

childhood in Belgrade. This special understanding was most in evidence when she met Biljana Plavsic in Banja Luka. Albright had added the stop almost as an afterthought on the advice of her closest aide, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Jamie Rubin, but the brief visit would have important consequences, emboldening President Plavsic to break publicly with her former mentors in Pale.

Ever since Dayton we had anticipated, even hoped for, a split between Pale and Banja Luka. (It will be recalled that at Dayton we had considered designating Banja Luka as the capital of Srpska, but held back because Izetbegovic objected.) Now it arrived in a most unexpected form. Plavsic publicly attacked her closest colleagues where they were most vulnerable: corruption. Presenting herself as a still-patriotic Serb nationalist, she lashed out publicly at Karadzic and Krajisnik, calling them "criminals" who were living well while stealing from their own people. To almost everyone's surprise, she struck a responsive chord among many Serbs in western Bosnia, and weakened Pale.

The Team Changes. Major personnel changes were under way within the international effort. Carl Bildt stepped down as High Representative to return to political life in Sweden, replaced by Carlos Westendorp of Spain. I urged Albright and Gelbard to send Jacques Klein to Sarajevo as Westendorp's deputy. In his tour overseeing the transition of eastern Slavonia to Croatian control, Klein had shown a flair for the sort of forceful, even melodramatic performance that impressed the people of the region.

Another appointment changed the equation significantly: President Clinton and Secretary Cohen chose as NATO's new Supreme Commander none other than Wes Clark. In naming Clark, they had, in effect, sent Dayton to NATO—an important signal of determination. At the same time a new SFOR commander, General Eric Shinseki, and a new Ambassador, Richard Kauzlarich, took over in Sarajevo.

Bosnia Once More. On July 18, Bob Gelbard, relatively new in his job as the "implementation czar," asked to have breakfast with me in New York. His drive and focus were impressive, but the situation on the ground was still unsatisfactory—to him as well as to me. Near the end of the breakfast, he asked if I would be willing to make another trip to the region as soon as possible. Its purposes would be to talk to an increasingly obstructionist Milosevic, and help revitalize the implementation effort. Agreeing at once, I proposed that we travel together to show a united front and maximize American pressure. I met Gelbard and his team, including Treasury's David Lipton, in Paris on August 6. President Clinton himself had talked publicly in recent weeks about "saving Dayton," a phrase that disturbed some of his senior advisors but that

vividly conveyed his own sense of concern. I had told him that we were about one year behind where we should be.

We flew first to Split to join a meeting between Izetbegovic and Tadjman. They met against the backdrop of highly publicized actions by both the Croat and Muslim communities against refugee return; each had recently mobilized mobs to prevent other ethnic groups from returning to their homes. In the Vogosca suburb of Sarajevo, a mob of Muslim women—many Srbenica widows—had blocked Serbs from returning to their homes. In Jajce, a Croat mob had done the same thing to five hundred Muslims.

When we were ushered into the meeting room, we were confronted with an unexpected sight. Instead of facing each other with the previous air of hostility, the two leaders were seated side by side at the end of the table, their shoulders almost touching. I remembered the meeting in Zagreb on September 19, 1995, when Tadjman had yelled at Izetbegovic in front of forty people. Now, as one of Tadjman's senior aides explained, they wanted to show us—and a large press corps waiting outside—that they could collaborate without American direction. With great pride, Tadjman and Izetbegovic gave us a joint announcement intended to strengthen the Federation. But it was vague and filled with generalities that meant little.

Gelbard and I had never worked closely together before, but we operated easily. I began, "We congratulate you on producing a joint statement. However, if you want us to praise it publicly, you must agree to a second statement with specific deadlines. You must condemn the mob actions against refugee return in both Jajce and Vogosca, and pledge that you will not permit it again."

