europeans send high-level team](#)," New York Times, June 30, 1991.

They were sidetracked in part because they had been indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal.

The International Criminal Tribunal is functioning. Some would say it has been quite successful. It has charged, and even convicted, a large number of people.⁷⁴ The failure relates to the initial period when S-FOR and later I-FOR went in. Because of the ambiguity of the Dayton language, the NATO forces were completely unwilling to arrest indicted war criminals. I worked very closely with the Dutch Foreign Minister at that time, Hans Van Mierlo, in a rather private and secret way to try to establish a special war criminals arrest force which would be made up of Dutch police. There were some serious discussions with the UN and the US military but it came to naught.

The result is the frozen peace that we have today. I am not saying that the failure to arrest war criminals is the only reason for the current state of affairs but I think it's a serious reason. You cannot allow the people who caused the problem to continue to run these countries afterwards. Some of them, over time, have been sidetracked. Eventually, Milosević was sidetracked by the political process in Serbia.⁷⁵

SHASHI THAROOR: I wanted to respond to John's earlier intervention about the bankruptcy of UN peacekeeping. UN peacekeeping is not bankrupt.⁷⁶ It has done amazingly good work in a number of situations around the world. The peacekeeping force won the Nobel peace prize [in 1988] precisely because it has made a difference. However, it should not be applied to inappropriate situations. I have talked about the large number of occasions in which we pointed out to the Security Council that there was no viable peacekeeping concept available but the Council went ahead nonetheless. If there is a lesson to be learned from Srebrenica, that's really the first lesson.

The formula for successful peacekeeping missions is very clear. It is a triptych. First you need a coherent, clear, implementable mandate. Second, you need resources that are

⁷⁴ According to a [fact sheet](#) prepared by ICTY, the tribunal had indicted 161 individuals by July 1995 for crimes ranging from "grave breaches of the Geneva convention" to genocide. A total of 80 people had been sentenced to varying prison terms, and 18 acquitted.

⁷⁵ Milosević was overthrown on October 5, 2000 following popular protests against fraudulent elections in Serbia.

⁷⁶ See Shattuck remark in Transcript Page 3-61: "What we are seeing documented [during our discussion at this conference] in a very powerful, real way is the bankruptcy of UN peacekeeping and peacekeeping in general."

commensurate with that mandate. I mean military as well as financial resources. Third, you must have political will. This is fundamental because it underpins the other two. Without political will, you won't get the resources and you won't get a clear mandate. If you have all of those, you have a successful peacekeeping operation. Peacekeeping should not be a substitute for the absence of political will which is what we saw in Bosnia. If future generations of decision makers are to learn the proper lesson from Bosnia, this is a mistake they must not make again.

Peacekeeping in the classic sense requires the cooperation of the parties in the conflict. This is fundamental. When the cooperation is doubtful, you should not have a peacekeeping operation. I stress this because there is all this talk about the immorality of neutrality between ethnic cleansers and their reviled besiegers. The fact is that this was not a situation for which peacekeeping should have been applied. It is better to start with a peace enforcement operation in these situations than to change mandates midstream, which is what we did in Bosnia. We were wrong to do that but it was forced upon us by the force of circumstances. The sheer number of Security Council resolutions is a stark indication of how the mandate for this mission got changed with incremental enforcement elements coming into it.

You began yesterday morning by asking about Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the United Nations charter. This is a complete red herring. There is no language in Chapter VI that supports peacekeeping. Not even Hammarskjöld pretended that. The deployment of military force is not foreseen under Chapter VI. The only question concerns Chapter VII. Article 40 talks about calling on parties to comply with “[such provisional measures as it deems necessary](#)” if negotiation, mediation, diplomacy do not work. Peacekeeping was seen by the classic purist international lawyers as a “provisional measure” under Article 40 of Chapter VII. Then there is Article 42 which talks about “[action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary](#)” if other means prove inadequate. Just saying Chapter VII is irrelevant. Practically speaking, there is no Chapter VI peacekeeping, although we use that as a short hand for saying “peacekeeping without enforcement” and we talk about Chapter VII for “peacekeeping with enforcement.”

In my view, they are both Chapter VII because no one can point to any language in Chapter VI that uses military force.⁷⁷ The point is that we should have two very distinct kinds of operation. (1) Classic peacekeeping for which there still is need and for which there is a provable track record of success, following the classic principles of neutrality. And (2) peace enforcement in situations where you feel obliged to violate the interests of one party or the other and force your way through, and where you can't take for granted the consistent cooperation of the parties.

