

Drama in New York

(September 18-26)

"I like the Walrus best," said Alice: "because he was a *little* sorry for the poor oysters." "He ate more than the Carpenter, though," said Tweedledee. . . . "Well!" [said Alice] "They were *both* very unpleasant characters."

—LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking-Glass*

WE WERE DETERMINED TO AVOID REPEATING in New York the chaos of Geneva. Yet, partly because of my own error of judgment, the New York Foreign Ministers meeting was nearly a complete disaster.

The drama surrounding New York would have surprised most journalists and outside observers, who had begun to impart a sense of inevitability to the negotiations. Their optimism was fueled by Administration officials who believed that when they talked to the press it was always necessary to emphasize the positive—which inevitably meant *overemphasize* the positive. Still, overstated or not, there was good news for the first time in four years. The city of Sarajevo was coming back to life. The aura of invincibility that surrounded the Serbs had been shattered. Milosevic, who had started the war because Bosnia had declared its independence from "Yugoslavia," had formally conceded in Geneva that Bosnia was an independent country, and had accepted its existing international boundaries.

Under these circumstances, Izetbegovic and his colleagues should have looked forward to New York as a chance to take another step forward. But they were disorganized and unfocused.

Meanwhile, Milosevic's first priority was the lifting of economic sanctions against his country. He favored an early international conference at which the three Presidents would sign an agreement of "no more than two or three pages" and freeze the contending armies in place. He wanted to keep the political provisions of any peace agreement ambiguous and limited, and restrict the functions and authority of a central government. His goal was to create a

situation similar to Cyprus or the two Koreas—a land in which a temporary dividing line becomes a seemingly permanent one.

This was not what we had in mind; if and when we invited the three Balkan Presidents to a conference, it would be with the clear intention of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement, not another weak, meaningless set of general principles that would be forgotten or ignored as soon as the conference adjourned.

Not for the first or the last time, Tudjman was the critical variable. He had a clear sense of what he wanted: first, to regain eastern Slavonia; second, to create an ethnically pure Croatia; and third, to maintain maximum influence, if not control, over the Croat portion of Bosnia. The Croatian President disliked both Milosevic and Izetbegovic, but his leverage over Sarajevo was substantial; the Croats in Izetbegovic's government, including the most important, Federation President Kresimir Zubak, usually followed "guidance" from Zagreb. The veteran British journalist Misha Glenny, who had covered the Balkans for years, was one of the first to recognize publicly the importance of Zagreb. In a perceptive article for the *New York Times* op-ed page published just before the New York meeting, entitled, "And the Winner Is . . . Croatia," Glenny praised our negotiating efforts but noted that, under any peace settlement, "Sarajevo will be utterly dependent on Croatia economically." He concluded: "The champagne corks can be opened in Zagreb—nowhere else."

Washington: The Bureaucratic Game. We had spent only one working day in Washington in the last three weeks. When we returned, we found that interest in our activities had increased substantially. Agencies and individuals that had paid us little attention now wanted to be part of the process. For example, the Agency for International Development (AID), asserting that it would have to carry out the reconstruction program, sought a major role in the negotiations. Some agencies or bureaus wanted to place representatives on the delegation; we fended them off on the grounds that our plane was too small. Tony Lake talked about creating a committee, under NSC direction, to oversee our efforts.

We were concerned that if the unprecedented degree of flexibility and autonomy we had been given by Washington were reduced, and we were subjected to the normal Washington decision-making process, the negotiations would become bogged down. At the same time, our small team was tired and understaffed. With only five days left until the New York meetings, we needed help, but I did not want to increase the size of the core team or relinquish our autonomy.

Faced with similar challenges in earlier crises, some administrations had created secret bypass mechanisms that kept information and authority within

a small group—but also deceived or cut out everyone else. Most famously, when Kissinger was National Security Advisor, he had frequently ignored the entire State Department—once making a secret trip to Moscow without the knowledge of the American Ambassador, and regularly withholding almost all information about his secret discussions with China from the Secretary of State. We did not want to arouse the kind of distrust and intrigue that, as a result, had marred the Nixon-Kissinger period—an atmosphere Kissinger told me that in retrospect he regretted.