We presented a draft that we had drafted during the flight to Split, and settled down to a five-hour negotiation that ended with an announcement containing ten new commitments and specific deadlines. As always in Bosnia, one could not be sure that these deadlines and goals would be honored. But based on the pattern of the previous eighteen months, we knew that the best way to make progress was to forge public agreement on specific dates and goals, and then hold the parties to them.*

In a private meeting, Tadjman complained bitterly to Gelbard, Galbraith, and me about his treatment by Washington. He had been hospitalized with a bout with cancer since I had last seen him, but it was in remission, and he showed only a few effects of his illness. But he believed that the United States had leaked information about his health after an examination at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington. The United States had also hardened its policy in the face of Croatia's continued expulsion of Serb families from land they had lived on for generations, slowing down or withholding aid to Croatia.

* To almost everyone's amazement, the refugees who had been forcibly prevented from returning to Jajce in early August returned peacefully a few weeks later, and more followed after that.

We said that he had to give Dayton more than lip service if he wanted Washington to ease up. I said that we were outraged by the Croat mob in Jajce only three days earlier. "By the way," Gelbard added dramatically, "I know for a fact that Dario Kordic [the most prominent indicted Croat war criminal] was personally directing that mob. You must send him to The Hague if you want things to change between us." Tudjman protested that he had no idea where Kordic was or what he was doing. But he did not really expect us to believe this; he was only testing the importance of the issue. We were immovable; Kordic had to be brought to justice.

Eight weeks later, on October 6, 1997, Kordic and nine other indicted Bosnian Croats "voluntarily" surrendered under pressure from Zagreb. It was an important step forward in the quest for war criminals.* Watching Kordic make his farewell statement on television before flying to The Hague, I noticed a small but revealing detail: Kordic's remarks at the Split airport were translated by Tudjman's personal interpreter, a clear signal that Tudjman and Kordic had reached some sort of private understanding regarding the future.

After our day with Tudjman and Izetbegovic, we spent the night at a resort hotel in Trogir, a beautiful walled city near Split. It was a soft August evening, and my thoughts went back to the last night I had spent in Split, almost exactly two years earlier, before setting out for Mount Igman.

Tuzla and the Generals. The next morning, August 7, we flew to Tuzla at dawn for a meeting with the three senior commanders in the American and NATO chain of command: General Shalikashvili, who had changed his schedule to join us for what was also his final visit to the region; General Clark, now the NATO commander; and General Eric Shinseki, the new SFOR commander. For over a year the Bosnian Serbs had been "cheating" on Dayton by putting military police uniforms on regular soldiers and claiming that they were no longer in the Bosnian Serb Army, even though the military annex of the agreement, anticipating such games, had specifically included "military uniformed police" in the definition of armed forces. These paramilitary police were, I said publicly, "racist, fascist, anti-peace agreement, anti-democratic, and a potential threat to the international community." Yet until Clark took command of NATO, SFOR had ignored them. Clark instructed Shinseki to issue a warning, followed by enforcement, that henceforth the military uniformed police would be treated the same way as regular forces.

When the weather cleared, we headed for Sarajevo, after bidding an especially warm farewell to Shalikashvili, whom I would not see again until his emotional retirement ceremony on the parade grounds at Fort Myer at the end of September. I had never known a military officer of whom I was fonder. It

* More voluntary surrenders—including a number of Serbs—followed in 1998.

was impossible to dislike him, and I was grateful for his personal support even when we occasionally disagreed.

Reviving Implementation. The good news in Sarajevo was that the joint institutions actually existed; the bad news was that they barely functioned.

The joint presidency, composed of Izetbegovic, Krajisnik, and Zubak, was one of the most important litmus tests of Dayton. I was gratified to see that our decision to limit the presidency to three people—one from each ethnic group—had been correct, but the joint presidency was still a limited operation. It had been in a state of suspension for over a month as a Serb protest against the British operation on July 10 in Prijedor—the most important military action since Dayton—which had resulted in the capture of one indicted war criminal and the death of another. The dead Serb had been one of Karadzic's closest allies, the Prijedor police chief, a notorious killer during the 1992 "death camp" phase of the war, and his death had been a serious blow to the Bosnian Serbs. Only our trip to Sarajevo had forced Krajisnik to attend.