That brings me to the question about dual key because again, we in the Secretariat had very little say in this matter, but the idea of dual key was absurd. If the purpose of using air power was to support the interests of the forces on the ground, the key should have been with one person, the local UN Force Commander. If the purpose of using air power was to pursue military objectives, to change the nature of the conflict, going well beyond the needs of the forces on the ground, then a) the peacekeeping forces should not have been there, they should have been pulled out, and b) the key should be with those deploying the air power, namely NATO. There was no need for NATO to have a say in the first kind of use and there was no need for the UN to have a say in the second kind of use. In this case, the UN should have been out of the way. The dual key pointed to the fundamental contradiction of trying to have an outside agency, in many cases without troops on the ground, use force when there were troops on the ground pursuing a different mandate. That summarizes my main lessons from these two days.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you, Shashi. Let me ask a question, which I will pose to Carl. In the 1999 UN Srebrenica report, they make a point that negotiations with the “architects of Serb policies,” principally Milosević and Karadžić but also Mladić on the military level, “[amounted to appeasement](#)” at various points in the war. That's the conclusion of the report. Is that the case? Is there a difference between negotiations that end up appeasing and negotiations that pursue a peace-making strategy?

⁷⁷ Chapter VI of the 1945 UN Charter does, however, include Article 36, which states that the Security Council can recommend “[appropriate procedures or methods of adjustment](#)” for the “*pacific settlement of disputes.*”

CARL BILDT: That is, of course, a matter of definition. You make peace with your enemies, not with your friends, so by definition, if you want to end a conflict not by militarily defeating the enemy but by some sort of political compromise then of course you have to negotiate with those particular forces. You end up with some sort of compromise which I would argue was inevitable in the case of a conflict such as the one we faced in Bosnia. And this was also what all the major countries and actors recognized. I do not know what David [Harland] had in mind when he wrote that particular phrase.

A couple of other comments. David seemed to be arguing that it would have made a big difference if the kind of strike package [against Bosnian Serb troops advancing on Srebrenica] that came after lunch on July 11 had instead come after lunch on the 10. Considering the fact that the military effect of that strike package was virtually nada, I am less certain. What might have made a difference would have been forces on the ground. It is difficult to know as we are trying to read the mindset of Mr. Mladić. We know that he changed the directives on the 9 for the operation and took that other fateful decision on July 11 [to kill the male prisoners].⁷⁸ More robust UN forces on the ground, and perhaps Žepa-like operations by the Bosnian Army, might have made a difference. The Bosnian Army emphasis was getting the troops out in the other direction. They were not primarily [in the south] where the Serbs were advancing, they were in the northern part of the enclave heading to Tuzla. Whether that would have made any difference we don't know, but I think it's more complicated.

On the overall conclusions of operations like this, I agree with much of what Shashi said. Clearly the safe area concept was a mistake in the way it was undertaken. We promised something we couldn't deliver. We couldn't secure these areas. That goes to what Shashi said: sometimes the mandates are hopeless. I think that lesson has been learned. There was an avalanche of Security Council resolutions on Bosnia, over the entire duration of the conflict. I joked at times that they were issuing Security Council resolutions at a

⁷⁸ According to chief ICTY Srebrenica investigator, Jean-Rene Ruez, Mladić took the final decision to capture Srebrenica on July 10 “[against the advice of his staff officers.](#)”

faster pace than we had time to read them. Some of them were utterly unrealistic which reduced respect for them as well.⁷⁹

We did not bring up the question of what the Security Council did after the fall of Srebrenica, which is an amazing story in itself. The first reaction of the Security Council was very, very low key. Those of us who were there were very surprised. There was some sort of Presidential Statement, which is virtually nothing. The Security Council then suddenly changed and adopted a resolution ordering the UN to retake, militarily, Srebrenica.⁸⁰ Of course no one took that resolution seriously, but there was an obvious disconnect between mandate and resources which has implications for the discussions we are having today on safe areas in different parts of the world. Don't talk about it if you can't do it.

The UN operation in Bosnia was a failure if you see it as a peacekeeping operation. But it was never meant to be.

Putting on my hat as Swedish Prime Minister, we probably sent around 10,000 soldiers to serve there during the conflict. Did they do anything useful? I think they did. Did they produce peace? No, they didn't. Did they defeat the Serbs? No they didn't, but they rescued a lot of people. We should not forget that this started, rightly or wrongly, as a massive humanitarian operation. It was the most massive humanitarian catastrophe that we had experienced in Europe since 1945. It was a question of helping, protecting with lorries and logistics to get help in. We also protected people in different areas who otherwise would have been subject to all sorts of things. I think it was most useful - but it was not a peacekeeping operation.

I think we have learned a lesson about the need for better intelligence. Sweden, along with the Netherlands, is now involved in the Mali operation. There is a Dutch

⁷⁹ A former UNPROFOR commander, Belgian general Francis Briquemont, told journalists in December 1993 that "I don't read the Security Council resolutions anymore because they don't help me." He resigned the following week. See, for example, "[UN General in Bosnia quits](#)," January 5, 1994, *NYT*.