To avoid this classic bureaucratic dilemma, John Kornblum set up a small, informal team to support our efforts. As we envisioned it, the group would be, in effect, an extension of the negotiating team, but located in Washington. We drew on people outside the European Bureau, but insisted they work solely for Kornblum on this particular project. This meant that its participants, with the prior agreement of their superiors, would have to agree *not* to process drafts through the regular interagency “clearance process,” which, while essential to the normal functioning of government, was too cumbersome and time-consuming for a fast-moving negotiation.

What Kornblum and I proposed was highly unusual, and could be derailed by forceful objections from a number of people. But Warren Christopher, with the strong encouragement of Talbott and Donilon, protected us. Christopher believed firmly in backing his negotiators, even if he did not agree with all their positions; this was fundamental to the man and shaped his attitude toward his role as the captain of the State Department. He, Strobe, and Tom regularly held off efforts by others to get involved in too many details. Without their support, the process would probably have resembled the one that had taught me such a strong negative lesson in Paris in 1968.

Sandy Berger also protected the negotiations. Several times a week, he chaired Deputies’ Committee meetings on Bosnia. At every meeting, Kornblum would bring the national security apparatus up to date on our activities, while keeping at arm’s length efforts to interfere in them. Sandy handled this deftly, keeping everyone sufficiently involved so that the Kissingerian problem—cutting people out—was avoided.

Kornblum’s core group consisted primarily of lawyers: Jim O’Brien, who was part of Madeleine Albright’s Washington office; Tim Ramish, the legal adviser for Europe; Miriam Sapiro, a lawyer on Jim Steinberg’s Policy Planning staff; John Burley, a lawyer in the European Bureau; Laurel Miller, a lawyer in Bob Owen’s firm who worked pro bono; and Lloyd Cutler, the former Counsel to both Presidents Carter and Clinton, who gave the group the perspective of a senior outsider with decades of experience.

Kornblum ran this backstop operation with skill. He had long been the Foreign Service’s most experienced German hand, and was widely respected for

his intellect. But in the Foreign Service "brilliant" is often a subtle code word for "arrogant," and, with his sharp wit and fierce advocacy, John had made some powerful bureaucratic enemies during his long career. Because he had gone without a promotion for a lengthy period, under State Department regulations he was within a year of being forced into early retirement—a result not of any career problems, but of a State Department budget so sharply reduced by Congress that promotions at higher levels had virtually ceased. This strange regulation had originally been designed to force deadwood out of the senior Foreign Service, and was now driving out some of the country's most qualified diplomats simply because they had been promoted early and then run into a general promotion slowdown caused by budgetary constraints.

From the beginning, we worked as a seamless team; I could turn a problem or a meeting over to him in midsentence and he would pick it up without a moment's pause. I felt a strong intellectual kinship with him, and greatly respected his superior knowledge of Europe.

On September 21, the day after we returned from the region, Tony Lake convened a meeting in the White House. He said that the "red lights" that Washington had conveyed to Zagreb and Sarajevo to end the offensive were extremely important and should continue to be emphasized. I wondered if Lake was aware of our conversations with Tudjman and Izetbegovic about continuing the offensive. Kerrick, Clark, and Pardew had kept their home offices informed, and my message to Christopher and Talbott the previous day had discussed the subject in detail.

"I want to be frank in the privacy of this room," I replied. "We asked them not to take Banja Luka, but we did not give the Croats and the Bosnians any other 'red lights.' On the contrary, our team made no effort to discourage them from taking Prijedor and Sanski Most and other terrain that is theirs on the Contact Group map. The map negotiations are taking place on the battlefield right now, and that is one of the reasons we have not delayed our territorial discussions. It would help the negotiations greatly if these towns fell."

"I am very concerned that we will be blamed publicly for encouraging more fighting and more bloodshed," Tony said. "We should emphasize peace. This may not be your view, but you should say it in a way that doesn't exacerbate differences on other fronts, like with the Russians."

Christopher said he agreed with Tony as far as public statements went. I had no problem with that; the negotiating team had been careful in public, so much so that journalists in the region continued to think, and report, that we were trying to stop the entire offensive. But I refused to try to stop the offensive.

I was puzzled by Tony's comments. Was he objecting to the position we had taken in Zagreb, or was he simply worrying that it might leak? It was never clear, either to me or to my colleagues, including Christopher, who told me

later that his only concern was that we not seem publicly to be encouraging the offensive.