The meeting began in an unlikely manner. Looking directly at me, Krajisnik said that he wanted to make an opening comment. "At Dayton," he said, "I opposed the agreement. I was wrong. I opposed the deployment of IFOR. I was wrong. Dayton is a good thing for Bosnia. I want to make this clear, especially to Ambassador Holbrooke."

This statement was not as promising as it sounded. Krajisnik's "Dayton" was not what we had in mind; his was a way station on the path to partition, ours was an agreement for a single country. He may have signed the agreement, but he still refused to accept its central thesis.

Krajisnik was immovable on every issue. Fed up, we ended the meeting and asked to see him alone. Gelbard and I angrily told him that his behavior was unacceptable, and obviously incompatible with his opening statement of support for Dayton. I said we had not come all this way just to participate in a meaningless meeting. We scheduled a second meeting for that evening at the National Museum in Federation territory. When Krajisnik protested the venue, we told him that if he did not come to the museum we would assume he was withdrawing from the joint presidency. This startled Krajisnik, and he backed down.

Another All-nighter. We resumed at about ten o'clock that evening, August 7, at the National Museum, and turned immediately to three unresolved problems: creating a single telephone system, getting the Standing Committee on Military Matters functioning, and agreeing on the distribution of ambassadorships among the three ethnic communities.

The meetings ended at four in the morning, with agreements on all these issues. The last carried equally great symbolic value, especially when the Mus-

lms agreed that the ambassador in Washington would be a Serb, while they retained the position at the United Nations.

When the final documents were ready for signature, the acting High Representative, Gerd Wagner, brought them in for Krajisnik's signature. Wagner, whom I had known well in Bonn and Washington, was one of Germany's rising diplomatic stars. Krajisnik clearly disliked Wagner, and instead of signing the agreements, he began to pick a fight with the affable German diplomat. Furious at Krajisnik's abuse of Wagner, I leaned forward across the table and said, "I want to tell you something I have never said to anyone else in this long negotiating process: if you do not sign this paper now, as you already promised in front of witnesses, I promise we will never speak to you or deal with you again." I handed Krajisnik a pen, and he signed the agreements. The next morning, Wagner joined Gelbard and me at a press conference at the American Embassy to announce the agreements of the previous evening. It was a real achievement for Wagner, the highest-ranking German diplomat in Bosnia—but it was one of his last. A few weeks later, he and eleven other people, including five Americans, died when a Ukrainian helicopter crashed into the side of a hill. Once again, as at Mount Igman and Dubrovnik, the enforcing nations had paid the ultimate price for their efforts to bring peace to Bosnia. And once again, the dead were civilians, diplomats, policemen, and aid workers—not soldiers.

A few days later, *The New York Times* would criticize us for having "spent the bulk of [our] time haggling over telephone area codes and designs for a currency and the appointment of Bosnian ambassadors [instead] of dealing with the principal threats to a unified Bosnia." But the front-page article missed one of the main points of our trip, and indeed of the entire implementation process: to create a unified Bosnia, these seemingly small issues had to be solved, one by one if necessary—and this could be done only under external pressure. The parties themselves could not voluntarily agree on anything yet. *The Washington Post* got it right, reporting that "Holbrooke's efforts [were] seen as part of the campaign to end a sense of drift that had settled over the Bosnia peacemaking effort." Our trip helped revive the implementation process, and set the stage for further progress. Bob Gelbard would continue to travel to the region tirelessly, hammering the parties into slow but steady progress.

Banja Luka and Plavsic. Immediately after the press conference announcing the new agreements on August 8, we flew to Banja Luka to see Biljana Plavsic, who was now receiving international attention for her defiance of both the Pale Serbs and Milosevic. A biologist during the Tito era, she had been a Fulbright scholar in New York and spoke serviceable English. She was on her best behavior, trying hard to charm us. The United States, in turn, had

put its weight behind her in her struggle against Pale. Nonetheless, we could not ignore her unsavory origins and close ties to Karadzic.