⁸⁰ UNSC Resolution 1004, adopted on July 12, 1995 called on the UN Secretary General "[to use all resources available to him](#)" to restore the "safe area of Srebrenica." The French representative (Mérimee) offered to "[make troops available](#)" for such operations. The US representative (Albright) said the US was prepared to "[provide necessary airlift](#)" for the deployment of a rapid reaction force to Bosnia. President Clinton agreed with the private assessment of French military leaders that "[retaking Srebrenica \[is\] too risky](#)." See Tony Lake memo, "[Points to be made for telephone conversation with Chancellor Helmut Kohl](#)," July 14, 1995. Akashi urged UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali to urge UNSC members to "focus on humanitarian assistance rather than suggesting even obliquely that [the status quo ante can be re-established by force](#)." See Akashi to Annan, "[A Possible Communication from the Secretary-General to the Security Council](#)," UNPF-HQ, Zagreb 1149.

intelligence unit and a Swedish intelligence unit there that operate with drones and listening devices. Whether that will help in Mali remains to be seen, but the capacity is there. Better intelligence would not have helped in the Srebrenica case because we know the decision [to capture the enclave] was taken very late. But I think that particular lesson has been learned.

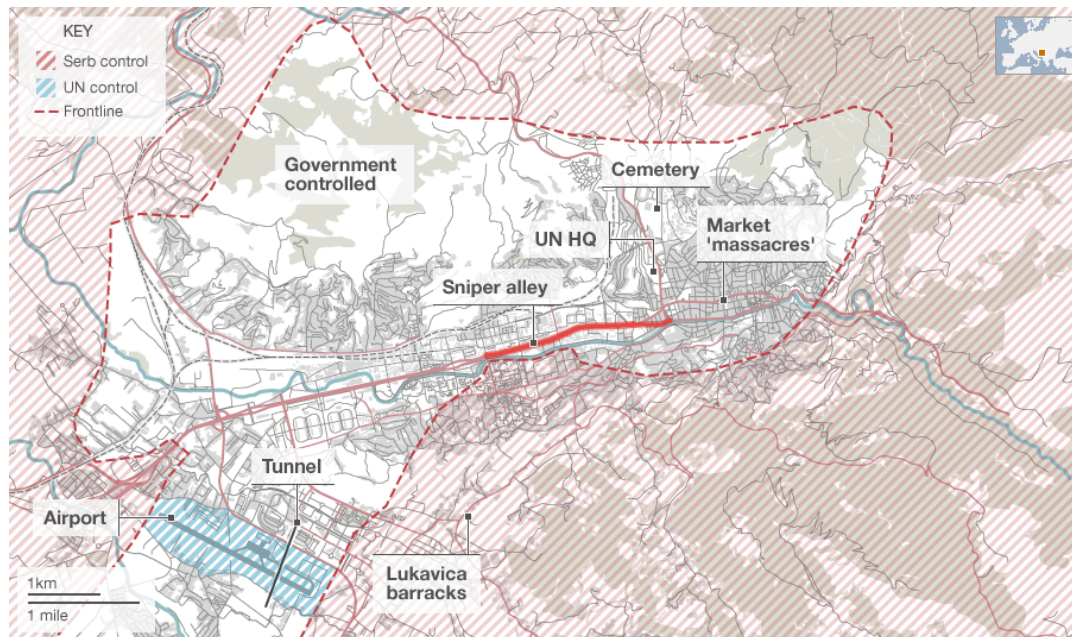
Overall, I agree that Bosnia is not where it should be.⁸¹ We are now twenty years after the war. Compare Bosnia today to Germany in 1965. There has been a failure of leadership in the country itself to come to terms with what needs to be done. Had we picked up some ICTY indictees [e.g. Mladić and Karadžić] earlier that would have been a good thing, no question about that. But it was impossible, in the wake of [the October 1993 Black Hawk Down incident in] Mogadishu [when 18 US soldiers were killed attempting to capture a Somali warlord]. The forces, particularly the US forces by the way, were opposed to that sort because it was considered too dangerous. I think it would have been morally good if we had done it. I do not know whether it would have made much a difference in the longer perspective. They were picked up eventually anyhow. Essentially it is the failure of the Bosnian political system to see the magnitude of their responsibility that explains the situation there today.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you Carl. I wanted to ask Rupert to comment on the negotiation/appeasement issue and then move on to your overall lessons.

RUPERT SMITH: Thank you, David Hannay, for the point about the rapid reaction force. Just to add, it was now up to me, the UNPROFOR Commander, to choose all the targets that NATO bombed. They had to agree to bomb them, but I chose the targets. The only ones that NATO chose were the suppression of air defense targets. NATO was my agent in that sense. Secondly, the artillery from France, Britain and the Netherlands fired something in the order of 600 rounds on the very first day of those attacks, August 30 and it stayed at that level [until the siege was broken about three days later](#). Two armored battle groups, one

⁸¹ After the Dayton agreement, Carl Bildt was appointed the international community's first High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina, serving from December 14, 1995 to June 17, 1997.