After the meeting, Christopher, Lake, and I spoke briefly by telephone with the President, who was traveling in California. "I want you to make an all-out effort for peace," the President said. He asked me to return to Bosnia as soon as the New York meeting ended. Late that evening, in a radio call-in show with Larry King, the President was asked about Bosnia. "I feel better than I have in a long time," he said. "I feel good about the process, but I want to caution the American people that this is Bosnia and we have a long way to go."

Congress. The Hill can never be taken for granted. Without its support, it is virtually impossible to construct and carry out policy on a controversial issue—and nothing is more controversial than placing American troops in harm's way. Now that there was a real possibility of deploying American troops to Bosnia, Congress wanted to be heard. Bob Dole had made Bosnia his personal project, but he was relatively quiet at this point; since he had long attacked the Administration for weakness, he was not in a position to oppose a stronger policy. Other critics of the policy, like Senator Joe Lieberman and Senator Joe Biden, who were both Democrats, held their fire, waiting to see what would happen next.

The first warning shot came on the same day as the White House meeting, September 21, during what was supposed to be a routine hearing by the Senate Armed Services Committee to approve a second tour of duty for General Shalikashvili as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was fortunate for the Administration that the first person to testify on American troop deployments was Shalikashvili, rather than a civilian; his low-key style and ramrod bearing, combined with his unquestionable patriotism and integrity, made him the most credible witness we could have.

Leading the skeptics were three of the Senate's most independent-minded Republicans: John McCain of Arizona, John Warner of Virginia, and William Cohen of Maine.* "Administration officials," reported *The New York Times* the next day, "were surprised by the breadth of Republican opposition to their intentions." The *Times* noted that Shalikashvili "seemed momentarily taken aback by the criticism," but he responded to it vigorously. "We cannot come in and out of the alliance and choose to lead when it's to our benefit, and let them take the lead when we don't wish to," he said. "Absent America's leadership role, things still don't get put together right."

The Senators kept Shalikashvili under polite but persistent pressure. "Why can't the Europeans carry out these peacekeeping duties themselves?" asked McCain, a former Vietnam prisoner of war whose courage and integrity were

* Cohen became Secretary of Defense during President Clinton's second term.

unsurpassed in the Senate. Cohen worried about "the consequences to NATO itself if U.S. forces are caught in a cross fire and American public opinion turns against the operation." These and similar questions gave clear warning that an intense effort on the Hill would be necessary.

Just before our team returned from the region, Kornblum had invited French and Russian officials separately to Washington to discuss a postsettlement military and civilian structure. The British also began discussions with us on the same subject. From the outset, there was agreement that the senior military commander on the ground would have to be an American, or else Congress would not approve U.S. troop deployments.

But what about the chief civilian in Bosnia, the person who would have the difficult task of implementing whatever settlement was reached? Not surprisingly, the Europeans wanted this position for one of their own. There were good arguments on both sides of this issue, but it was not decided on its merits, or on the basis of Bosnia itself. The critical variable would be who paid for the civilian effort.

Here domestic politics collided with Bosnia policy, and the timing could not have been worse. As Leon Panetta had predicted exactly a month earlier during the discussion at Fort Myer, the Administration and Congress were heading into the biggest budget confrontation between the two branches in this century—one so serious that by November it would lead to a shutdown of most of the U.S. government. The President's domestic advisors warned that getting *any* funds approved for Bosnia would be extraordinarily difficult. The only exception to this would be the military budget. The Europeans, members of Congress told us, must pay for reconstruction in Bosnia.

Under these circumstances, Berger and the Deputies' Committee decided that the chief civilian had to be a European. In taking this decision, they recognized that we would significantly reduce our control over one of the most important aspects of the effort. But there was really little choice. Reluctantly—because civilian implementation would be just as important as the military effort—I agreed with Sandy's conclusion. We informed the Europeans, who began to look for the right person to head the civilian effort.

The situation also gave U.N. Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali a chance to start the U.N.'s disengagement from Bosnia, something he had long wanted to do. After a few meetings with him, I concluded that this elegant and subtle Egyptian, whose Coptic family could trace its origins back over centuries,*

* See *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem: A Diplomat's Story of the Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*, by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which contains frequent references to "my own awareness of my family's long tradition," and "its many generations [of] rich tradition of service to the country" (pp. 6, 7, et al.).