"I want you to know that while I am still a nationalist, I am also a good democrat," she began. This was a shrewd start. "But what we must ask you," I responded, "is whether you are still a separatist."

"No," she answered firmly, "I do not support a separate Serb state, I support Dayton." Later, although we had agreed to keep our conversation private, her staff made this exchange public. It represented a complete change for her since the days when Bosnian Serbs named tanks after her.

She told us she feared for her life at the hands of Pale thugs. She said that her meeting with Madeleine Albright in May had been critical in her decision to stand up to her former mentors. The day after that meeting, she said, she had gone to Pale to meet with Krajisnik, Buha—and Karadzic. "I told them we should comply with Dayton," she said, "and they attacked me, told me I had betrayed the revolution, and threw me out of the party."

When it was time to leave, the most revealing moment of the day occurred. Over one hundred journalists were waiting downstairs. We had assumed she would keep her distance from us in their presence. Instead, she announced that she would sit with us and participate. In addition, she asked David Lipton to explain to the press the price the Bosnian Serbs were paying in lost international aid because of Pale's refusal to participate in the joint institutions.

Mrs. Plavsic had crossed the Rubicon. It would be difficult for her to scramble back. She had chosen to defy Pale, and was clearly, publicly, counting on American support.

Belgrade, August 8. Once again, Milosevic had moved the meeting place, this time to the "White Palace," a magnificent royal dwelling in Belgrade unused for over a decade. The gardens were splendid, the food significantly better, and the walls filled with Old Masters, including a Rembrandt. But these cosmetic changes only emphasized that nothing else had changed. In fact, the sense of isolation felt greater.

Alone in the palace except for his faithful aide Goran Milinovic and one Deputy Minister, Milosevic said that Dayton was succeeding and that we should be satisfied, except for the troubles that Mrs. Plavsic was causing. We disagreed strongly, saying that Karadzic was now openly violating the July 18, 1996, agreement, and that, by backing Pale over Plavsic, Milosevic was undermining stability in Bosnia. The meeting meandered on, and even a private talk in the gardens was unproductive.

During dinner, Milosevic and I spoke alone in the reception room. "Mr. President," I said, "we have been wasting our time tonight. We are willing to return tomorrow if you wish to bring Krajisnik here so that we can try to make some progress." We finished the meal without any progress.

Gelbard and I returned to the White Palace the next morning alone, wondering if Krajisnik would appear. He had told us flatly in Sarajevo that he would not come to another meeting in Belgrade. But there he was, sitting quietly in a chair next to Milosevic, his demeanor quite different from what we had seen two days earlier.

We turned first to Radovan Karadzic, still the overriding issue. I showed the two men an interview that Karadzic had given the previous day to a German newspaper. Both Milosevic and Krajisnik professed to be unaware of the interview, but they readily agreed that it constituted a flagrant violation of the July 18 agreement. We warned that such actions would increase the chances of a military action to bring Karadzic to justice.

"If you take such action," Milosevic said emphatically, "it will be a disaster for all of us. Your nation will regret it." Gelbard and I shrugged. "That is your problem," I said. "You cannot threaten our nation. What happens in Bosnia is important to us, but not decisive. For you these events are life and death."

Krajisnik offered a guarantee that Karadzic "would henceforth comply fully with the July 18 agreement." We rejected this as no longer sufficient. "If you wish to affirm that the July 18 agreement is still valid, you may do so, and we will report it publicly," I said. "But we cannot make a second agreement with you. You signed the first one, and it has been violated."

We concluded the meeting by discussing several other issues that concerned us.* Then, after a press conference, we left for the United States. For the first time since Dayton, I felt that the implementation effort was being pursued with sufficient vigor and determination, thanks in large part to Gelbard and Clark. At a meeting in the Cabinet Room on Friday, August 15, I told the President and other senior officials that we were still far behind schedule, but progress was visible in many parts of Bosnia. At the local level, people were trying to live and work together again. But it was necessary to repeat a warning that was now nearly two years old: as long as the leaders who had started the war remained in power in Pale, the country would not be out of danger, and it would be almost impossible to withdraw our troops.