French, one British, then came in and broke the siege. UNPROFOR's role in this saga has been left out of the story a bit too much.



AFP map of Sarajevo 1995. Brown shade represents higher ground.

I want to talk about the direction of operations and the political-military relationship. The use of armed force to achieve anything will never work unless there is an extremely close linkage between the political direction and the military commander. It has to be an iterative, continuous conversation. It is not one meeting, in which you are told to go out and do something. It has to be a continuous relationship. You accommodate each other's point of view. The political view isn't the same as the military one. They are separate activities. You have to arrive at a position where you apply the use of force to a particular political end. If you cannot do that, in whatever way you wire it up, it will not work. It will fail. If your opponents are doing it better than you, they will defeat you. This is what you see taking place at every level of this venture until the very end when we managed to get it together in August 1995.

As an example of how it does not work, consider the point about negotiations. As a young officer in counter-terrorist training, I learned a bit about hostage situations. I wasn't the hostage: he was inside the room and I was outside it. One of the lessons drummed into us from bitter experience was that commanders command and negotiators negotiate. If a commander negotiates, he has only got himself and his position to deal with. He starts to

give his position away in order to achieve the extraction of the hostage. Between 1992 and 1995, we conducted around thirty negotiations without any political context or direction at all. Whether it was on the military one or the civil side, the UN immediately started to sell their position in order to achieve the goal of getting the convoy through or doing the safe area. That was what they were trading. Over the course of three years, you watch UNPROFOR sell itself away until we get to 1995. This happened because the commanders (and here I include Mr. Akashi and his predecessors) had only themselves to trade with. Commanders command, negotiators negotiate. The politician is the negotiator and the man on the ground, civil or military, is the commander. Don't put the commander in the position where he is trading with himself. That is what we were doing and we shouldn't do it again.

This leads me to a phrase that I hate, negotiation by force. Ladies and gentlemen, it's a fight, a battle. That is negotiation by force and that is what I do. You cannot negotiate by force, you win or lose a fight with force. It is a binary outcome, win or lose. It is not a negotiation. If you want a negotiation with force associated, then get a negotiator and use me to use the force. This is how the political-military relationship should be wired up. It does not have to be just individuals, it can be committees, but you have to satisfy those requirements.

I was recently asked by a publisher to write a new introduction to a book, originally written in 1976, called *On The Psychology of Military Incompetence*, which I recommend reading.⁸² It caused me to think about the problem of changing my own command's way of thinking in the spring and summer of 1995 and turning the nervous system of my headquarters into something more offensive. The author, Norman Dixon, mentions the need "to break the collective rationalizing away of information challenging the group's assumption." Didn't we have to break that? He talks about the "unquestioning morality of rightness that enable the consequences of actions to be overlooked." Didn't we fall into that one? He refers to "a shared illusion of unanimity in a majority viewpoint." Lastly, he mentions "a selective availability of information to avoid challenging previous decisions." In other words, group think. If you are in command in one of these situations, make sure the group thinks safe. Those are also my lessons.

⁸² Norman Dixon *On the psychology of military incompetence* is a survey of "100 years of military inefficiency" from the Crimean war to World War II.

YASUSHI AKASHI: There are many lessons to be learned from the Srebrenica experience or the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina operation. First, I would like to say that the perfect solution is an enemy of a good solution. In peacekeeping you first have to do the humanitarian assistance side. You also have to negotiate a ceasefire to stop bloodshed, however fragile it might be. What we most want to accomplish may not be what is the most feasible or realistic. As Dag Hammarskjöld said, what the UN tries to do is not to take people to heaven, but to save them from hell. We have to be modest and realistic.

I think this peacekeeping effort was doomed to be a failure because the Bosnian government did not want peacekeeping. They wanted peace enforcement. The Bosnian Serbs wanted no peacekeeping at all. It was bound to be very difficult, very delicate, and very controversial.

I would like to tell our Dutch colleagues that they should not blame themselves too much. They went to Srebrenica because Canadians did not want to continue and Sweden refused to go. You undertook a very difficult task. I am sure you were aware of the risks but I must say you had the courage to do a thankless job. Your Calvinist tradition [of individual responsibility] is great, but don't go too far. I think Colonel Karremans and his colleagues did their best. We need to put ourselves in their shoes.

I agree with other speakers that the approximately 200 resolutions and presidential statements issued by the UN Security Council [related to Bosnia] were a little too much. We achieved peace Cambodia with about 5 percent of this number of resolutions and presidential statements, UNSC [Resolution 836](#) [of June 4, 1993], in particular, was a very unfortunate resolution. I think many of us read it twenty, forty times, or even 100 times, without making sense of it. It includes so many phases and qualifiers. You have to adopt resolutions that will not be laughed at by commanders and negotiators on the ground.