had disdain for the fractious and dirty peoples of the Balkans. Put bluntly, he never liked the place. In 1992, during his only visit to Sarajevo, he made the comment that had shocked the journalists on the day I arrived in the beleaguered capital: "Bosnia is a rich man's war. I understand your frustration, but you have a situation here that is better than ten other places in the world. . . . I can give you a list." He complained many times that Bosnia was eating up his budget, diverting him from other priorities, and threatening the entire U.N. system. "Bosnia has created a distortion in the work of the U.N.," he said just before Srebrenica. Sensing that our diplomatic efforts offered an opportunity to disengage, he informed the Security Council on September 18 that he would be ready to end the U.N. role in the former Yugoslavia, and allow all key aspects of implementation to be placed with others. Two days later, he told Madeleine Albright that the Contact Group should create its own mechanisms for implementation—thus volunteering to reduce the U.N.'s role at a critical moment. Ironically, his weakness simplified our task considerably.

Countdown to New York. On September 22, I met for almost three hours with our backstop team to review the planning for the New York Foreign Ministers meeting. I asked them to try for a huge leap beyond Geneva—an agreement on the framework of a central government for Bosnia that both the Bosnian Serbs and the Federation would accept as the sole sovereign entity. Owen and Hill, with support from Jim O'Brien and Miriam Sapiro, had produced a draft agreement, which established many essential institutions: a division of responsibilities between the central government and the two entities, the Federation and Republika Srpska; elections for both the presidency and the national assembly; and the creation of a constitutional court. I explained our strategy to a reporter at the time: "If we can get a cease-fire, we'll take that. If we can get some more constitutional principles, we'll take them. If we can settle Sarajevo, we'll do it. We're inventing peace as we go."

Our plan was first to negotiate with Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey in Washington, then to turn back to Belgrade. As at Geneva, nothing could be left unresolved prior to the meeting itself. Sacirbey wanted a strong presidency, with every detail of the final political structure spelled out in New York, whereas I continued to follow a step-by-step approach: find areas of agreement, lock them in with a public announcement, and then return to the region for another round of negotiations to narrow the differences further.

It was increasingly obvious that Sacirbey's distaste for Silajdzic was coloring his own behavior. After a day of contentious discussions with Owen and Hill, during which tempers flared repeatedly and Sacirbey threatened several times to "go public," the two men warned me that the Bosnian Foreign Minister would try to go around the delegation and get other American officials—

particularly Strobe, Madeleine, or Tony—to change our positions. Sacirbey also worked the Congress vigorously, often criticizing the Administration in conversations with Senators, some of whom promptly told us. As Strobe put it, “He goes public anyway, and he can’t get around you.”

Sacirbey’s behavior irritated American officials during this trip. Many of his points had merit, but he left people uncertain of his goal. It was not entirely clear what drove Sacirbey: was he was trying to show his colleagues (and enemies) back home that he was a true Bosnian patriot despite having spent most of the war in New York? Was he positioning Izetbegovic for the struggle back home, or was he simply freelancing for the media?

As Sacirbey worked the town, Strobe Talbott was with his main Russian counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Mamedov, a witty and sophisticated man. The Talbott-Mamedov channel, low profile at the time, was the modern version of the special channel between Washington and Moscow that had existed from 1941 through the end of the Cold War, and now constituted the main vehicle for negotiating important issues between the two countries, including NATO enlargement, economic assistance, presidential summits, and sensitive political issues.*

Bosnia was a central part of “The Channel” as we entered the second month of our shuttle. On Friday, September 22, hoping to reduce the tensions between the Russians and the Bosnians, Strobe invited Sacirbey to meet Mamedov privately in his office.

Strobe began with an imaginative attempt to lighten the tension and create a bond between the two men. “You have something in common,” he told them. “You both have Muslim heritage and the same name!” (Mamedov was a slavified version of Muhamed, Sacirbey’s first name.) Sacirbey was surprised. “So, you’re one of us?” he asked. Mamedov, of part-Azeri background, laughed. “Well, by way of Baku,” he replied.

Unfortunately, the rest of the meeting did not live up to this promising start. Each man had a position to defend, and, while pleasant, the conversation did not produce any breakthrough on either side.

During our last meeting in Belgrade, Milosevic had suggested that someone from the delegation return to Belgrade before the New York session to put direct pressure on the Bosnian Serbs—part, he said, of his “technology.” Although it was Milosevic’s responsibility to deliver the Pale Serbs, there was value to his suggestion. I asked Owen, Hill, Pardew, and John Burley from State’s Balkan desk to return to Belgrade after only two days in Washington.

