

CHAPTER 9

Geneva

(September 5–8)

There is no process by which the cross-hatched complexity of acted history can be reproduced faithfully in the written word.

—C. V. WEDGWOOD, *History and Hope*

WHEN WE AWOKE IN ANKARA ON TUESDAY, September 5, we still had no idea if the bombing would resume. Calls to NATO headquarters were uninformative, and it was too early to call Washington, even Strobe Talbott, who was notorious for rising at an ungodly hour. With uncertainty hanging over our heads, we drove to the residence of Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller for a meeting that Izetbegovic would join. Then we planned to fly to Belgrade to close the Geneva agreement with Milosevic.

Turkey had once shared a common history with Bosnia. Even today, when Serbs and Croats speak disparagingly of the Bosnian Muslims, they call them "Turki," in memory of the distant time when the Ottoman conquerors had come to the southern Balkans. Izetbegovic respected the Turkish leaders, especially President Demirel, and their support for any postsettlement activities in Bosnia, such as improving the quality of the Bosnia-Croat Federation military forces, would be important.

En route to Ankara the previous evening, we had discussed Cyprus, the long-running problem that had caused so much tension between Greece and Turkey, especially since the 1974 Turkish invasion. The image of Cyprus, its two hostile ethnic groups divided for twenty-one years by an ugly wall that cut the island in half, would haunt us during the entire Bosnia peace effort. Was this how Bosnia would look after we were done, even if we succeeded in ending the war? It would be better than war, but it would hardly be a real peace. Haris Silajdzic and some of the better-informed journalists often raised this specter with us. Aware of the problem, our team talked frequently about the need to avoid letting Bosnia become another Cyprus—that is, allowing a temporary cease-fire line to harden into a permanent partition line.

When Izetbegovic arrived, we held an unusual trilateral session with Ciller—not a normal grouping, but one that helped reduce the edge from the previous night's difficult meeting. Izetbegovic was clearly troubled, and seemed unsure whether to go forward with the text he had accepted the previous night. He was deeply annoyed that the bombing had not yet been resumed, and linked his final acceptance of the draft for Geneva to the resumption of bombing. Waiting for word from NATO, I thought this an entirely reasonable position.

After the meeting, Sacirbey and I headed for the Ankara Hilton, where we were scheduled to hold a joint press conference. As we drove through the streets, Strobe called. Reluctant to discuss sensitive matters over an open cellular telephone yet anxious to give us some much-needed good news, he talked in an improvised code: "The Smith Brothers and our jolly friend have made a new decision that makes our conversations of last night OBE."

What did he mean? It took a moment to understand that he was trying to tell me that the two (unrelated) Smiths, Admiral Leighton and General Rupert, and General Joulwan ("our jolly friend") had agreed to resume the bombing, and thus our discussions of the previous evening were now "OBE" (overtaken by events).

The persistent efforts of officials like Willy Claes and General Joulwan in Brussels, and Berger, Talbott, and Admiral Owens in Washington had paid off. Once again, the Bosnian Serbs had brought down upon themselves something that they could have prevented—fortunately for us. It is impossible, of course, to say with certainty what effect a failure to resume the bombing would have had on our efforts. After the peace settlement, some European officials argued that the negotiations would have achieved the same results with or without the bombing. I am glad that we did not have to test this proposition.

On the plane from Ankara to Belgrade, Hill and Owen predicted that Milosevic would not accept several of the key provisions in our Geneva draft. With three days to go before Geneva, they said, we faced a stalemate. We had pushed Izetbegovic as far as he could go, and could not go back to Sarajevo, literally or figuratively, to ask for changes. But would Milosevic agree to the document we had hammered out in Ankara? The views of Chris and Bob, who had done most of the negotiating with Milosevic on this issue, worried me. On the plane, anticipating a contentious meeting, we agreed that I should see Milosevic alone—my first private meeting with him.

Leaving our colleagues in the main sitting room, he and I went into the room next door as soon as I arrived. We sat side by side on a sofa. "This is what we agreed to with Izetbegovic," I said, handing him the Ankara draft. "We cannot change it."

Milosevic, who prided himself on his legal training and ability to read and absorb highly technical material with great speed, scanned the document rapidly. Even Bob Owen, a great lawyer and a demanding taskmaster, had been impressed with how quickly Milosevic assimilated every nuance of documents written in English. This skill made Milosevic all the more dangerous as a negotiator; he would regularly try to slip into documents words or phrases that seemed innocuous, but contained potentially deadly traps.

Milosevic objected to several phrases. He wanted the country to be called either the "Union of Bosnia-Herzegovina" or, perhaps, the "United States of Bosnia-Herzegovina." I countered that we should drop the use of "Republika Srpska," a suggestion Milosevic termed "absolutely impossible." He retreated gradually from his initial demands, and, after thirty minutes of argument, accepted the document without any changes.

I walked with Milosevic back into the main room, where my colleagues had been listening to the Serb Foreign Minister lament his fate in having to go to Geneva. Handing the document to Owen, I said, "We have an agreement." He looked astonished, and gave me a thumbs-up sign.

Were I allowed to revisit the negotiations, this is where I would probably start. In its entirety the document represented significant gains for Sarajevo, as both Milosevic and Izetbegovic knew. But I regret that we did not make a stronger effort to drop the name Republika Srpska. We underestimated the value to Pale of retaining their blood-soaked name. We may also have underestimated the strength of our negotiating hand on that day, when the bombing had resumed. In retrospect, I think we should have pushed Milosevic harder to change the name of the Bosnian Serb entity. Even if the effort failed, as Owen and Hill predicted, it would have been worth trying.

Geneva was still four days away. Leaks could be fatal, since they would trigger public pressure in Sarajevo to ask for more. To maintain maximum secrecy, we faxed a copy of the agreement to Talbott's office in Washington and asked him to hand-deliver it to a few senior officials; it was a sad truth of modern Washington that no reporting sent through normal State Department channels—no matter how it was "slugged" for distribution—was safe from the risks of uncontrolled distribution and leaks.

We spent the night in Belgrade, then headed for Zagreb, where we reviewed Geneva with a decidedly uninterested Tudjman. He had only one thing on his mind: regaining eastern Slavonia from the Serbs. Repeating our warnings not to use force, we promised to include eastern Slavonia in any international negotiation. Tudjman welcomed this, but refused to eschew public threats.

We had an agreement. But before Geneva, we had to pull together our allies and the Contact Group, which had little idea of what we were up to. Clark and Pardew headed for Brussels to help NATO plan for deploying a force in Bosnia if we achieved a peace agreement. Hill flew to Paris to join Peter Tarnoff, who was briefing senior French, British, and German officials. I drew what appeared to be a pleasant assignment: at the urging of Tony Lake and Ambassador Bartholomew, a visit to Rome to calm down some very unhappy Italians.

My first stop in Rome was a call on an old friend, Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli. Universally known as Sunni, she had been appointed to the post by the government of Lamberto Dini in part because of her personal stature. A former mayor and senator, the sister of Italy's most famous businessman, Gianni Agnelli, and the author of a best-selling memoir with the delightful title *We Always Wore Sailor Suits*, Sunni Agnelli combined aristocratic bearing with casual informality. Her giant white mane of hair and her imposing height added to her presence. She approached her job as she had probably approached almost everything else: with a relaxed confidence in her own intuition. She conveyed an impression of great amusement at the passing parade of overly intense men formulating policy. We had known each other for years, but only socially. I liked her, and expected, as did Bartholomew, a friendly call between old friends that would resolve a relatively minor problem—Italian pique at their exclusion from the Contact Group, which, as I had repeatedly tried to explain, was not our fault.

It was no social call. Flanked by her staff, one of whom glared at me through thick glasses, she lit into the United States for failing to keep her country adequately informed or involved. Reading from notes prepared by her staff, she said that we had reneged on Lake's commitment to get Italy into the Contact Group. Pleased that she was venting their frustration, her staff occasionally fueled the fire with short comments.

Only a few hours earlier, I had been in the ugliness of Belgrade and Zagreb, trying to end a war that threatened the stability of Europe. Now, in one of the most beautiful cities on earth, the capital of the only NATO nation with a common border with the war zone, a Foreign Minister whom I liked and knew as a friend was reading us the riot act. Bartholomew, one of America's most accomplished ambassadors, was as astonished as I was. He had said that my trip would mollify the Italians, but it seemed only to inflame them.

We explained that Lake had made no commitment to bring the Italians into the Contact Group, something that was beyond our capability. Her aides insisted that he had made a promise. Perhaps there had been a misunderstanding, we suggested gently: it was not Washington that objected to Italy's membership in the Contact Group, it was the European Union members of the

Contact Group. We stressed that the United States wanted Italy, the only NATO nation bordering the war zone, to play a greater role in the region. Tony had said only that we would seek to convene a larger group (the "Contact Group Plus") from time to time.

This was nothing less than the truth. Britain, France, and Germany liked the prominence that came from being senior members of a prestigious international negotiating group. (Never mind its ineffectiveness.) To allow Italy to join, they felt, would not only dilute it but create pressure to add Spain, the Netherlands, and other nations with troops in Bosnia. We later learned that senior diplomats from Paris, London, and Bonn had met privately and decided not only to keep Italy out of the Contact Group, but to tell Rome that Washington was the culprit.

I could not solve Italy's Contact Group problem, but, trying to ease the tension, I suggested we hold a special meeting of an "expanded Contact Group" in Rome in October, provided that we could get the rest of the Contact Group to agree to meet in Rome. She accepted immediately. When we had finished, Bartholomew and I met with Prime Minister Dini, who presented a position identical to Agnelli's. Recognizing by now that there was little we could do in the face of this profound misunderstanding by our Italian friends, I repeated our offer to hold a special meeting in Rome, stressed how important Italy was to the United States, and left.

Exhausted by our continuous shuttle, now in its eleventh straight day, I returned to the graceful ambassadorial residence in Rome for a quiet dinner with the Bartholomews. The visit had not been the pleasant, relaxed stop among friends in the Eternal City that we had expected. But in the end, the trip had been useful, since it would lead to more involvement by the Italians in the Bosnian peace effort. In fact, the Italians did end up hosting several key meetings in Rome, including a dramatic Balkan summit in February 1996. In 1997 they finally became members of the Contact Group. None of this would have happened if we had not taken such a strong pro-Italian position.

GENEVA

We arrived in Geneva on Thursday, September 7, and drove with Ambassador Spiegel directly to the U.S. Mission. I was impressed. In four days, he had somehow arranged everything and produced a room and table that fit our needs so well that we copied it exactly for all subsequent meetings, including the final negotiations.

In diplomacy, details matter. During the 1968 peace talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris, we had famously wasted more than two months arguing over the shape of the negotiating table, while the war continued. I had watched

as two great American diplomats, Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance, were humiliated and furious; I was determined not to let such an event happen to me. With this in mind, I had asked Spiegel to construct a round table large enough to seat no more than nine people—one representative from each of the five Contact Group nations, plus a seat for Co-chairman Carl Bildt, and one seat for each of the three Balkan countries. The chairs had to be close enough to one another so that there would be no room at the table for the Bosnian Serbs or anyone else. I asked for nameplates without country names, and the national flags of only the five Contact Group nations and the European Union. I was struck by the parallel with 1968: Hanoi's insistence that the Vietcong get a seat at the table separate from the North Vietnamese had been the reason for the argument over the table shape in Paris.

On the day before the meeting, NATO intensified the bombing, hitting the Lukavica barracks southwest of Sarajevo, and bombing ammunition dumps, communications equipment, and other facilities. I was pleased to see a column in *The Washington Post* by Charles Krauthammer, a constant critic of American policy, concluding that "U.S. policy on Bosnia is finally on track." In a phrase more perceptive than he may have realized, Krauthammer wrote that the bombing should continue until "(a) the Serbs have made concessions at the bargaining table . . . or (b) we run out of targets."

There was great tension that night in Geneva. So far, we had achieved nothing except the deal between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Now, for the first time, everything was on the line. I called on Milutinovic and Sacirbey separately. The Yugoslav Foreign Minister was, as always, the essence of a smooth, affable diplomat. But when I asked him about the Bosnian Serb delegation, he waved his hand dismissively and said that they were staying at another hotel. He did not care to deal with them. Sacirbey was much more troubled. The agreement was not good for his country, he told me, and his President was taking "a lot of heat" for it back home.

September 8. We thought everything was agreed to; the agreement had been accepted by everyone two days earlier. We planned to meet, approve the agreement formally, discuss the future informally, and then meet the press. But nothing goes according to plan in the Balkans—and, for a day, the U.S. Mission in Geneva turned into part of the war zone. The troubles began fifteen minutes before our Contact Group colleagues were due to arrive, when Sacirbey called to say that he would not come to the meeting unless his government could retain the name "Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina." They were getting heavily criticized in Sarajevo, Sacirbey said, and needed this last-minute change.

This was the first instance of a recurring pattern in the negotiations—second thoughts or changes in position by Sarajevo after it had agreed to something. I could sympathize with it, but Izetbegovic had made an agreement in Ankara, and if we tried to renegotiate it in Geneva, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Milutinovic would refuse; as he had repeatedly told us, he had no authority and could make no decisions.

In no uncertain terms, I told Sacirbey that if he precipitated a failure in Geneva, the United States would hold him responsible, and only the Serbs would benefit. It was a harsh conversation—the most difficult I had had with Sacirbey—and it was overheard by several other people. Later on, after it was leaked to the press in an exaggerated form, it became part of negotiating folklore that the chief American negotiator was a “bully” who had yelled at everyone. But in fact, such emotional exchanges were extremely rare, and usually deliberate. Whatever my tone, Sacirbey was convinced that it was in his interests to appear at the conference on time. But to protect the process, I later asked Warren Christopher to call Izetbegovic and Silajdzic in Sarajevo to calm them down. He did so immediately, explaining to both men that the first sentence of the Geneva agreement represented a “powerful recognition” of Bosnia’s status that more than made up for their concessions on the names.

Shortly after 10:00 A.M., the delegates convened around Dan Spiegel’s small round table. Carl Bildt sat to my right, and Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov to my left. Directly across from us sat the three Foreign Ministers, and behind them hundreds of journalists. Without warning, I rose and walked around the table to the three Foreign Ministers. “Would you all join me in a handshake for the world?” I asked. Astonished but unable to avoid it, Sacirbey, Granic, and Milutinovic rose and posed awkwardly for the photograph that would be seen around the world as a sign of momentum toward peace. Then we asked the press to leave and settled down to business.

As soon as I gavelled the session to order, we ran into a problem. The leader of the Bosnian Serb delegation, Republika Srpska “Vice President” Nikolai Koljevic, rose from his seat behind the table. “I protest this arrangement,” he said. “My delegation should be seated at the table, and we will not participate in this meeting if we are denied our rights.” This was precisely what the seating arrangements were designed to prevent. I was thankful that there was no room for Koljevic at the table. I replied that, according to the Patriarch Paper, Foreign Minister Milan Milutinovic spoke for the Bosnian Serbs. Koljevic angrily persisted, and when I looked at Milutinovic, expecting him to silence Koljevic, he looked away. I immediately called for a recess.

We had set aside a set of small rooms just off the main conference room for private meetings. Taking Milutinovic into one of them alone, I asked him

whether this was a game that he and Koljevic had devised. If it was, I said, the meeting would break up and the consequences would be serious. "If not," I said, "you must get your 'friends' under control."

Nervous and unhappy, Milutinovic said he could not control the little Bosnian Serb. "Only my Master can do that," he added. Then he made a suggestion that surprised me. "I think if you talk to him firmly he will understand."

I asked Koljevic and his colleague, "Foreign Minister" Aleksu Buha, to join us in the tiny room. With Milutinovic watching in silence, I told them that if they continued their protest they would deal themselves completely out of the process. "Walk out if you want to," I told the astonished Serbs. "But if you do, we will continue without you, and Bosnian Serb influence in this process will be eliminated. I doubt President Milosevic will be pleased, but it's up to you."

Koljevic seemed to deflate in front of our eyes. Suddenly he was everyone's friend, a man of peace who wanted only to be allowed to quote a few lines of his beloved Shakespeare before fading away. He proposed that he be allowed to rise one last time from his seat behind the table, concede that Milutinovic spoke for him and his colleagues, and then remain silent.

I said we would agree to his request, provided he said nothing substantive, and that Sacirbey and the Croatian Foreign Minister, Mate Granic, both agreed in advance. The confrontation had been intense, but it was over in less than thirty minutes. When we resumed, Koljevic followed his script, pathetically quoting the Bard and "relinquishing" his right to speak, after which we finally started the meeting.

The rest of the meeting was routine. Each person at the table made a speech; as is usual on such occasions, they were of little consequence. Given the chance to perform before an audience—even without journalists present—the three Foreign Ministers reverted to sterile and accusatory rhetoric.

That afternoon, at the InterContinental Hotel, flanked by Carl Bildt, Igor Ivanov, Pauline Neville-Jones, Jacques Blot, and Wolfgang Ischinger, my colleagues and I faced over four hundred journalists, with live broadcasts on CNN and several European networks. We did not invite the three Balkan Foreign Ministers to the press conference, knowing that their natural proclivity to argue would divert attention from the Joint Agreed Principles. Before reading the agreement, I made a personal statement:

Our first thought this morning when we walked into the room and found that the Foreign Ministers of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia were in the room for the first time in so many months, that they were willing to shake hands and reach a common agreement which, though limited, moves us toward peace . . . our first thought—all of us—was: if only Nelson, Joe, and Bob Frasure could have seen this day.

I faltered for a moment, and Carl Bildt graciously picked up the same theme, saying of Frasure that "his excellence, knowledge, and humor made a lot of this possible."

The Joint Agreed Principles of September 8 were only a first step toward peace, and we did not want to oversell it. The bombing and the war were still going on. I stressed the limitations of the agreement:

The statement takes us an important step closer to peace. Yet, important as it is, this statement does not constitute the end of the tragedy in the Balkans. Far from it. . . . The hardest work still lies ahead. The [two] entities have yet to develop a design for a central connecting structure. . . . In addition, the parties need to define their internal borders within Bosnia in accordance with the 51-49 principle. We should be under no illusions that these will be easy tasks.

After the press conference, I asked every member of our team to meet with journalists individually or in small groups organized by the European Bureau's energetic press officer, Aric Schwan, who had flown to Geneva to assist with the media. We wanted to be sure that the story was properly reported; most especially, we wanted to be sure that everyone understood that the next step was to fix the major omission in the Geneva agreement—the lack of any agreement on a central government. Without this, the agreement could easily be construed as having partitioned Bosnia, when the exact opposite was our goal.

We were through the first phase of the negotiations, and the world was taking notice. Yet, despite some overly optimistic reporting, we were still far from our goals. We planned to resume the shuttle within a week, but as we headed home we had no clear plan as to how to proceed.