I think David Harland made a very good point about the defective structure of the peacekeeping. The headquarters was in Sarajevo at first, which was a good location, but was moved to Zagreb.⁸³ This was a major defect. [As the special representative of the UN

⁸³ The UN Protection Force for the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) was established in February 1992, primarily for Croatia, with headquarters in Sarajevo. The headquarters moved to Zagreb in May 1992 due to the lack of security in Sarajevo.

Secretary-General] in Cambodia [between 1992 and 1994], I established my headquarters in Phnom Penh. I was able to consult with foreign ambassadors at my leisure, any time, at a moment's notice. I established a so-called "expanded five" committee, representing the Permanent Five Security Council members and regionally important countries. They were a perfect sounding board for me. The foreign ambassadors in Zagreb were accredited to Croatia, not Bosnia. My access to Sarajevo ambassadors was much more difficult than in Phnom Penh.

Sometimes, we learn too many lessons from the previous peacekeeping operation. We kept on telling ourselves not to cross the "[Mogadishu line](#)." We were aware of the debacle in Somalia. Secretary of State Christopher warned us of the so-called CNN effect. Public opinion and the media sometimes cause us to launch operations prematurely and prematurely withdraw, as happened after October 1993 when the American Rangers were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. We have to always warn against the eerie effects of media and the fickleness of public opinion. I subscribe to 95 percent of the [Brahimi report](#) that came out in August 2000. It is full of very good lessons for peacekeeping operations and it distributes the blame on all of us: from the Security Council, member governments, and UN Headquarters in New York to individual commanders. The primary warning is to avoid trying to do the impossible.

If you decide to send a peacekeeping force somewhere, you should not be stingy about resources. Do not underestimate the tasks which you confront. I am glad that UN peacekeeping operations today are far better than those in the 1990s, but are they perfect? No, far from it. A [new report](#) has just come out from a group headed by the former President of East Timor, José Ramos-Horta that emphasizes the vital importance of the political process accompanying peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping operations are much more effective if there is a pre-agreed peace agreement. We had such an agreement in Cambodia but even then the instrument was not perfect. We had to amend and revise the framework as we went on. My legal adviser was extremely disturbed by my attempts to depart from that fundamental text which was very important for us, but no paper is perfect. Nothing can replace human intelligence, human wisdom.

Peacekeeping is in constant evolution. All conflicts are unique and *sui generis*. Let us not apply the same solution to all operations. We have to be humble and keep our eyes

wide open to a great diversity of peacekeeping operations. The lessons we draw from Bosnia and Herzegovina should not be considered as a bible, a panacea for all future peacekeeping.

As Rupert and Shashi mentioned, there is no reference to peacekeeping in the UN Charter. We will have to continue to muddle through somewhere between Chapter VI and Chapter VII. Boutros-Ghali, in his famous “agenda for peace” said that the UN should stick to peacekeeping but that peace enforcement may be allowed on a very small scale. The Somalia experience forced Boutros-Ghali to amend his agenda and say that the UN should never venture into peace enforcement. For peace enforcement, you need an entirely different force structure, philosophy, training, equipment, and intelligence capabilities, as many of you have mentioned.

One of the few recommendations in the Brahimi report that were not accepted by the General Assembly or Security Council was an intelligence service. Member governments hate to give the UN Secretariat an intelligence capacity. We have to go to the Dutch government or the Swedish government or the US government to get our intelligence. If trust is established between the UN Secretariat and UN member governments, you will be allowed access to very valuable information, as was the case with me with regard to North Korean nuclear installations. Of course those satellite pictures were immediately withdrawn and taken back.

I will stop here, but I think the last two days have been extremely valuable and have given us many lessons to ponder.

ZEID RA'AD AL HUSSEIN: Everyone around this table was once a senior UN official or represented their states at the UN or worked with the UN as journalists or academic. I am the only [serving] UN official at this table, and for my sins I have to brief the Security Council next week on Srebrenica. I am the only one who is briefing. I consider this exercise not just a refreshing of my own mind but hopefully, with your permission, I will also

represent all of you at the 20th commemoration [of the Srebrenica events]. The Council has to hear the hard truth emerging from this discussion.⁸⁴

I was [Jordan's ambassador to] the Security Council [in 2014] when the Secretary-General decided to call for a full scale comprehensive review of peacekeeping. Here I depart from Shashi. It is true that mandates are important and resources and political will are necessary, but what also matters is performance. We discussed this in the Council at length. You have what you have, but how well do you perform with what you have? What we discovered coming out of an internal report last year was that there is a massive failure in the protection of civilians by the UN, notwithstanding everything written in the resolutions of the Security Council.⁸⁵

One of the matters we discussed last year was the continuing, chronic problem of interference by national authorities in the working of peacekeeping operations. It has not diminished, it has not gone away. When the atmosphere is benign, no one interferes, but when the atmosphere becomes dangerous and acute, everybody interferes. National commands tell their contingents not to obey the UN, not to occupy this bridge, to evacuate this position, exfiltrate out of that position. It is still happening. We learn very slowly or not at all. Our powers of anticipation remain extremely poor.