* Although it had existed in other forms for decades, Henry Kissinger gave “The Channel” its name when it was conducted by him and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. See *White House Years*, by Henry Kissinger, p. 141.

The three men reached Belgrade on Saturday, September 23. Milosevic, upset by some of the changes Sacirbey had proposed, asked them to meet with Karadzic and Krajisnik. This was the "technology" that Milosevic so enjoyed. But, as the discussion progressed, the Americans realized that the Pale Serbs had not really accepted the central concession to which Milosevic had committed them at Geneva—that Bosnia would remain a single state. Karadzic demanded the right to vote for secession, and, showing an unexpected flair for metaphor, said that a single Bosnia would be "a wooden oven which would burn itself up the first time it was used." He attacked every provision of Owen's draft designed to create national structures. He objected to the election provisions, refused to discuss the "competency" of the central government, and insisted that the Bosnian Serbs have a separate foreign policy and their own embassies. A meeting that was supposed to be mere "technology" turned into another marathon sixteen-hour negotiation, during which the American team rejected every Karadzic effort to legitimize a divided Bosnia.

Reaching an impasse on Sunday afternoon, Owen and Hill asked Milosevic, who had left the Americans alone with the Bosnian Serbs, to return. While the Americans waited in the gardens, Milosevic engaged in his usual routine of outmaneuvering and intimidating the rest of the Serbs. He then summoned the Americans back into the room, and produced an agreement close to the one we had negotiated with Sacirbey. Owen and Hill agreed, however, to drop the word "direct" in the clause describing elections for the presidency and the national assembly. They also agreed to soften the language on the functions of the central government.

Calling just before they left Belgrade on Sunday, September 24, Owen and Hill told us that despite some "minor changes" the basic elements of the Further Agreed Principles were intact. I congratulated them and requested that they fax us the new draft right away. By this time, I was at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York to meet foreign ministers from other countries, accompanied by Rosemarie and Christopher Hoh, who worked for Chris Hill. Anticipating a day of intense communications with the field, I asked Philip S. Goldberg to go to the State Department early Sunday morning to handle telephone calls, then come to New York later in the day. Goldberg and Hoh were two of the best younger American diplomats: candid in private, reliable, and dedicated.

Sacirbey remained in Washington that Sunday morning for a meeting with Lake, Tarnoff, Fuerth, Kerrick, and Sandy Vershbow. Sacirbey said the draft agreement he had negotiated in Washington was fine, but he warned that Izetbegovic was upset about the Owen-Hill-Pardew trip to Belgrade. "The negotiating team has been contaminated by the Belgrade air," Sacirbey said. He was not joking. "My President is not going to tolerate your people going to Belgrade all the time. The optics are bad. You must spend more time in Sarajevo." He was not moved when Tarnoff noted that Owen and Hill had spent

two days with Silajdzic in Sarajevo on the document, as well as an entire day with Sacirbey himself in Washington.

Peter called immediately to alert me to the problem, but it still seemed just another Balkan bluff; I did not see how serious it was. By this time, Owen, Hill, and Pardew had started home in their small military jet. But as the negotiators flew west over Europe, Izetbegovic announced that Sacirbey "has been instructed not to attend" the meeting in New York, less than forty-eight hours away. "The Serbian side has demanded wholesale changes which radically alter the agreement," Sacirbey told the press waiting outside the White House. A White House press spokeswoman, Mary Ellen Glynn, skillfully downplayed the difficulty, calling it "part of the ups and downs of shuttle diplomacy." As far as I could tell, however, this was all "downs."

More bad news followed immediately, in the form of a fax from Belgrade with the revised draft agreement. As soon as he saw the changes, Phil Goldberg warned that, while not substantial, they would be treated as "big" in Sarajevo. Later, we learned that Sacirbey had never sent the changes he made in Washington on September 22 to Sarajevo for approval. I felt the New York meeting slipping out of control.

In diplomacy process can often be as important as substance. This is especially true early on, when longtime adversaries are prone to maximize differences rather than reach out for agreements. Such was the case at that moment; we had been sloppy in not planning a stop in Sarajevo for Owen, Hill, and Pardew. Now we were paying the price. I blamed myself for three basic errors. First, I should have asked our team to reject any changes, no matter how small, in Belgrade. Second, even though we saw far more of the Muslims than the Serbs, many of our meetings were outside Sarajevo, and we had unintentionally left a public impression that we were spending more time with Milosevic than Izetbegovic; our team should have gone to Sarajevo. We also erred in thinking that Sacirbey could speak for the entire Bosnian government.