Milorad Dodik and the second elections. In a bold gamble, the United States and its Contact Group associates backed a proposal by Mrs. Plavsic to hold new elections for the Republika Srpska Assembly. In our August 1997 meeting, Gelbard and I had told Milosevic that we would back these elections despite his strenuous objections. Faced with this unyielding position, Milose-

*The bulk of the meeting concerned matters that are still "operational," and must therefore be omitted from this account.

vic changed course and began to deal with Plavsic, whom he had long ridiculed publicly.

The results of the election, held in September 1997 under OSCE supervision, were stunning, and suggested more than any previous event the potential that lay in aggressive implementation of the Dayton Agreements. Eighteen members of the new Bosnian Serb assembly were Muslims, elected by Muslim refugees voting in their home areas under complex electoral provisions hammered out at Dayton, over Milosevic's objections. These new legislators combined with Plavsic's supporters to elect as Prime Minister—by one vote—a thirty-nine-year-old businessman named Milorad Dodik, who had not been involved in the war and who had only limited ties to the Bosnian Serb wartime leadership. For the first time since the war began, the Bosnian Serb government was not controlled by the party of Radovan Karadzic. While Izetbegovic and his government in Sarajevo watched skeptically, Dodik announced that he would honor Dayton. In response, the United States and the European Union began to release aid funds previously denied to the Bosnian Serbs. The dismantling of the Bosnian Serb wartime capital of Pale, which we had long hoped for, began as government offices moved, one by one, to Banja Luka.

The President Decides. On December 22, 1997, President Clinton made his second trip to Bosnia. He took with him not only his family and members of Congress but, in a brilliant display of bipartisanship, former Senator and Mrs. Dole. Dole had told me in early September that he would support an extension of the American troop presence in Bosnia, information I promptly relayed, with Dole's blessing, to the President, and the two men, once political adversaries, had found common ground over the need to stay the course in Bosnia.

Two days before his trip, President Clinton held a news conference in which he announced that the United States would keep American troops in Bosnia past the original June 1998 deadline. The President accepted full responsibility for agreeing to the two earlier deadlines, and said he would set no further deadlines.

This was a benchmark decision for the United States. The President had finally made it explicit that we would not walk away from Bosnia. Three days later, he took that message directly to the people of the Balkans.

I talked often to the President and his senior advisors in the weeks prior to his announcement and his trip, and I knew how difficult the decision was at the personal level, especially since his political opponents were determined to take advantage of it. But he knew that the original timetable would have done enormous damage to the national interests of the United States and NATO. We spoke again right after the trip, and it was clear that seeing Sarajevo for the

first time had had a powerful impact on him and his family. I had the sense that the trip had reaffirmed in his mind the correctness of his strategic decisions, and clarified for him the difficulties that still lay ahead.

Once it was clear that the United States had abandoned a specific NATO troop withdrawal schedule, the pace of implementation picked up. The first few months of 1998 saw more movement than in the previous two years. The common currency coupon and new coins, a unified telephone system, a single license plate, and limited air, rail, and truck traffic all began to function—although in many cases local officials resisted such reforms, as they would cut into their personal gains under the highly corrupt system that had developed during the war within each ethnic community.

In September 1998, another important nationwide election was held in Bosnia. In several meetings during the summer of 1998 at the White House, I stressed that these elections would be critical in deciding the country's future. The highest priority was the defeat of Momcilo Krajisnik, who was running for reelection as the Serb co-President of Bosnia and still represented the extreme rejectionism of Karadzic. His departure was, in my view, absolutely necessary for progress in Bosnia. This was especially true since, under the Dayton system agreed to at Dayton, the next senior president of Bosnia-Herzegovina would be Serb—and Krajisnik would never convene a meeting of the three-person presidency if elected.

Gelbard added that Plavsic's reelection was equally important, although, given her origins as a founding member of the SDS, she still carried a highly unsavory legacy and was firmly opposed to the return of Muslim refugees to the Serb portions of Bosnia. Gelbard predicted that both elections would produce the desired outcome.

The election results were mixed. Krajisnik lost to a moderate, Zivko Radisic—a man with whom both the Bosnian Muslims and the international community could work. Furthermore, the vote of the extreme nationalist parties in all three communities declined, the first electoral indication that the people might at last be turning away from the leaders whose inflammatory ultranationalism had destroyed Bosnia. In the Republika Srpska Assembly, for example, the number of seats controlled by the SDS had dropped from forty-five to nineteen in just over a year.

But something went wrong with the second part of the scenario. Running a sloppy and complacent campaign, ignoring the advice of her advisors and of Bob Gelbard, Mrs. Plavsic lost her bid for election as president of Republika Srpska to an ultranationalist, Nikola Poplasen, who represented a party even more extreme than the SDS. In addition—and this was not unexpected—another nationalist, Ante Jelavic, won the election for the Croat co-President of Bosnia, reinforcing concerns that, in the long run, the greatest danger to a sin-

gle functioning Bosnian state would come not from the Serbs but from the Croats, who could more easily carve parts of the west (where the bulk of the Croats lived) out of Bosnia and annex them formally to neighboring Croatia, which already exercised de facto control over much of the area through its representative and local thugs.

Poplasen and Jelavic were setbacks, but Radisic's victory was a step forward. As a result, Gelbard and I suggested in several meetings at the White House in late 1998 that a significant adjustment in policy was in order: henceforth, the implementing powers needed to seek ways to strengthen the central government, which had been virtually nonexistent while Krajisnik had been its senior Serb representative. Approving this policy shift, Washington and the EU planned to place more power in the central institutions in 1999, and remove as much as possible from the entities. Such a policy—I called it “back to the future”—was precisely what I had originally hoped for at Dayton, since a stronger central government would increase the chances of making Bosnia a viable single country. I urged that we now address the single greatest flaw in the Dayton Agreement—the existence of two opposing armies in a single country—by creating a centralized defense establishment.

Despite the mixed election results—and despite the fact that refugee return to minority areas, the single most critical indicator of progress, was still moving extremely slowly—even the most hardened critics of Dayton had to be impressed by evidence that the country seemed to be gradually coming together, especially economically. At the end of 1997, Gelbard and the Contact Group decided, as an incentive for further progress, to offer Milosevic a “road map” for normalizing Yugoslavia's relations with the international community: a series of actions that the U.S. and the Contact Group would take to “reward” Belgrade for supporting strict implementation of Dayton. The steps were primarily economic: the phased removal or suspension of most of the remaining economic restrictions on Yugoslavia, keyed to progress in Bosnia. Beyond that lay Belgrade's ultimate goal: political acceptance, U.N. and OSCE membership, U.S. recognition.

In March 1999, the Western powers took two important steps, demonstrating their continued resolve. First, Roberts Owen finally made his long-awaited ruling on the town of Brcko, “awarding” it neither to the Federation nor to the Serbs. Rather, he established a special zone, the “Brcko District,” that would be administered directly by the central government. On the same day, High Representative Carlos Westendorp fired Nikola Poplasen as President of Republika Srpska because of his continual efforts to destroy the Dayton Agreement.

But long before these events, indeed a year earlier, something that had long been feared occurred. Kosovo, the most difficult of all the problems of the region, the area where the crisis had begun, exploded again.

By the spring of 1998, Kosovo would create another crisis for—and between—America and its NATO allies and Russia, both proving again the necessity for American leadership and illustrating in the most brutal form the dilemmas created by the terrible and complex history of the Balkans. It would also bring me back to the region in the summer and fall of 1998 under the most difficult conditions in a desperate effort to prevent another Balkan war.