When looking at the lessons we draw from our experiences, there are a few things that we have to bear in mind. In many cases, not just Bosnia but today as well, we are often terrified of our interlocutors and what they may do. We should also be prepared to allow the possibility that they may be terrified of us too. We do not factor that into our thinking. No lesson appears to have been learned in this regard, which is so depressing.

Just because there is a complex political situation does not mean that the moral situation is similarly complex. There is a very complex political situation in Myanmar, but the moral situation is very clear. We should not confuse the two. Understanding the grievances of the other side does not mean that you have to sympathize with the actions of the other side.

⁸⁴ High Commissioner Zeid [addressed the UN Security Council](#) session on Srebrenica on July 8, 2015. Russia [vetoed a UK-sponsored resolution](#) describing the events in Srebrenica as a "genocide." The resolution received 10 affirmative votes. China, Venezuela, Angola, and Nigeria abstained.

⁸⁵ OIOS report, "Evaluation of the implementation and results of protection of civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations," [A/68/787](#), March 7, 2014.

My final point is this that [the parties] have to respect the UN. They don't have to like us, but if they do not respect us, they will have their way with us.⁸⁶ This is what happens too many times when the UN is present. We are too quick to try to please. We want to be on good terms with everybody, we want to be liked by everybody, we want to feel that we are partners. It doesn't matter in the end. I have infuriated more governments in the last nine months than most people here could possibly do, simply because of my job [as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights]. The thing is they all want to talk to you. They realize that there is some respect for the office. That is a fundamental lesson for the UN.

We need to understand who we are dealing with. We simply didn't understand enough about what Mladić was capable of. We learn extremely slowly, if at all.

I have been an almost continuous presence at the UN since my days in UNPROFOR, but we have never had a discussion like this. We had a debate in the General Assembly on David Harland's report in 1999, but it wasn't a discussion. I would love for the current members of the Security Council to have been here [in The Hague] to listen to our discussion. They needed to come and listen to the discussion [last year on Rwanda](#). Both Vitaly Churkin and Samantha Power [representatives of Russia and United States on the Security Council] were both with us in the Balkans, but the Council writ large has no clue about the anatomy of all of this.

One of the most serious consequences of our failure in Srebrenica and Žepa was the abandonment of the whole idea of safe areas. Many of us thought that it could still have applicability if it were done right. You could possibly have had a safe area in Syria in 2012, but [the Bosnia experience caused us to] cast it aside as something completely impractical. I do not believe you can't do it. In his report, David said it was difficult to do under the circumstances we had in Bosnia, but that does not mean it is impossible in other circumstances.⁸⁷ For the sake of all the people who are suffering in Syria, Iraq, and Libya,

⁸⁶ High Commissioner Zeid elaborated on this point in [his address to the UN Security Council on July 8](#). "The most foundational lesson of Srebrenica was this: To succeed, the United Nations must be respected. For the United Nations to be effective in robust peacekeeping, all parties to a conflict, and in particular the aggressor, must take the measure of the Council, its decisions and the United Nations presence on the ground. They must believe there will be serious consequences, and no impunity."

⁸⁷ The 1999 Srebrenica report concluded that "[protected zones and safe areas can have a role in protecting civilians in armed conflict](#)," but they must either be "demilitarized and established by the agreement of the

we need to rescue the idea of safe area and see if we can make it work properly the next time.

ZLATKO LAGUMŽDIJA: First, I want to thank you for organizing this meeting. A few points which I learned. Peacekeeping and peace building are different things. We have to move to the next level which is conflict prevention and something called “responsibility to protect.” This exercise can give us some tools, or at least elements of the tools, of how to proceed in the future.