We needed to find a way to get the Sarajevo government back on track quickly, or the New York meeting would collapse, unleashing a cycle of disagreements and perhaps even a re-escalation of the war.

I had a desperate idea. Could we turn the Owen-Hill-Pardew team around in midair, and get them to Sarajevo in time to save the New York session? Goldberg and I realized our colleagues had not yet reached their refueling stop in Ireland. Goldberg gave the Operations Center and the National Military Command Center an urgent task: find the plane, get us in touch with it, turn it around.

We were in luck; Goldberg and the OpsCenter found the Irish official who ran the VIP room at Shannon; he knew us well from our frequent stopovers. The plane had just landed, and the official soon located our colleagues.

As we talked, Hill and Owen, unshaven and ragged, huddled around a green "Dial Your Relatives in America" shamrock-shaped pay phone, located next to the "Ladies' Toilet."

"Chris," I said, "you have to go back to Sarajevo. You have to go back. We will lose the agreement unless you get Izetbegovic back on board." They were halfway home, utterly exhausted. Now they were being asked to turn around in the middle of the night. It was not hard to sense Hill's fatigue and unhappiness. "Chris," I said, "let me talk to Bob."

I could hear Hill ask Owen if he wanted to talk to me, and, more faintly, Owen's dry, dignified voice saying, "Not much." Then he came on the phone. Anticipating his first question, I told him I had already talked to the Secretary of State and he shared my view. This provoked audible snorting at the other end of the phone, and a comment that they had allowed only "minor changes" in Belgrade. "Bob," I shouted into the phone, "there is no such thing as 'minor changes' in the Balkans!"

Although exhausted, they turned around and headed back across Europe, stopping in Ramstein, Germany, to switch to a C-130 flight to Sarajevo. After a sleepless wait, they were told that the only available transport plane was in Italy. After more difficulties at the Italian air base, they boarded a British C-130 and headed for Sarajevo at 7:30 A.M. Before leaving Ancona, Hill called Goldberg and me through the OpsCenter. It was 2:30 in the morning in New York, and both Phil and I sleepily understood that the call's primary reason was to make us share their exhaustion. "Do you realize how difficult this is for us?" Hill asked.

Hill said later he would never forget my answer. Just as I had visualized him at the shamrock-shaped pay phone in Shannon, he imagined me in a fancy suite at the Waldorf. "Look," I said, "you're in Ancona and I'm up at 2:30 A.M. We're all inconvenienced. We're having a difficult time here too. Now go get the Bosnians on board."

Owen, Hill, and Pardew finally arrived in Sarajevo on Monday morning, September 25. The meetings highlighted the widening split within the Bosnian government. An angry Haris Silajdzic immediately chastised them for dealing only with Sacirbey. "Do not believe," the Prime Minister said, "that you can reach an agreement without me."

The Bosnian government's opposition was caused not by the language changes in Belgrade but by a change of heart on the part of Silajdzic. After thinking further about the draft language he had approved on September 15, Haris told Owen and Hill that he now felt it was "too American"; the presidency was too powerful. He now favored a more "European" system; that is, one with a strong prime minister and a weak presidency. Silajdzic's annoyance was di-

rected at Sacirbey, not the Serbs; he felt that the draft approved by the Foreign Minister, Izetbegovic's political ally, had been designed to weaken him. So deep was Silajdzic's anger that he insisted on a separate meeting with the three Americans, and refused to participate in their session with Izetbegovic.

To solve this impasse, Owen and Hill redrafted the New York document in such a way as to gain the support of both Bosnian factions and still be acceptable to the Serbs. They fell back on our standard approach of deferring the most difficult issues and focusing instead on general principles embraced by all, which could be made more specific later. As soon as we heard from Owen that the Bosnians had accepted the revised draft, Christopher called Izetbegovic to thank him. Izetbegovic assured him that Sacirbey would now attend the New York meeting.

But once unleashed, the cycle of demands for changes in the agreement could not easily be stopped. As soon as he read the revised election language from Sarajevo, Phil Goldberg said, "The Serbs will never accept this." He was right again. Hill sensed this as well; as he changed planes in Ancona on his way back to New York, he called the OpsCenter and left a short message: "Tell Holbrooke to call Milosevic over the elections provisions. They are going to cause a big problem."

It was now midday on Monday, September 25, and everyone was converging on New York. With concern in Washington rising, Christopher and I went to the teleconference room of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, along with Madeleine Albright, to brief the President and the rest of the principals. Then Christopher, Albright, and I met with the three Balkan Foreign Ministers for a courtesy call. The meeting was short and perfunctory. To the press, Christopher was upbeat; but once they had left, the meeting became tense, with Christopher urging agreement, and then closing down the meeting before the three Foreign Ministers could start arguing with one another.

Working from my Waldorf hotel suite, Don Kerrick, Phil Goldberg, and I spent most of the next six hours on the telephone, alternating between Milosevic and Izetbegovic. Milosevic argued that he had reached an agreement in good faith with Owen, Hill, and Pardew and that he could not change it again. Milosevic was most adamant on the question of "direct" elections; having gotten it out of the draft, he did not want it to reappear. He also objected to elections by "popular vote," another clause that had been reinserted in Sarajevo.

Between phone calls, I saw Sacirbey. The meeting came closer to physical violence than any other during our long negotiations. I asked him if, for the sake of overall progress, he and his government could drop the "direct" clause for presidential elections. Even the United States, I pointed out, did not elect its president directly. Sacirbey said that without the precise word the Serbs could create "sham elections."

"That's nonsense, Mo," I said. "The Geneva principles guarantee international supervision of the elections. This is not the defining test of a democracy." Nothing in the draft precluded direct elections, I told Sacirbey; if we did not get them now, we would insist on them in the next round.

Sacirbey asked to call his President. We gave him some privacy, and he talked with Izetbegovic. When we resumed, he was angry and immovable. Without the direct-elections clause, there could be no agreement.

The atmosphere in the room grew tense. Sacirbey enjoyed a spirited, rowdy relationship with many of us, and we often expressed ourselves in rather rough-and-tumble terms. But this time the mood slipped over the edge, and the exchange became ugly. Without warning, Sacirbey slammed his jacket down on the sofa, stood up, and started for the door, yelling that the United States was betraying his country. "If you leave in this way, you will do your country immense damage," I responded, following him. He was in a rage, and for a moment it seemed to Goldberg and Kerrick that he was going to hit me. Kerrick stepped quickly between us, then moved smoothly into the hotel corridor to block Sacirbey's departure. As Sacirbey started out the door, he saw two dumbfounded journalists in the corridor watching this amazing scene. The sight of the journalists, and Kerrick's physical presence, seemed to calm Sacirbey slightly, and Don eased him back into the room. We shut the door again and managed to finish the meeting on relatively civil terms, but without any progress.

I called Izetbegovic as soon as Sacirbey had left. "Mr. President," I said, "we are on the brink of a disaster. You will gain a great deal from this agreement, and we will negotiate later to get direct elections. You are giving up nothing." He said he had to have the direct-elections clause. It was already after midnight in Sarajevo, and Izetbegovic disliked working at night. I gave up, ending with the hope that we could make progress in the morning.

Milosevic was, in this area as in so many others, the exact opposite of Izetbegovic. He enjoyed late-night drama, perhaps in part because his stamina and ability to hold liquor often gave him an additional edge over others at that time. Seeing we were in a hole, he stuck to his guns on the elimination of the direct-elections clause.

Kerrick, Goldberg, and I were drained. I called Christopher and asked if he would make a last-ditch call to Izetbegovic with me very early the next morning.

Tuesday, September 26. I arrived in our staff room at the Waldorf at 5:30 A.M. and was joined by Goldberg. It took almost an hour to reach Izetbegovic. When we finally connected, Christopher and I asked him to defer the question of direct elections, provided Milosevic would give up the reference that ap-

peared to limit the role of the central government. After a few minutes of discussion, Izetbegovic agreed. We thought we were out of the woods.

The meeting of the Balkan Foreign Ministers was scheduled to start at 10:00 A.M. in the twelfth-floor conference room of the United States Mission to the United Nations on First Avenue, facing U.N. headquarters. The room, although less imposing, had been set up to resemble the one in Geneva. Fearing a repetition of Sacirbey's last-minute dramatics in Geneva, I sent Phil Goldberg to the Bosnian's offices to make sure that Sacirbey showed up on time. At 9:30 A.M., as our European colleagues were arriving at the twelfth floor, he called. "We've got a big problem," he said, speaking in a low voice. "Mo isn't going to agree. You'd better speak to him."

Sacirbey came on the line. He would attend the meeting, but he could not accept the agreement. I told him that there had to be a misunderstanding; the Secretary of State had just talked to his President, and everything was all set. No, said Sacirbey, "I've just talked to *my* President, and he told me not to agree."

It was Geneva all over again—a last-minute problem with the Bosnians. Racing down one flight of stairs to Albright's office, where Christopher had set up headquarters for the morning, I told him, Madeleine, and Tom Donilon what had happened. Moments later Goldberg arrived with Sacirbey and brought him directly to Albright's office.

Warren Christopher was famously a polite man who almost never raised his voice or showed personal discourtesy of any sort. But we were about to see an amazing sight. Sacirbey walked in smiling, said, "Hello, Chris," and stretched out his hand. Christopher ignored it, holding his own arms stiffly at his side. "What the hell is going on here?" he said in a voice just barely containing his fury. "I made an agreement with your President just two hours ago."

Taken aback by Christopher's anger, Sacirbey tried to explain that the Bosnian government had overruled Izetbegovic, but the more he talked, the more resistant Christopher became. "This cannot stand," he told Sacirbey. Albright, whose close relationship with Sacirbey dated from his U.N. ambassadorship, tried to reason with him, but to no avail. After fifteen minutes of useless argument, I pointed out that over one hundred journalists and officials from five nations were waiting for us upstairs. We had to join them.

Warren Christopher opened the meeting with brief remarks urging the parties to seize "this moment in history [to] end the fighting and end it for good." The photographers clicked away, and the press was ushered out. Immediately, to the surprise of nearly everyone in the room, I adjourned the meeting, whispered to Granic and Milutinovic that we had a problem with Sarajevo—this

brought a gleam of real pleasure to the Serbian's eye—and asked the Contact Group to join us downstairs. We gave each of the Foreign Ministers a private "holding" room on the same floor.

Still furious, Christopher left for meetings across the street at the United Nations. Before he departed, he told Sacirbey that the situation would have to be cleared up right away if Sarajevo wanted to avoid serious consequences to its relations with the United States. I met with Carl Bildt and the four Contact Group representatives, who were distressed at having been shunted around. Apologizing, I invited them to talk to Sacirbey, but their efforts to move him got nowhere.

Sacirbey was scheduled to deliver his speech to the U.N. at 11:30. I asked him not to reveal to the press that we were in a state of crisis. He promised—and walked out onto First Avenue into a sea of journalists, whom he promptly told that he would not accept any agreement that did not provide for "direct elections."

The Contact Group waited, eating sandwiches in the office of Madeleine Albright's deputy, Edward "Skip" Gnehm. When Sacirbey returned, he seemed buoyed up by his public appearance at the General Assembly. Speaking in the great hall had taken some of the edge out of him. He now presented himself as the person who could solve the problem. Christopher returned from his other meetings to rejoin the fray. After coordinating with Tony Lake, we told Sacirbey that President Clinton would speak to the nation at 3:00 P.M. He would either announce the agreement and praise the Bosnians, or he would state publicly that New York had failed because of Sarajevo's stubbornness.

Asking for a private room, Sacirbey called Izetbegovic to relay our ultimatum. For a long time we waited. Then he emerged. "If President Clinton will say in his statement that he strongly opposes partition," he said, "we will agree." Since this was an existing American position, we assented on the spot. We also promised to pursue the cause of direct elections in the future. We went back upstairs to hold a brief formal meeting with the Croatian and Serbian Foreign Ministers, who had been waiting for four hours, and adjourned.

At 3:50 P.M. on September 26, the President announced the agreement from the White House pressroom. "There is no guarantee of success," he said, "but today's agreement moves us closer to the ultimate goal, and it makes clear that Bosnia will remain a single internationally recognized state. America will strongly oppose the partition of Bosnia."

As soon as the President finished his short statement, we met with the press. We could finally show the skeptics that we were building a central government, at least on paper. We had agreed on a three-person presidency, a parliament, a constitutional court, and other important attributes of a national

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government. A great bridge had been crossed—but with more difficulty than we had expected, revealing even more clearly than before the troubling divisions within the Bosnian government.

We announced our return to the region in two days to resume the shuttle. To journalists who asked if we were now going to get a cease-fire agreement, I was noncommittal. The truth was, we didn't know.