

Pale's Challenge

(August 22-28)

The inscrutability of history remains the salvation of human freedom and of human responsibility. The failure of prediction permits us to act as if our choices make a difference. For no one can prove that they don't, and there is no other way that we can vindicate human dignity and contrive a moral existence.

—ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.¹

AT 10:00 A.M. ON AUGUST 22, the day after our return from Sarajevo, Secretary Christopher convened his senior team to discuss Bosnia. As usual, we met in his working office, a small room directly behind his large, formal office on the seventh floor. When I first visited the State Department during a spring break from college in 1961—a trip that inspired me to join the Foreign Service the following year—Dean Rusk had used the large room as his office. But most recent secretaries of state preferred the more intimate surroundings of the back office, and Christopher used the ornate larger room almost entirely for formal meetings with foreign officials.

Although the State Department's unique bureaucratic culture has survived every one of its leaders (and defeated some), the personal style of each secretary deeply affects the way the Department reacts to events. Warren Christopher's style was methodical and cautious. He was, as the press often said, a lawyer's lawyer. He rarely talked about himself, but once offered a revealing comment to a journalist about his style: "I always thought that I would do things in a conservative way to maximize the progressiveness of my policy positions. . . . If you are courteous and prudent, you can advance causes and advance ideas that would be unacceptable for others."² Highly successful in his Los Angeles legal practice, he went to Washington in 1977 as Deputy Secretary of State to Cyrus Vance, and carried out a number of key assignments, most famously the complex negotiations over the release of the fifty-two American hostages in Tehran at the end of the Carter Administra-