When you are in front of the court, you can be charged with intentional [criminal acts] because you planned it. You can be charged for being part of a [plot or conspiracy]. You can be charged for knowing about it, you can be charged if you should have known it. In the case of Milosević and Mladić, they purposefully planned these events. The notion that Mladić became a kind of false messiah at 11 p.m. one evening to take revenge for something that happened 500 years ago, in order to clean his communist past, is very dangerous.⁸⁸

I understand that some people didn't expect it. I understand that some people were shocked. I was myself shocked by the level of atrocity, I expected it to happen, but not on such a scale. I expected it from the very beginning. I warned at the very beginning that something like this would happen. As deputy prime minister, I talked to UN representatives about planned, organized rapes of women in different parts of the country. Mass graves were recently discovered with 400 bodies in a mass grave at Tomašica in the Prijedor area, and another one with 700 people, that were part of the crimes of June-July 1992. There was a planned, self-evident chain of events beginning in Tomašica and the people of Prijedor being made to wear white ribbons [in 1992].⁸⁹ What happened in Srebrenica was a logical consequence of everything that happened before.⁹⁰

belligerents” or they must be “truly safe areas, fully defended by a credible military deterrent. The two concepts are absolutely distinct and must not be confused.”

⁸⁸ A reference to Mladić’s statement, on July 11, 2015, that “[the time has come to take revenge on the Turks](#)” for past historical injustices. ICTY prosecutors believe that Mladić took the decision late on the evening of July 11 to kill the male captives from Srebrenica.

⁸⁹ In August 2013, Bosnian authorities discovered a mass grave in Tomasica village, near Prijedor in northwest Bosnia, dating back to the first phase of the Bosnia war. ICTY investigators later identified the remains of 600 victims, many of whom had disappeared from their homes in the Prijedor area in June-July 1992. The Serb authorities in Prijedor had issued an order, on May 31, 1992, for the non-Serb population of the town to wear

I understand that you have to discuss, debate, cooperate with the butchers and criminals, but with all due respect I cannot see how you can be for negotiations and cooperation in between an unprotected victim and an armed murderer about the victim's right to life, property, religion, freedom and dignity. To put it another way, can you imagine a wolf and a lamb discussing what they will have for dinner? In that case, we should not be surprised if the wolf is at the table, not on the table.

As other participants have said, we need to redefine the notion of neutrality. I witnessed the obsession with neutrality from my first contact with the UN, when I participated in negotiations between the UN General Lewis MacKenzie and a Yugoslav army general on May 2, 1992. I was arrested with President Izetbegović after I returned from peace negotiations in Lisbon on a European community plane.⁹¹ I saw how it works.

I agree with Diego that we witnessed a planned "slow-motion genocide" from Tomašica and the white ribbons of Prijedor to Srebrenica. We should have seen it coming. The first time that there was a comprehensive, serious strategy with a clear goal, of stopping the people who had committed the genocide, was on August 30 to September 20, 1995, with the bombing campaign run by General Smith. That was a lesson learned. Thank you.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you Zlatko. Hasan?

HASAN MURATOVIĆ: We must all agree with Ambassador Arria's conclusion [from his visit to Srebrenica in April 1993], that Srebrenica was an "open jail" in which a slow genocide was taking place. The creation and management of the safe area was a postponement of genocide and postponement of transfer of territory to the enemy by the UN. The territory

white ribbons on their arms when they went outside their outside their homes, which were identified by white sheets.

⁹⁰ On May 31, 1992, the Serb authorities in Prijedor issued an order for the non-Serb population of the town to wear white stripes on their arms when they went outside their homes, which were identified by white sheets. Early in the war, Mladić criticized the ethnic cleansing policy advocated by Bosnian Serb political leaders. On May 16, 1992, he told the Republika Srpska Assembly that "we cannot cleanse nor can we have a sieve to sift so that only Serbs would stay...I do not know how Mr. Krajisnik and Mr. Karadžić would explain this to the world. People that would be genocide." [See [Mladić speech to 16th Session of the RS Assembly.](#)]

⁹¹ Izetbegović and Lagumdžija were arrested by the Yugoslav army at Sarajevo airport when they returned from peace talks in Lisbon aboard a European Community jet on May 2, 1992. Fighting flared up in Sarajevo shortly afterwards.

was transferred through the mistakes of the UN. It should have been protected by the UN forces on the ground, with support from the air. NATO and the UN failed to defend the enclave because of mistakes made by the headquarters in Zagreb. I think Mr. Harland expressed it very well. It was not a failure of the system, it was a failure of individuals. I am convinced that Janvier had promised Mladić not to call for air support. He did keep his promise during the time of the attack and fall of Srebrenica.

As for the lessons, we all know that the international community, and the UN, can act in one of two ways: through political and legal influence or by force. I think it is clear that the UN cannot implement any kind of efficient or useful peacekeeping mission without some use of force. In the Bosnia case, mechanisms for the use of force were not working properly. They were not implemented properly, they were misused by individuals. To avoid similar mistakes in the future, I think that NATO must be included in the implementation of Security Council instructions and resolutions.

To repeat what I said before, we must give credit to the UN for its actions in the humanitarian and medical fields, even though there were many mistakes due to the fact that so many people were involved. When we are talking about wrong and tragic UN engagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we are talking about UNPROFOR. This part of the UN operation in Bosnia was unprincipled, counterproductive, irresponsible, unfortunate, tragic and shameful. These are all words that describe the actions of the UN in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and especially in Srebrenica.

OBRAD KESIC: As the sole Serbian voice here, I would like to have the opportunity to say something in closing. First and foremost, I think even though my voice comes from Washington, DC, it comes with the approval of the President of Republika Srpska [Milorad Dodik] who is aware that I am here and who has shown an openness and willingness to engage in these kinds of discussions.

Having said that, the one regret I have is that the Serb leadership did not show the willingness to engage on the tragic events in Srebrenica and get ahead of the need for information about what happened. I myself encouraged Karadžić in February 1996 and also the last time I saw him at the end of July 1996, to be forthright about what happened and get as much information as possible about discrepancies in the numbers of missing

men and casualties. Unfortunately, his focus then was on the agreement he claimed that he had with Holbrooke [to retire from the political scene in return for immunity from war crimes prosecution]. He saw no need to move further in trying to clarify anything that had happened during the war.

There was much in our discussions that was very useful and I could agree with, but I had trouble with the political and moralistic statements. I do not find them very helpful or constructive. At the same time, it does show how emotional this issue has been and continues to be. Hopefully, at some point in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there will be a chance to do something like this, not only concerning Srebrenica but the many, many festering wounds that all people have. As we remember the victims of Srebrenica during the 20th anniversary commemoration, I hope you will have some compassion and empathy for all the victims, including the Serbian victims who tend to be overlooked whenever there is any kind of discussion about the suffering of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you, Obrad. Let me give a final word to Kees Matthijssen.

KEES MATTHIJSEN: I think I am the only military person here still on active duty. I have frequently been asked about the difference between my experience in Bosnia and my experience in Iraq and in Afghanistan, where I was also a commanding officer but at a higher level. In both Iraq and in Afghanistan, I had the certainty that I had the means or the access to means to allow me to do my job even if things went wrong. That was the big difference with the situation we faced in Srebrenica. The main lesson I would like to emphasize is that the military are educated, trained to do their jobs. Policy maker or decision makers must make sure that the military can do their job. I completely agree with Sir Rupert's remarks about the relationship between politicians and policy makers and the military. Make sure that you create the right conditions so that the military can do their jobs.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you, Kees. Let me ask Abi Williams, our host and inspiration in many ways, to conclude our deliberations.

ABIODUN WILLIAMS: It has been an extraordinary two days. As you have heard, we had a similar conference a year ago on Rwanda. When I came to this Institute, particularly because of my experience at the UN, I thought it was important for us to look back at these really two tragic events and to get a better sense of what happened through critical dialogue and close engagement with the key players and their interaction with essential documents. In joining us, you have done a service not only to policy making, but also to history.

We focused on what went wrong in Bosnia over the past couple of days, but if we look at Macedonia in the same period you could see what went right. If you look at the mandate, the resources, the cooperation of the parties, political will, the performance, you can see why we got it right. In contrast to all those resolutions and presidential statements on Bosnia, in the case of Macedonia, there were essentially just two resolutions, plus the pro-forma ones, extending the mandates.⁹² The resources were clear: 500 Americans made up 50 percent of the force, complimented by a Nordic force of 500. It was a robust signal to the rest of the former Yugoslavia drawing on the peacekeeping traditions of the Nordic troops. We saw what went right.

It is appropriate that we held this conference in the Netherlands. Srebrenica has understandably been a particularly sensitive subject in this country. It is a testament to the leaders of the Netherlands and the level of public debate that the subject has remained high on the political and legal agenda of this country. We have witnessed a revolution in accountability and individual responsibility since Srebrenica and Rwanda. The unique constellation of courts and tribunals that we have in this city represents an enormous step forward in the fight against impunity. This is why The Hague Institute, together with other institutions in this city, are engaged in discussions about preserving the judicial heritage of the ICTY. It is critical that this heritage be preserved and not lost. It is important for the UN to examine the policy and programmatic implications [of past actions]. We cannot make historians of every diplomat but we can provide them with the tools to draw on the lessons that past experience provides.

⁹² According to the UN database, the Security Council passed three resolutions related to the former Yugoslavia in 1991, 21 in 1992, 22 in 1993, 13 in 1994, and 21 in 1995, i.e. a total of 80 resolutions.

It has been an honor to host this second edition of our project and partner again with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and the National Security Archive. Thank you, Cameron and Michael for your tireless efforts in preparing this conference, and Tom, for your very skillful moderation of these discussions. Above all, thanks to our colleagues from Bosnia. In the words of the great poet Maya Angelou, in her poem in honor of President Clinton's first inauguration, *"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."* We are deeply grateful to all of you for your willingness to engage with us and for the openness with which you have discussed the very traumatic and very painful events of two decades ago. Thank you.

[END OF OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT]