

International Decision Making in the Age of Genocide: Srebrenica 1993-1995
June 28 – July 1, 2015
The Hague
Edited Transcript

Session 1: Creating the “Safe Areas”



Meeting room in The Hague

TOM BLANTON: Good morning. Thank you very much for coming to the table. A reminder about our methodology: everything said at this table is on background for now but we are recording the session and will produce a transcript.¹ You will have the opportunity to correct your remarks before we release the transcript. One of our goals is to expand the historical record on Srebrenica.

If you turn to your briefing books, you will find a summary of key points that we plan to address in each of the four sessions.² This morning we want to start with the eyewitnesses on the ground in the spring of 1993. We know this is an arbitrary date. There is an argument to be made that the sins that led to Srebrenica go back to

¹ This transcript was annotated and edited for clarity by conference staff and participants in accordance with conference ground rules.

² USHMM, [“Conference Agenda,”](#) June 28, 2015.

the diplomatic recognition process [in 1990-1992], the lack of protection for ethnic minorities during that early period, the arms embargo, or the famous Jim Baker comment, "We don't have a dog in that fight" when the Americans went missing.³

But for the purposes of this conference and our focus on Srebrenica, we want to begin with General Morillon's visit to Srebrenica in March 1993.⁴ Michael Dobbs, will you lead us off with a few awkward questions?

MICHAEL DOBBS: Thank you, Tom. This is the second in a series of conferences that we are organizing under the title "International Decision Making in the Age of Genocide," looking at the big crises of the post-Cold War period.⁵ Last year, we had a conference on Rwanda with a similar set up around the table. We had members of the UN Security Council on the left, General Dallaire and the other UN peacekeepers in the middle, and the people who negotiated the Arusha Accords on the right. I think that [former UK representative on the UN Security Council] David Hannay is sitting in exactly the same chair that you occupied for our Rwanda conference. You provide a thread of continuity between the two conferences, as does [former US Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights] John Shattuck.

Many of the officials who were involved in Rwanda decision-making were also involved in Bosnia. There are similarities and differences between those two events. One of the similarities is the gap in perceptions between the people on the ground and the people in New York and the national capitals. In the case of Rwanda, it was as if the debates were taking place on three different planets. There were the people who negotiated the Arusha Agreements, the peacekeepers who implemented the agreements, and the UN officials in New York who supervised the entire process. There was imperfect communication between these three groups of actors. We discovered that there was imperfect communication within the same institution: at

³ Secretary of State James A. Baker visited Belgrade on June 21, 1991, meeting with a wide range of Yugoslav leaders, five days before the outbreak of war between Serbia and Slovenia. His comment "we don't have a dog in that fight" was reported later by National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft.

⁴ General Philippe Morillon visited Srebrenica from March 10 to 13, 1993, at the head of a UN humanitarian aid convoy while the town was under siege by Bosnian Serb forces.

⁵ More information on the International Decision Making project can be found on the [US Holocaust Memorial Museum website](#).

the United Nations, for example, between the Secretariat and the Secretary-General, or between the Secretariat and the Security Council. I suspect that we will find similar disconnects in the case of Bosnia.

To set the stage for our discussion today, I read Rupert Smith's excellent chapter on Bosnia in *The Utility of Force* in which he writes that the [seeds for the Srebrenica disaster](#) were “sown with the decisions made in the spring of 1993: decisions to threaten with no intention to act, to deploy forces with no intention to employ their force, decisions made in no political context except fear of the consequences of action to the force.”⁶ He also comments on the lack of any overarching strategy. He says there was no strategic direction, no achievable military goals, no military campaign, no theater level military objectives, only incoherence. He talks about “the imperative to do something and the scramble to create a policy.” We may not agree with General Smith’s assessment, but we will certainly have to grapple with his critique over the next couple of days.

This morning, we will look at the period from March 1993, when General Morillon arrives in Srebrenica to accompany a humanitarian convoy, through the three UN Security Council resolutions that established the Safe Areas and set the parameters for their protection.⁷ The events of July 1995 are shaped by the decisions taken in 1993.

A few questions for us to consider: what was the nature of the commitments contained in these three UN resolutions? Did the people around this table—UN ambassadors, members of the UN Secretariat, the peacekeepers—have a clear idea of the policy that you formulated back in 1993? How were the resolutions meant to be implemented? What was the proper role of UNPROFOR? Was it a classic peacekeeping mission or was it a peace enforcement mission? During our Rwanda conference, there was a lot of discussion about the rules of engagement, authorized under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. In the Bosnia “Safe Area” resolutions, you will

⁶ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, 150.

⁷ The UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 819](#) on April 16, 1993, calling on the warring parties to treat Srebrenica as “a safe area”. UNSC [Resolution 824](#) of May 4 added five more “safe areas”: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Žepa, Goražde, and Bihać. On June 4, UNSC [Resolution 836](#) extended UNPROFOR’s mandate “to deter attacks against the safe areas.”

find references to Chapter VII [e.g. in [819](#) and [836](#)] of the UN Charter, but it is unclear whether this was meant to be a Chapter VII mission or a Chapter VI mission.

What was the proper role of peacekeepers? Should they be strictly neutral, or should they take sides in the conflict? [Turns to David Harland, author of the 1999 UN report on Srebrenica]. In your report on Srebrenica, you conclude at the end that [peacekeepers cannot be impartial](#) when confronted with "attempted genocide."⁸ We should talk about that. Under what circumstances was air power meant to be used to defend the enclaves? Were there alternatives to the establishment of "Safe Areas"? Was the Vance-Owen peace plan a possible alternative? Was there a strategy for ending the war in Bosnia, many strategies, or no strategy at all? We are also interested in the relationship between the humanitarian goals of UNPROFOR and the strategic goals. Is there a link between the two? Should one serve the other, or are they entirely separate?

SHASHI THAROOR: Before we start at March 1993, surely we have to understand what UNPROFOR was doing there in the first place: why it was deployed, what the logic of it was, why it even had the name it did and everything else. Morillon's visit did not happen in a vacuum. There was a year and a half of UNPROFOR before that. Everything Rupert Smith says in that extract you read is absolutely accurate, but that is precisely because of the way in which this operation had evolved up to that point.

DAVID HANNAY: I think it is worth spending half an hour or so on the context. The documents [in the briefing book] are fascinating, they recall much to me, but they are totally context-less. You would not know from these papers, for example, that the Security Council and member states were grappling with the biggest split in NATO in living memory over "lift and strike."⁹ You would not know that the Security

⁸ United Nations General Assembly, ["The fall of Srebrenica,"](#) A/54/549, November 15, 1999, henceforth "1999 UN Srebrenica report."

⁹ "Lift and Strike" referred to a U.S. proposal to lift the arms embargo imposed on the Bosnian government (and other Yugoslav republics) in September 1991 and use air strikes to force the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table. The strategy was adopted by Bill Clinton during the 1992 presidential

Council was setting up its first war crimes tribunal.¹⁰ You would not know that the Security Council was imposing on Serbia the biggest package of economic sanctions that had ever been imposed.¹¹ So, there is a lot missing from the context, which does not change the view that Rupert has rightly expressed, that the Srebrenica decision and the Safe Areas decision were taken without proper consideration of their possible consequences, but relate to the question of whether there was a strategy. There was a strategy. It was a bad strategy, but it was a strategy. The strategy was not to do lift and strike, not to do the Vance-Owen peace process, to set up a criminal tribunal, to impose sanctions on Serbia, and hope for the best.

SHASHI THAROOR: We need to talk about the background. Why did Morillon go to Srebrenica? What sort of mission was he deployed on? You cannot start off with the mission without understanding what he was doing there. I will be as brief as I can, but unfortunately I am the person here with the longest UN involvement in this issue. I went out on the very first mission in October 1991 that [UN Under-Secretary-General] Marrack Goulding undertook when the European Community was anxious to hand this particular hot potato to the UN. You may remember the European peace monitors being called "[ice cream salesmen](#)" a few months before that.¹² There were European Community monitors in Croatia and Bosnia. Our goal was to see whether a peacekeeping operation was viable for Croatia. There was enormous political pressure on us from Europe to take this on. Goulding was relatively new to peacekeeping, but had been very thoroughly schooled in the Dag Hammarskjöld catechism of peacekeeping: the doctrine of complete neutrality, not taking sides in the conflict, deploying in highly visible configurations, vehicles

campaign, and adopted as official U.S. policy in May 1993, but abandoned because of opposition from U.S. allies. See "[Decisions of Principals Committee Meeting on Bosnia](#)," May 17, 1993.

¹⁰ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was established under [UN Security Council resolution 827](#) of May 25, 1993.

¹¹ The UN Security Council passed [Resolution 820](#) on April 17, 1993, restricting imports and exports from Serbia and Montenegro. Previous resolutions included [713 \(1991\)](#), [724 \(1991\)](#), [757 \(1992\)](#) and [787 \(1992\)](#).

¹² Several hundred European observers were deployed to Croatia as part of the European Community Monitoring Mission in July 1991. Croats dubbed them "ice cream salesmen" because of their uniform of white suits and white shoes, which were designed to give them protection. See, for example, Ray Moseley, "[European Peace Talks Offer Little Hope of Yugoslav Settlement](#)," Chicago Tribune, September 25, 1991.

painted white and all that stuff. This was the logic with which we approached the entire concept.

UNPROFOR was set up [under UN Security Council [Resolution 743](#) of February 21, 1992] for political reasons even though we mentioned in our initial report to the Security Council that there was [no really viable concept of peacekeeping that all sides agreed upon](#).¹³ We called the peacekeeping force UNPROFOR, meaning United Nations Protection Force, which reflected Goulding's optimism. We were really not in the business of protecting anybody significantly. We had observers to begin with and later a very, very small military deployment. When the troubles began in Bosnia, in the early spring of 1992, European members of the Security Council asked [UN Secretary-General Boutros] Boutros-Ghali to extend UNPROFOR to Bosnia. It is often overlooked that the [April 24, 1992] report submitted by the Secretary-General explicitly said, "...in the light of all the factors bearing on the current situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the deployment of a peacekeeping force there was not feasible."¹⁴ It is there in [black and white](#), a public document.

Many of you are not too young to remember the wonderful old song, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." Since they could not find any other response to this crisis in the Security Council, they took the one available mechanism, namely UN peacekeeping, and applied it to a situation for which it was manifestly not suited, as the Secretary-General himself said in black and white. That is how UNPROFOR backed into peacekeeping in Bosnia.

The cable traffic throughout 1992 from the field, up to the Morillon visit to Srebrenica in March 1993, shows the mounting contradictions in such a mandate. You have a peacekeeping operation where there is no peace to keep, with a mandate designed to protect Serbian civilians in Croatia, and Croatian civilians caught up in the war. That was the original mandate of UNPROFOR. It was in Bosnia essentially to be able report back to the Council that it was doing something. When Sarajevo

¹³ Boutros-Ghali, ["Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 721 \(1991\),"](#) S/23280, December 11, 1991.

¹⁴ Boutros-Ghali, ["Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 749 \(1992\),"](#) S/23836, April 24, 1992.

airport fell to the Serbs, [UNPROFOR became the mechanism](#) to prize the airport away from them [in June 1992] and hand it over to international supervision.¹⁵ In the absence of a coherent vision, UNPROFOR was expected to take all this on. It is against this background, without any very coherent or agreed concept or plan of operations that Morillon goes to Srebrenica in March 1993. That is a very short summary of something far more complicated and messy, but provides the Department of Peacekeeping Operations perspective at the time this Srebrenica adventure begins.

DAVID HARLAND: I agree with the point that you cannot understand the fall of the Safe Areas until you understand how UNPROFOR got into Bosnia in the first place. We should also remember that the idea of Safe Areas was extensively discussed in 1992 long before “Srebrenica.” It was raised by Austria and Hungary in particular. There is a very interesting, and I think profound, correspondence relating to the establishment of Safe Areas.¹⁶ The idea actually comes up in a message from [Austrian foreign minister Alois] Mock to [International Committee of the Red Cross President Cornelio] Sommaruga asking about “safety zones” as they are referred to in the Geneva Conventions.¹⁷ Sommaruga then replies saying that they have certain characteristics: they are absolutely unarmed, they are for the protection of hospitals and so on. He asks whether or not the UN Secretariat has been consulted. Then there is another letter to [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako] Ogata. Ogata replies firmly on the record that this is an absolutely terrible idea which, if ever used, should be limited to simply protecting hospitals by agreement. The reason I raise this is because it shows how international decisions are sometimes made. An idea enters into play and is shaped and changed. The fact that it entered into play as an idea to be discounted is something that sometimes gets forgotten as time goes by.

¹⁵ UNSC, [“Resolution 758 \(1992\),”](#) June 8, 1992.

¹⁶ For background on discussion of UN Safe Areas, [see paragraphs 45-51](#), of 1999 UN report on Srebrenica, A/54/549.

¹⁷ Annan to Stoltenberg, [“Safe areas,”](#) UN DPKO, MSC-870, May 28, 1993.

MICHAEL DOBBS: We will certainly look at the origins of the Safe Areas concept, and the differences between the way in which it was applied in places like Kurdistan and Bosnia, but let us go to Larry Hollingworth now. Larry, you accompanied General Morillon to Srebrenica in March 1993. Can you describe the circumstances of this visit and what you remember from the visit?

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: I was in Bosnia [with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees] primarily to deliver humanitarian aid. I worked primarily in Sarajevo, but we were always reminded that there were these [Muslim-inhabited] enclaves [in Serbian-controlled territory], and that we should do something about these enclaves.¹⁸ I had managed to get into Goražde and Žepa. We tried to get into Cerska, but were kept out. We had three humanitarian relief convoys dotted around Bosnia. We could not move any of them. We spent three days outside Zvornik. Finally, Madame Ogata said “enough is enough” and pulled us all back. This was the very first time that I felt that General Morillon was interested in the convoys. He got a good debrief from me and said, “Okay, we should definitely try to get back into Cerska.” While I was waiting in the first convoy [outside Zvornik] for three days, Kamenica fell. Morillon rang me up and said, “Look, we should definitely try to get into Cerska again but we should first of all do an assessment.” He said, “I’d like you to come with me, bring a [World Health Organization] doctor with you. I have approval and we will get into Cerska. We first of all flew to Zvornik. In Zvornik we picked up an armored car from the British. We tried to get then into Cerska but we were regularly stopped in the forest. I don’t know whether it was the Bosnian side or the Serb side, but they cut down lots of trees and it was very difficult to move.

When we got to the outskirts of Cerska, we were met by the soldiers of Naser Orić [commander of the Army of Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina 28th Division], who said, “You’re too late, Cerska has fallen.” This was a great blow for us. General Morillon, who was with us, said, “Okay let’s move on now. We will go to Konjević Polje.” When we got into Konjević Polje, the General decided that he would go back to Zvornik and meet up with General Mladić and see if we could make further

¹⁸ [“Bosnia: Areas of Control,”](#) September 1994.

progress to try and get into Srebrenica....To cut a long story short, the doctor, Simon Mardel, walked to Srebrenica, the General went to Zvornik, and I returned to Sarajevo. The general then decided that we had to take a convoy into Srebrenica. He got approval [from UNPROFOR commander] General Wahlgren and from Karadžić and Mladić.

So off we went, with a very small convoy. There was an UN Military Observer vehicle, there was a Canadian armored personnel carrier, there was a small vehicle with Mèdecins Sans Frontières in it, and there was myself, with two vehicles. That was it. We were going to enter over the bridge at Bratunac, but the Serbs told us the bridge was down and we had to go on a side road, which had not been used for a long time. We were told very clearly that it was mined and was under a meter of snow. So we moved off with the General, who was in the APC. We were going too slowly so he zoomed ahead of us to get into Srebrenica. I was then running the convoy. The first of our trucks hit a mine and was blown up. Unfortunately that meant that the vehicle behind it could not move either since the road was only wide enough for one vehicle. A little bit further, we lost the MSF vehicle, which got stuck in the snow. Eventually we limped into Srebrenica, late at night [March 11, 1993]. General Morillon was waiting at the outer checkpoint of Srebrenica. We all went together into Srebrenica late at night. We went to the reception committee, I think Muhamed [Duraković] was there, in the room at the time. We had a small briefing and then I spent about two hours out on the streets wandering around. It was minus three degrees at the time, and thousands of people were out on the streets.

The following day [March 12, 1993] we met with the mayor and with Orić. All seemed to be going well. We had two Americans with us who were doing communications for us. After doing the recces, the General decided we would go back home. We all got in our vehicles to set off and thought it was rather nice that the entire town came out for us. We thought they were waving us off, but they were not waving us off at all. They were stopping us from leaving. The general said "Okay that's it, we can't move." We had people saying, "If we can't get out, you can't get out." That was the message that was given to us. I think I now know the background to it. We went to the PTT building. The general was obviously worried. His greatest

fear was that he would be taken hostage and here he was, at least "detained," in Srebrenica.

We only had one vehicle with communications. Communications in the APC did not work so my little vehicle became a kind of headquarters. I remember the general's chief of staff, Piers Tucker, explaining what had happened to Bosnia-Herzegovina Command. The voice on the other end said, "So, you are prisoners? You've been taken hostage." Piers Tucker said, "No, no, no, we've just been detained, we're just not allowed to leave." I thought it was a little subtle way of putting it.

The next day, General Morillon kept to himself. He came up with a plan to get up at 2:00 in the morning and walk away from the building. Piers Tucker and his bodyguard would pick him up in the APC, using the excuse that we had to move the vehicle because we could not get good radio reception. The plan fell apart because people stopped them from moving the vehicle. The general had to sneak back into the PTT building. He hid in the room, which gave the impression that perhaps he had left. I would like to ask you [directs question to Muhamed Duraković] whether you thought he had left, or whether you did not know whether he had left. In any case, for twenty-four hours, nobody could see him.

He finally came out and said, "Lar-ry... [*Imitates French accent, with rolling Rs*] I have a plan." He was smoking Davidoff cigars [*makes inhaling sound*].

"Lar-ry, you 'av a flag?" I said, "Yes, General." He said, "A UN flag?" [*Makes inhaling noise*] "Yes, General." Then he said, "Lar-ry, you 'av a tannoy?" I said, "I think so General, yes I think so." And he said, "Good." He said, "Get me the mayor." So we got the mayor and he told the mayor that he wanted everybody in Srebrenica to be outside the building. So sure enough, an enormous crowd of people appeared. He then said to me, "Lar-ry, when I nod my head, you put the flag out the window." I said, "Okay."

So we stood on this balcony. I had no idea what he was going to say, no idea at all. He stood up and he said to the people, "I came 'ere [*inhales*] voluntarily," he

said, "I came 'ere to 'elp you." He said, "I am now putting you under the protection of the United Nations." He nodded his head. Flag out.¹⁹ [Laughter]

There was this enormous cheer from below. People were clapping and cheering and shouting and I thought to myself, "There's only eight of us here." I remember a Canadian soldier said to me, "Does that mean, sir that we can go out and walk around the town?" I said to him, "No it means we can get out of here and protect the town."

The next incident was that we had to inform BH Command, which was fun. I went down with the General and we sat in the vehicle. He explained what was happening to Brigadier Roddy Cordy-Simpson, and explained that he had put Srebrenica under the protection of the United Nations. I could hear Brigadier Cordy-Simpson sucking in his breath. They decided to talk again four hours later. The general said to Cordy-Simpson, "Roddy, I 'ave a plan, I want the helicopters 'ere for the evacuation tomorrow." And Cordy-Simpson said to him, "Um that is not considered to be a good idea, sir." Morillon said, "By whom?" Cordy-Simpson said, "By BH Command, sir." "Roddy," the General said, "I *am* BH Command."

The following day there were no helicopters. We spent about three days trying to bring a convoy in. My task was to find out where to put the food. We had 200 tons of food coming in and a population of maybe 30,000 very hungry people. Where are you going to put this warehouse? How are you going to protect it? How are you going to hand out the food? We also had the task of trying to evacuate the people in the hospital which was the worst that anybody had ever seen.

The General managed to get approval for himself to go out and organize another convoy to come in. When the convoy arrived, they unloaded the aid but it was also agreed that they would take out women and children and males over 60.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Let us return to the evacuation question, and whether the people would be evacuated or protected in place, a little later. I also want to ask you about the media coverage which was very important. Before we do that, we would like to

¹⁹ Footage available in clip of BBC Documentary, [The Death of Yugoslavia](#), Part 5 (YouTube).

hear from Muhamed [Duraković], who was inside the town. Could you describe the situation inside Srebrenica at this time and the impact of the Morillon visit and those words of Morillon? How did you interpret them?



Muhamed Durakovic, R, with Larry Hollingworth

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: Thank you very much. It is an honor and a privilege to see faces that I have not seen for twenty plus years. We have to put General Morillon’s visit in the context of how the population in Srebrenica was surviving at that time. The winter of 1992 to 1993 was the most difficult one. Many people not native to Srebrenica, who managed to survive the onslaught and ethnic cleansing in the Drina Valley, had moved into the enclave.²⁰ The most difficult thing for us was being unable to communicate our situation to those outside Srebrenica. People living in Sarajevo or the Bihać pocket, and other places around Bosnia-Herzegovina, were also in a very difficult situation, but we felt like we were inhabiting this lonely island in the middle of murky waters. We had very little to hope for. The first sign that someone was thinking about the population of Srebrenica and trying to assist us

²⁰ According to a [January 1994 survey](#) conducted by the Srebrenica municipality, more than 16,000 people from other municipalities had fled to Srebrenica, bringing the total population to 37,000. See also [“Report of the Security Council Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution 819 \(1993\),” S/25700](#), April 30, 1993.

came with the airdrops in February 1993.²¹ I always mention Larry in my presentations on Srebrenica.

I was seventeen years old and in high school when the war started in 1992. I would walk away from Srebrenica up into the mountains, hoping that I would be the lucky one to see these air drops. The strategy was to disperse the food in many different locations so that it would not end up on the black market, so that many people would get access to it. For the safety of the aircraft and the pilots, the food was usually dropped from very high altitudes. We would look up into the sky and hear the planes, but not be able to see them. We would stand in the middle of the forest in complete darkness at 2:00 in the morning. Then we would suddenly hear the "poof, poof, poof," [*makes succession of popping noises*] of parachutes opening. The sky would light up with bright colors, yellowish and greenish. These were small flares hanging on the corners of these parachutes. It was as if Christmas had returned to Srebrenica. Actually it looked like a large Christmas tree falling from the sky. My impression was confirmed when I met Mr. Santa Claus here [referring to Larry Hollingworth, photo above] when he came to Srebrenica.

This was the first time in my life that I had met foreigners. I was young, I lived in a very small, isolated community, and I was not very well traveled. It was an extraordinary experience. Here were people willing to risk their lives to travel to Srebrenica under very difficult circumstances. You may have got the impression that you were being detained, but I think the local population never felt like you were being detained. You were always very welcome to come to Srebrenica. To explain our perspective, however, we learned through the grapevine that the internationals had moved to Cerska, and Cerska falls. Then they are in Konjević Polje and Konjević Polje is quickly run over. When they finally came to Srebrenica, this seemed like a very bad pattern. The lesson we took from this was: if they go, we will all die. There were some attempts, as you mentioned, to prevent the UN from leaving, but it was not really organized. It was purely accidental.

²¹ Lake to Clinton, "[Presidential Decision for Humanitarian Air Drops for Bosnia,](#)" The White House, February 19, 1993.

By the time you arrived from Konjević Polje [addresses Hollingworth], people who survived the Cerska and the Konjević Polje onslaughts were arriving on foot from Konjević Polje. It takes at least one or two days to walk from Konjević Polje to Srebrenica. By the time you were getting ready to leave, these people were coming into the town. They had no place to stay, so they sat down on the streets of Srebrenica. It was very cold, it was snowing. There were women and children making fires in the middle of the road. It may have appeared to you that someone was trying to block you, but in reality, these people had no place to go, they did not know anyone in Srebrenica.

Of course, when finally General Morillon made that famous statement from the PTT building, we citizens of Srebrenica felt that we had survived. We really thought this was the end of our suffering, we have again become part of the civilized world, and we will survive the atrocities to which we have been exposed during the previous year.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Before we ask how this information was received at the UN, could Larry tell us how the news got out. If Morillon had made that declaration with nobody to hear it except for the people of Srebrenica, that would have had a certain impact. But there were journalists present. That changed the nature of the event, right?

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: There were two journalists inside Srebrenica, who had made their own way in. One was a German photographer, Phillip von Recklinghausen, and the other was a cameraman called Tony Birtley, who was freelancing for ABC.²² Both of them were there before we got in. They had taken some very good film, but had never been able to get it out. They filmed the episode of the flag coming out of the window and whatever else. I was leaving with the convoy, because my final task was to get people on the convoy which was an absolute nightmare because thousands of people went on the trucks. As I was going

²² Von Recklinghausen arrived in Srebrenica on February 8-9, 1993, and was wounded in the arm, when he stepped on a mine. [Birtley arrived around the same time](#). Both journalists were evacuated from Srebrenica by helicopter.

out, Tony Birtley said to me, "Will you take out all of my film?" It was a gamble because I could have been searched and I could have lost them. I told him that I would take them out if he was prepared to take the risk. I took them and gave them to ABC. They were around the world and in every newspaper within hours of us getting out.

MICHAEL DOBBS: How long between the Morillon speech [declaring Srebrenica to be under the protection of the UN] and the film appearing on the news?

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: I think about four days.²³

MICHAEL DOBBS: It would be almost instantaneous today. In this case, it took four days and the film had to be smuggled out.

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: It was a sad story for Von Recklinghausen. He gave his films to somebody who lost them. He shot about twelve weeks' worth of film with little to show for it.

VERE HAYES: I was at [UNPROFOR BH Command] at Kiseljak on a recce to take over from Cordy-Simpson when all of this was going on. He was extremely concerned by what was happening. Not only did he have to get in touch with New York and the UN, but in the next door office French Special Forces were planning an independent national covert operation to go in and get General Morillon out. I don't know how widely known that is, but it was certainly taken pretty seriously at the time.

TOM BLANTON: I think at one point you describe the smoke of cigarettes leaking under the door of the office they were using.

VERE HAYES: Yes, the door was locked. There were a lot of Gauloises being smoked, a lot of coffee going in. It certainly filtered around the headquarters.

TOM BLANTON: Minister Muratović.

²³ The [footage](#) aired on ABC's *World News Tonight* with Peter Jennings on March 16, 1993.

HASAN MURATOVIĆ: We heard that the arrival of Morillon changed things in Srebrenica but I would like to explain why Morillon went to Srebrenica. He was responsible for the Sarajevo sector. He went to the Tuzla sector by his own decision, without asking anybody's approval or even opinion. Our deputy prime minister, Hakija Turajlić, had been killed on January 8 in a French APC. The APC stopped at a checkpoint near the airport, where all negotiations took place and stayed there for two hours with the Serbs. The [French peacekeepers] did not ask for any support in accordance with the rules. After two hours they opened the door and the deputy prime minister was killed [by the Serbs].

Later in the evening, around 1 a.m., we had a government meeting to organize the burial and discuss the whole matter. General Morillon appeared at this meeting, even though he had not been invited. He came and sat on the side. He asked if he could contribute something to the burial or arrange for more security for the burial. Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, the minister who chaired the meeting, accused Morillon of responsibility for the death of our deputy prime minister. He said, "We suspect you of having a part in it." Initially, Morillon did not react, but later said it was untrue, and tried to prove it was untrue. Mahmutćehajić then asked him to leave the meeting and said that we did not want to do business with him anymore.

We never publicized our suspicions, and did not have any evidence about Morillon's involvement.²⁴ But he probably wanted to do something good and prove that he was not in any way involved in the case. He went to Srebrenica all of a sudden, and then went to Belgrade for several days to negotiate with Milošević. This was outside his area of responsibility at the UN. He succeeded in negotiations with the Serbs and got humanitarian convoys into Srebrenica, which had not been allowed to pass for several months. In our opinion, this was a reward by the Serbs for his part in the execution of Hakija Turajlić.

²⁴ See John Burns, "[Bosnian Muslims Criticize U.N. Over Official's Killing](#)," New York Times, January 10, 1993. A Bosnian government statement issued on January 9, 1993, accused Morillon of failing to protect Turajlić and covering up events that led to the killing. Morillon called the incident "a tragedy of errors" and the "the worst blow of my career." Muratović said that the Bosnian government suspected that Morillon was involved in the Turajlić execution and went to Srebrenica to get away from Sarajevo.

TOM BLANTON: Thank you very much. Let me ask Shashi to describe the reaction in DPKO to the Morillon "declaration" placing the people of Srebrenica "under UN protection."

SHASHI THAROOR: As I said, we had an unclear mandate. The "protection" part of UNPROFOR, as far as Bosnia was concerned, essentially meant protection of humanitarian convoys. From our point of view, the humanitarian mission was obviously extremely important. At the same time, and this was very much General Wahlgren's view as the commander on the ground, we were anxious not to be drawn into the conflict. We were there as a peacekeeping force. Our approach was based on a complicated set of premises. We needed to protect humanitarian aid deliveries to all sides. We needed to protect the UN personnel dispersing that aid. We also needed to ensure that aid deliveries were not used by one side in the conflict to make us a party to the conflict.

None of us had a problem with the idea of the UN stepping aside and allowing Western governments, if they wanted, to take sides and end the war, but there was absolutely no indication of the necessary political will in the West to do that. The band aid approach that the Security Council was pushing was in fact a reflection of the absence of political will for a definitive conclusion of the conflict. We therefore found ourselves managing a peacekeeping operation under the rules of peacekeeping with all the usual configuration patterns, including white vehicles, liaison with all parties and so on. This was at a time when the Serbs were reluctant to let humanitarian aid through because they thought it bolstered the military strength of their opponents. The Bosnians hoped that attacks on humanitarian convoys would irresistibly drag the UN into the conflict on their side. We were caught in the middle.

Obviously we had no problem with the UN going to Srebrenica and delivering aid. That is what the UN was supposed to be doing. However, we were somewhat taken aback by the dramatic declaration by Morillon. We did not disavow him at any point because we also recognized that significant voices on the Security Council welcomed his statement. We wanted to see how we could interpret that in a way

that would keep us viable as a peacekeeping force which is what the Council wanted us to remain. I am sorry that is not a very coherent reply but nothing about this affair was coherent at the time. This was the set of balls with which we were juggling as we tried to deal with the situation.

To take up David Harland's point about the earlier discussions on Safe Areas: these discussions were related to very specific ideas of safe havens which required a number of elements to be viable in international law. The ICRC concept was based on demilitarization. We were happy to do this, but how do you demilitarize Srebrenica when the Bosnian army says it is defending its own people there? You don't demilitarize. When they fire out from this area and are fired back upon, what is the role of the UN? Are we joining the Bosnian Army? These were some of the fundamental dilemmas that we faced because of the peacekeeping nature of our mandate.

TOM BLANTON: Ambassador Walker.

JENONNE WALKER: I think several themes are emerging here. The first, obviously, is the folly of calling something a “protection force,” or even a “peacekeeping force,” when has no intention of protecting anyone. It is a “violation observing force” rather than a peacekeeping force. The notion of being neutral between the attacker and the victim of the attacker puts the UN and participating countries in an impossible position. I am also struck by the number of things that were done to look as if we were doing something when, in fact, we were not willing to do anything serious. This very much includes the government for which I worked. I was in the Clinton administration the first nineteen months or so [from 1993 to mid-1994]. We believed very much—not throughout the government, but at least in the White House—that the West ought to do the kind of things Rupert Smith talks about in *The Utility of Force*, but we were not willing to participate in such an effort ourselves.

We thought our European allies ought to be taking a lot more risk than we were prepared to assume ourselves. We therefore did various peripheral things to make us feel that we were or as if we were doing something and make it appear to

the outside world that we were doing something. I am gratified to hear that you thought the food drops were useful. I too think they were useful. It was the first initiative we took but it was peripheral to the basic problem. It was amelioratory rather than trying to solve the problem. Our attitude toward the creation of the Safe Areas was exactly the same. We thought it was folly to call something a Safe Area that we had no means or intent of keeping safe. But we had zero political or moral credibility because we were not willing to participate ourselves. After years of blathering in NATO about sharing risks and responsibilities, we were not willing to participate.

MICHAEL DOBBS: To follow up on that. President Clinton took office in January 1993 after criticizing the previous Bush administration for dithering on Bosnia. He promised a more energetic approach. So you come into office and [the “tar baby,”](#) as Senator McCain called it, is handed to you.²⁵ Why did you not take a more energetic approach, as was advocated during the campaign?

JENONNE WALKER: A variety of unsatisfactory reasons. President Clinton's major advisers were deeply divided. [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] Colin Powell, who spoke with great authority, did not want us engaged at all. None of us fully appreciated the importance of President Clinton's draft evasion. Colin would have told some favorite reporter that this draft-dodging President was rashly risking American lives. Almost all the principals changed their minds, no one more often than [Secretary of State] Warren Christopher. [National Security Advisor] Tony Lake consistently wanted a more robust American engagement. But he did not want to put the president in the position of choosing between his advisers. Clinton was even more neurotic than most politicians about wanting to be loved by everybody. So we drifted.

We did some useful peripheral things. We delivered Bosnian agreement to Vance-Owen, which the world forgets. We did so by getting rid of a provision that

²⁵ See Michael Wines, [“Conflict in the Balkans; Senator Who Saw War Up Close Doesn’t Want to See Another,”](#) New York Times, May 5, 1993.

would have meant the dissolution of Bosnia unless the Serbs agreed otherwise.²⁶ But all of these things were peripheral to the basic problem. “Lift and strike” was our first serious proposal. The debate in Washington during those early months was between an air strike commitment only and air strikes linked to lifting the arms embargo.²⁷

The reason “lift and strike” was chosen was because we believed it would give us an end point of the strike commitment. We would have a certain number of months during which we would help arm and train the Bosnians. They would then be on their own. Of course, this was nonsense: once we had gone that far in supporting the Bosnians, we would have been committed to their defense if they continued to be attacked. This was a carryover from the “Vietnam syndrome”: there had to be an exit point.

We did not get really serious until August 1993, when we proposed to NATO a serious air strike threat with serious intent to carry it out.²⁸ We got bogged down in the “dual key” issue, which was another mess. We slowly got more serious as time went on, but a lot of people died while we were delaying. That is not a satisfactory answer but it's the best one we have.

SHASHI THAROOR: Ambassador Walker mentioned the Vance-Owen plan.²⁹ I think it is important to understand that this was the linchpin of the international community's strategy at the time. We should have mentioned this earlier. The UN

²⁶ The Vance-Owen Peace Plan [VOPP] divided Bosnia into 10 cantons, or semi-autonomous regions, each dominated by a separate ethnic group. The plan called for Sarajevo to be administered jointly, under international authority. Bosnian President Izetbegović agreed to the peace plan in a ceremony in the UN building in New York on March 25, 1993, on condition that the Serbs also sign. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić originally agreed to the plan on April 30, but it was rejected by the Republika Srpska national assembly on May 6. In his book, *Balkan Odyssey*, Owen acknowledges that US envoy Reginald Bartholomew was “helpful in nursing the Bosnia-Herzegovina government over the final hurdle.” The Bosnian government objected to the plan on the grounds that the central government would likely have been too weak to rule over the ethnically divided country.

²⁷ The “lift and strike” policy envisaged lifting the arms embargo against Bosnian Muslims and Croats accompanied by the threat of air strikes against Bosnian Serb forces if they continued shelling civilians.

²⁸ Roger George & George Kolt to Director of Central Intelligence, [“Likely Allied Reactions to Unilateral US Actions in Bosnia,”](#) NIC 1046/93, August 5, 1993.

²⁹ See Boutros-Ghali, [“Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the ICFY: Peace Talks on Bosnia and Herzegovina,”](#) S/25479, March 26, 1993, for a detailed description of Vance-Owen and the positions of the warring parties.

was trying to push--and the US was on board at the time--a peace settlement that would have been destroyed had we been obliged to take sides with one of the three parties. The chances of Vance-Owen happening would have been undermined if we had found ourselves taking the side of the Bosnian army. While the US may have been caught up in its own internal deliberations, the US backed Vance-Owen and brought the Bosnian government on board, as Ambassador Walker has mentioned.

JENONNE WALKER: Our official position was that we would not endorse anything that all the parties had not accepted but quietly Reg Bartholomew [Clinton's special envoy on Bosnia] got the Bosnian agreement. I'm not going to pretend that there was anything coherent about our policy.

DIEGO ARRIA: The Security Council's concern about the situation in Srebrenica was prompted by the videos Hollingworth has talked about that were shown on TV [on March 16, 1993]. There was a TV screen outside the room where informal sessions of the Security Council were held. We saw video of events in Srebrenica that had not been brought to our attention by the UN Secretariat or by the UNPROFOR media personnel, and even less by the UK and France who both had a significant military presence in Bosnia. This prompted me to convene an urgent meeting of the non-aligned members of the UNSC: Pakistan, Morocco, Cape Verde and Venezuela. We took advantage of the fact that the Pakistan representative, Jamsheed Marker, was presiding over the Council at this time. A council meeting was held that evening at our request. That was how Srebrenica entered the agenda of the Security Council: via a journalist's video, and not by the UN Secretary-General as should have been the case.

I never belonged to a less well informed group than the UN Security Council. I say this not as a joke. It is a true fact, and it was done not by ignorance but by design. Only the permanent members are fully informed about what is happening on the ground. The UN Secretariat accommodates these powers by hiding information, or as we saw later, even by helping to cover up operations, as with the case of the "slow motion genocide" that occurred before their eyes in Srebrenica. Such a reality helps

to explain some of the positions of the Council not only in Bosnia but later in Rwanda. The same behavior applies to the P5 members of the Council which do not share enough information to the other non-permanent members. They put aside their obligation under the Charter to preserve peace and security to accommodate their national interest.

A case in point: the killing of Hakija Turajlić in January 1993 while *en route* to Sarajevo airport in an UNPROFOR APC. I personally took the initiative to investigate his murder. The Serbs shot him after a French colonel [Patrice Sartre] opened the door. The French troops neither returned fire, nor called for reinforcements. UNPROFOR, as well as the UN Secretariat, carried on a very mediocre evaluation of the case. At the time, I even requested the advice of a former attorney general in Canada as well as an American prosecutor. They both declared that justice had not been served in the case. If the Serbs could murder the Deputy Prime Minister of Bosnia while under UN protection, that showed they could literally get away with murder.

Colonel Sartre was later promoted and decorated in France for his “bravery.” For months I kept asking for a review of the case, but this never happened. It was a monumental crime that was shamefully covered up by all parties.

DAVID HANNAY: A little from the British point of view about the background to all this. British involvement in Bosnia was transformed back in August 1992 as a result of the London Conference.³⁰ Having had practically no military on the ground, we actually sent a substantial number for a humanitarian protection operation through the terrible winter of 1992-1993.³¹ In the autumn of 1992, Cy Vance had warned that there could be millions of people dead in Bosnia that winter unless something was done.³² The British government was therefore in this up to its neck.

³⁰ The United Nations and the European Community convened a meeting in London on August 26-27, 1992, that charged the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia [ICFY] with negotiating a peace settlement.

³¹ According to data collected by the [United Nations Peacekeeping website](#), there were [2,874 UK troops](#) in UNPROFOR as of December 31, 1992.

³² See, for example, [“Vance to UN: Troops are needed in Bosnia,”](#) Chicago Tribune, October 15, 1992.

We had a lot of troops deployed by March 1993, but they were neither deployed nor equipped to fight a war. Shortly before Clinton took office [on January 20, 1993], John Major, who was then prime minister, got everybody together in Downing Street, including a lot of ministers, military, and myself back from New York. He asked, "What are we going to do?" The view of that gathering was we must tell the Americans that we must do whatever we do together because otherwise it was not going to work. That message may have been passed, but it certainly did not resonate.

MICHAEL DOBBS: What date was that?

DAVID HANNAY: It would have been the first week of January 1993, before the president took over. After the transfer of power in the US, the first thing that emerged out of what seemed to us fairly confused discussions was "Lift and Strike." Lift and Strike was a nightmare for anyone who had troops on the ground in Bosnia. Had that policy been accepted, the first thing you would have had to do was to extract your troops. None of the Europeans wanted to do that but they also did not want to be put into a position where the Serbs would consider their troops the enemy. This is what preoccupied everyone during those three or four months at the beginning of 1993. It was tearing NATO apart until the United States dropped the policy which caused a certain lowering of tension.

At the same time there was no real alternative policy to the Vance-Owen peace process. I agree very much with what Jenonne said. The United States did, between clenched teeth, give some support to it in the early weeks. [Reg Bartholomew](#) certainly got the Bosnian government to agree to it.³³ But when we were drafting one of these resolutions [UNSC 820] in April, we tried to get the Security Council to tell the Bosnian Serbs that the international community would stick to the Vance-Owen plan until hell froze over and they had better realize that. That was the right diplomatic move to make. After a great deal of debate in New York which, alas, all came out in the public domain, the United States refused to put

³³ See Mark Tran, "[Izetbegovic agrees to divide Bosnia](#)," The Guardian, March 26, 1993.

the word "endorse" into a resolution. After a lot of toing and froing with Washington, we were told that the furthest Secretary of State Warren Christopher would go was to put the word "commend" in.³⁴ That was the end of Vance-Owen. The peace plan was dead. As Shashi said, this was the big game that everyone was playing. The Vance-Owen peace plan was the strategy, but it was killed in the middle of the action. Srebrenica, of course, was going on all this time.

JORIS VOORHOEVE: I remember that the lift and strike policy, even when it wasn't supported any more by the US administration, lingered on in Congress until the spring of 1995. I had quite an argument at the time with Senator McCain who advocated lift and strike. It was also striking at the Munich conference, in February 1995 that the entire American delegation was still talking about lift and strike, which we in Europe thought was the wrong policy.

MICHAEL DOBBS: We should examine some of these specific UN Resolutions. Let's begin with the first one, UNSC 819, adopted on April 16, 1993.³⁵ It was followed by the Security Council visit to Srebrenica, led by Diego Arria, on April 25. How was this resolution passed? What did it actually say? How was it meant to be implemented? We have an interesting dynamic around the table between the Security Council members who passed the resolution and the peacekeepers on the ground who tried to implement the resolution as best as they could. Perhaps Diego Arria could tell us what the resolution was meant to achieve. Then we will ask General Hayes to describe how UNPROFOR attempted to implement the resolution.

³⁴ UNSC, "[Resolution 820 \(1993\)](#)," S/RES/820, April 17, 1993. U.S. policy-makers opposed the Vance-Owen peace plan on both moral and pragmatic grounds. During a February 24, 1993 press conference, Albright stated that Vance-Owen plan amounted to "rewarding aggression and punishing the victims." Christopher earlier publicly expressed doubts about the "feasibility" and "practicality" of the Vance-Owen formula, telling the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the US should "investigate other options." (See John Goshko and Julia Preston, "[U.S. officials resist pressure to endorse Bosnia Peace Plan](#)," Washington Post, February 4, 1993.)

³⁵ UNSC, "[Resolution 819 \(1993\)](#)," S/RES/819, April 16, 1993.

DIEGO ARRIA: The Security Council approved a mission to Bosnia and Srebrenica, [April 23-26, 1993], that I had the privilege to lead.³⁶ To my surprise, it was the first mission ever sent by the United Nations Security Council to the theater of conflict. As soon as we landed in Sarajevo I found out why this was the case. There was a policy of keeping non-Permanent members of the Security Council uninformed. We landed in Sarajevo thinking we were going to negotiate something, but it was already finished. A demilitarization agreement had already been signed by the parties on April 18, with the assistance of General Hayes.³⁷

We thought it was very important, and even Boutros-Ghali agreed, that we should take a contingent of international journalists to Srebrenica to reinforce the resolution. The journalists who traveled with us from New York were prevented, by UNPROFOR, from traveling with us to Srebrenica. Even the delegation members were almost prevented from entering Srebrenica. General Hayes will remember that there were discussions that morning in Zvornik, and that they almost did not allow the Security Council members to travel to Srebrenica. André Erdős was also there. You can imagine our reaction to the situation.

In the end, we forced our way through. I went with General Hayes in one of the helicopters. My colleagues had to wait in Zvornik with a Serb colonel until we got to the other side. UNPROFOR even cooperated in disarming the members of the delegation of our cameras during the visit. I refused to give up my camera and took the only photos which were later used by Reuters. UNPROFOR had a lady filming the whole thing but I have never been able to see that video.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Let us recall the language of [UNSC 819](#), which says, "...acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations," i.e. the peace enforcement provision, the Security Council "demands that all parties and others concerned treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a Safe Area which should be free from any armed attack or any other hostile act." How did you think that resolution would be enforced?

³⁶ UNSC, "[Report of the Security Council Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution 819 \(1993\)](#)," S/25700, April 30, 1993.

³⁷ Sefir Halilović & Ratko Mladić, "[Agreement for the Demilitarization of Srebrenica](#)," April 18, 1993.

DIEGO ARRIA: We did not have any hope of that happening. We were addressing international public opinion rather than the Council itself, describing the devastation of the people of Srebrenica. It was not difficult for the Council to agree on the resolution, because there were no commitments on the part of anybody. It was *pour la galerie* [“for the public gallery”], as the French would say. It was a resolution without any cost or consequences except to accommodate the Serbs.

MICHAEL DOBBS: When you passed that resolution, did you think that UNPROFOR had the duty to enforce it by itself, or that it should reach agreement with the parties on how to enforce it? How was the resolution meant to be enforced, in your view?

DIEGO ARRIA: We were not very well informed about the realities of UNPROFOR, which by the way is a misnomer. With such a grandiose name, United Nations “Protection Force,” we thought something would be done. A few days later, of course, we discovered that this was not the case.

In proposing the text of the resolution, I had written in Spanish, “*Areas Protegidas*,” or “Protected Areas.” The US and UK translated this as “Safe Areas” and the French as “*Zones de Sécurité*.” This was more than just semantics. “Protected” would have meant really enforcing the resolution. “Safe” meant nothing, as we all found out very quickly. There were no obligations under the “Safe Area” concept.

SHASHI THAROOR: If you read UNSC 819 carefully, you will see that it calls on the parties to treat Srebrenica as safe. It enjoins no new responsibilities on the international community, if the parties fail to treat Srebrenica as safe, UNPROFOR has the responsibility to act in self-defense. One of the fundamental problems we had throughout this operation is that diplomatic drafting conducted with great finesse and aplomb by very skilled diplomats served as an end in itself. It was not linked to operational realities on the ground.

While we were talking in the Security Council about UNSC 819, on the ground unknown to us, General Wahlgren, General Halilović (the Bosnian commander), and General Mladić had negotiated and signed a demilitarization agreement that was not

explicitly called for in 819.³⁸ We had not asked for it because it would look as if we were taking sides against the Bosnians. We had not asked for it because we didn't think for God's sake that it could be viably implemented by us.

I want to draw your attention to the Annan cable of April 23, 1993 which I confess I wrote.³⁹ These are our instructions to Wahlgren following a phone call I had with him earlier. With one or two exceptions, most of the cables signed by Kofi Annan were drafted by me. In this [cable](#) we tell Wahlgren that "...the demilitarization of Srebrenica was a step agreed by the parties, not one proposed by the United Nations." We tell Wahlgren that UNPROFOR is merely "lending its good offices to help both parties fulfill the commitments they have made to each other." We were extremely conscious throughout of the severe operational limitations.

I also have a sentence here saying, "...however, UNPROFOR takes on a moral responsibility for the safety of the disarmed that it clearly does not have the military resources to honour beyond a point." I wrote these words in some distress because this was not an action we in headquarters had authorized or recommended. UNPROFOR had taken it on. Of course, the Serbs were going to use this as a way to disarm their rivals.⁴⁰ But, equally now, it got embedded into the concept. If the Bosnian Muslims, or the Bosnian Army officially, had not been disarmed, and therefore could continue to fight out of the pocket, did the pocket suddenly stop being a Safe Area in terms of what the Council intended in 819?

I keep harping back to the central dilemma: what was our role? The best thing would have been if the US had made up their minds early enough, talked to the Brits and the French and said, "Pull the UN out and let's go to war." That would have been the simplest, clearest thing, but they were not doing that. They had the UN deployed there, making peace as an operation, trying to be neutral among the parties, trying to ensure that the UN presence did not become a military advantage to any one of the parties, while at the same time all this was going on in the capitals, without any coherent conclusions. I would commend this cable not because I wrote it but

³⁸ ["Agreement for the Demilitarization of Srebrenica,"](#) April 18, 1993.

³⁹ Annan to Wahlgren, ["Srebrenica,"](#) UN DPKO, MSC 676, April 23, 1993.

⁴⁰ The cable added that DPKO saw ["no need for UNPROFOR to participate in house-to-searches for weapons"](#) given Wahlgren's public statements that Srebrenica was "fully demilitarized."

because it encapsulates some of the operational dilemmas that 819 gave us and that frankly we foresaw. David [Hannay] will probably remember that we had a little meeting in the office of the President of the Security Council where I read out Wahlgren's cable advising against the adoption of such a resolution. The Europeans were very clear in any case that they were going to go ahead with this, and we did go ahead with it. This cable summarizes the operational consequences that we were trying to clarify to UNPROFOR which meanwhile had taken one step beyond what either the Council or we in DPKO had anticipated in actually signing a demilitarization agreement.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Let us go to General Hayes. You received UNSC 819 and had the task of implementing it, together with General Wahlgren. Can you describe how you went about trying to put flesh onto the resolution and apply it to what was actually happening on the ground in Bosnia.

VERE HAYES: Yes, certainly. Before I do, can I just come back to something that Ambassador Arria said about UNPROFOR preventing him from getting into Srebrenica. That is actually totally incorrect from my point of view. We did everything we could to get you in. The problem was that we could not get the journalists in. Since I knew that was going to happen, I had to decide whether we took you and other members of the delegation in so that you could see the place or nobody would get in at all. I also find it slightly strange that members of the Security Council thought that we were operating under a Chapter VII, as opposed to a Chapter VI, mandate. I would have thought that would have been obvious.

MICHAEL DOBBS: So your understanding was that you were operating under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, and this was not a Chapter VII operation at all?

VERE HAYES: We were operating under Chapter VI. For us, Chapter VI was a “cook and look” operation, as we rather cheekily described it. That's all you could do, “cook and look.” The way Chapter VII went was that the UN issued the warrants and the United States made the arrests.

To come back to what was happening. There was a meeting at Sarajevo airport on April 17-18, 1993. An agreement was signed between Mladić and Halilović.⁴¹ The negotiation started at noon on Saturday, April 17, and lasted until 2 a.m. on Sunday, April 18. The question arose, who was going to be responsible for the details? I looked down the table at Generals Wahlgren and Morillon, who looked back down the table at me, and I took it on. We needed to get some clarification on the [phrase](#), "all parties...treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a Safe Area."⁴² Obviously, that phrase meant different things to different parties.

To cut a long story short, we negotiated all day Sunday and all day Monday. We had seventy-two hours in which to get the agreement implemented.⁴³ Otherwise it would have fallen apart. We also had to get orders to the Canadians, who had moved into Srebrenica, on what they were meant to do. As a commander on the ground, you look to your higher headquarters to tell you what to do. You do not try to make it up as you go along. We had to give the 145-man Canadian contingent led by Lt. Col Tom Geburt some orders, so he could actually do something.⁴⁴ I eventually decided on my own initiative that the Srebrenica "Safe Area" had to be extended out from the town itself. We looked at the maps and did a quick survey of the high points around the town. There is [a map here](#).⁴⁵ We went and drew the Safe Area on the map, extending out to the points from which you had a direct line of sight, with the ability for direct fire into the town itself. That was where we drew the area to be defined as a Safe Area. It was very small, about 4.5 kilometers by about 1.5 kilometers. To me, it was the kernel of a nut which would be extended.

We did not disarm the Bosnians in the pocket. We asked them either to leave the area we had designated to be demilitarized as the Safe Area or, if they were

⁴¹ Sefir Halilović & Ratko Mladić, "[Agreement for the Demilitarization of Srebrenica](#)," April 18, 1993.

⁴² UNSC, "[Resolution 819 \(1993\)](#)," S/RES/819, April 16, 1993.

⁴³ The agreement signed at Sarajevo airport between Mladić and Halilović (Point 4) specified that "the demilitarization of Srebrenica will be complete [within 72 hours](#) of the arrival of the UNPROFOR Company in Srebrenica." The agreement also provided for the evacuation of 500 seriously wounded and sick civilians.

⁴⁴ An April 22, 1993 *NYT* article by John Burns reported that UNPROFOR had "no contingency plans" in the event of a Serb attack on Srebrenica. Colonel Tom Geburt, of the Royal Canadian Regiment, was reported to be "tearing out his hair" at the prospect of having to defend the city, or even his own men. The rules of engagement were unclear.

⁴⁵ Hayes to UNPF-HQ, "[Report on the Demilitarization of Srebrenica](#)," HQ BH Command, April 21, 1993.

going to stay, hand their weapons in. This became a debate with the Serbs when they were coming in with a delegation to sign the agreement and had to leave their weapons behind. It also became a debate with Naser Orić, who was in the area with his bodyguards carrying his weapons. When I got in there [on April 21, 1993] with [the Bosnian government and Bosnian Serb delegations](#), we got out at the compound where the weapons had been gathered. Naser Orić was standing there. I had to say to him, "You're armed in this area. It's not in the agreement." He said that nobody had told him very much about the agreement, and he did not know what was going on. I said, "You're not meant to be in this area with a weapon. I'm going to get the delegations out of the vehicle. When I turn around, if you're still here armed in the area, I will have to arrest you." I'm not sure we would have had much success arresting Naser Orić but when we turned around he had gone.

We then put the two parties together in vehicles and drove around the area. We had agreed that the area had to be marked on the map which then had to be confirmed and marked on the ground. So you actually had map and ground markings so you knew where the area was. We went around that area, came back and signed an agreement. Neither side was particularly happy with it. Our intention was that there would be a buffer zone, controlled by the Bosnians, extending out from the area decreed to be safe to the front lines, which were a lot further out at that time. We went back several times to try and extend the area but were never able to do so. Neither side was prepared to make any concessions. That is how it ended up, as just that very small area around the town itself.

When Ambassador Arria came with his delegation, I made an error with a journalist for which I apologize. I had heard the Ambassador talking on BBC Radio 4 about the UN disarming Bosnians [in Srebrenica]. I now think he was unaware what was happening on the ground. I made the mistake of saying that I wasn't quite sure that the Ambassador knew what he was talking about which caused a furor understandably with the Ambassador. That colored our subsequent discussions. *[Laughter]*

If we had not left the journalists behind in Zvornik, you, Ambassador, would not have been able to get into Srebrenica and see it, even in the limited way that you

did see it. At the time, as far as the Serbs on the ground were concerned, the UN and your delegation actually had no authority to go in without their permission. There was nothing we could do about it.

DIEGO ARRIA: The smaller countries in the Security Council do not have armies. My friend David [Hannay] once remarked that the Ambassador from Venezuela was not going to march into Srebrenica with Venezuelan soldiers. I said “He is right, but we do not have the privilege of sitting permanently in the Security Council, either.” Public opinion was fundamental in this issue. We knew the importance of bringing the journalists. General [Hayes], you said something at the time about United Nations Security Council Resolutions being “woolly-headed.”⁴⁶ This was the first time I heard that expression. I said, “How can a general who is not the force commander address the Security Council in that way?” These are political matters. I thought that you were getting involved in political negotiations. You talked just now about wanting to arrest the Bosnian commander in Srebrenica [Naser Orić]. I think that would have been an abuse of power which would have had consequences.

VERE HAYES: I do not think it would have been an abuse of power because the agreement between the two parties said that there would be no armed people in that area. It would simply have been implementing an agreement that had been made between the parties.

ANDRÉ ERDÖS: In Hungary, we were looking to the United States to play an important role. In January 1993, we received information from US sources, which is not included in this booklet. US officials met with non-permanent members of the Security Council, and said that the US was ready for more radical steps, including a more active military role. It seems they were unable to take these steps because of opposition from the United Kingdom, France and Russia. They added that they also had to take into consideration Yeltsin’s internal political problems. In May 1993, we

⁴⁶ See John Pomfret, [“UN delegation visits shell-scarred Bosnian Enclave,”](#) Washington Post, April 26, 1993 quoted anonymous UN peacekeepers calling recent Security Council resolutions on Bosnia as “woolly-headed” and “so vague they were almost impossible to enforce.”

heard the same thing. US delegation sources said that the United States was ready to conduct air strikes as long as they were not opposed by the major allies and the Security Council. This shows that, quite apart from all the internal Yugoslav problems, such as nationalism and so on, a major problem involved relations between western countries. This was one of the reasons why the war dragged on until 1995.

OBRAD KESIC: The Geneva Conventions discuss the protection of civilians and the organization of safe areas.⁴⁷ As far as Safe Areas are concerned, there are two elements that are equally important. The first is that they depend on the will of the belligerents. Combatant forces must have the will to conclude an agreement and define a Safe Area. The second part is demilitarization. Was this what was in the mind of the people drafting the UN Security Council Resolution or was it more a case, as Ambassador Walker suggested, creating the perception of “doing something” without actually understanding what you were doing?

MICHAEL DOBBS: Just to add to that, there was no mention of “demilitarization” in the UN Security Council Resolution. It was something that was added by the people on the ground. Shashi mentioned his April 23 cable which states explicitly that “we see no need for UNPROFOR to participate in house-to-house searches for weapons.” In other words, DPKO was backing off some of the commitments that had been made on the ground.

SHASHI THAROOR: Yes, we were caught in a cleft stick. We had not proposed this thing to begin with. We did not think we had the capacity to enforce it and implement it. At the same time we were under the tremendous moral pressure in the Security Council and in the media that we were giving aid and comfort to ethnic

⁴⁷ “Safety zones” were created under the Geneva Conventions in Madrid in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War and in Shanghai in 1937 during the Japanese bombardment. [Article 15](#) of the [Fourth Geneva Convention \(1949\)](#) on “The Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War” provides for “neutralized zones” intended to shelter “wounded and sick combatants or non-combatants” and “civilian persons who take no part in hostilities.” Protocol 1 Article 60 on “Demilitarized zones” prohibits warring parties from extending military operations to demilitarized zones.

cleansers and killers and so on. The last thing we wanted was to be seen as aiding and abetting the Serbs. We could not afford to take the Bosnian side "militarily," but we could morally. We did have a problem taking the Serb side since they were besieging a town with civilians. It was complicated by the fact that this agreement had already been signed by all parties including the Bosnian Army. So we said, "Let the parties fulfill their obligations to each other but don't go around being the enforcers of this agreement." That was our guidance.

TOM BLANTON: You have a [sentence](#) in your April 23 cable, mentioning the "...strong feeling amongst several Member States that UNPROFOR should not participate too actively in 'disarming the victims.'"⁴⁸

SHASHI THAROOR: That is right. I knew that people like Diego Arria and André Erdős were certainly saying that sort of thing in the Council, as were the Pakistanis and others. There were a lot of very strong voices on this subject. I would say the principal authors of UNSC 819 were the Brits. David Hannay can speak to the thinking behind it. At the time, David assured us that the parties were being enjoined to treat the Safe Area as safe and there were no new obligations for UNPROFOR. The demilitarization agreement looked very much like a new obligation which is why we [in DPKO] tried to push it back and say, "Don't do more than you absolutely have to." Let them keep their word to each other.

VERE HAYES: To be clear on the demilitarization, what we were saying was, "you either hand in your weapons and stay in the area or you leave the area." Those people who wanted to stay in the area were disarmed by voluntarily handing in their weapons. If they did not want to hand in their weapons, they had to move out of the Safe Area. We, the UN, did not actually disarm anybody.

SHASHI THAROOR: That is right. Our guidance fitted in very much with the way you saw it. I have a [sentence](#) there telling General Wahlgren, "...given your own public statements that Srebrenica is fully demilitarized..." Frankly, we took this with

⁴⁸ Annan to Wahlgren, "[Srebrenica](#)," UN DPKO, MSC 676, April 23, 1993.

several pinches of salt, but that is what Wahlgren was saying officially, in public. That was another reason why we should not go around doing house to house searches. I see from a separate document that [on April 8] [30,000 rounds of ammunition were found](#) in Srebrenica so it was not in fact demilitarized.⁴⁹

VERE HAYES: That ammunition was found in a UNHCR convoy going to Sarajevo across the airport. It had nothing to do with Srebrenica. That was before anything happened with the Srebrenica agreement and was one of the reasons why the Serbs became so insistent on searching UNHCR convoys.⁵⁰



Zlatko Lagumdžija, left, with Hasan Muratović

ZLATKO LAGUMDŽIJA: I feel like a guinea pig who survived an experiment. I am honored to be here with the scientists who, let's say, "helped us survive." I think that Hasan Muratović made an important point. The killing of Deputy Prime Minister Hakija Turajlić was a clear signal that you can do anything you want and not be

⁴⁹ Wahlgren to Annan, ["High-Level Military Meeting in Belgrade of 9 April 1993,"](#) UNPF-HQ, Z-495, April 11, 1993. The document supports Hayes' memory that the ammunition was discovered in a UNHCR convoy in Sarajevo.

⁵⁰ For Mladic's account of his talks with Wahlgren and Morillon in Belgrade, see his diary entry, ["Meeting with Generals Walgren \(sic\) and Morillon,"](#) April 9, 1993.

punished. A few weeks after his murder, I was responsible for the negotiations with Morillon and Sadako Ogata on humanitarian activities as acting prime minister. We tried for weeks to evacuate wounded kids from Sarajevo on the empty planes that were delivering the food. It proved impossible. They told us that the people who killed Turajlić would not allow it.

At one point things got so desperate that we refused to accept food in Sarajevo until food was delivered to the enclaves, first with parachutes (those “Christmas trees”) and then with convoys. We greeted UNSC Resolution 819 with enthusiasm, not because of the resolution but because of the mention of [Chapter VII](#) of the UN Charter.⁵¹

We heard many times, and again today, that UNPROFOR did not want to be dragged into the conflict. I debated this question many times with Larry Hollingworth, both before and after I was seriously wounded on May 22, 1993. What does “being neutral” mean? Does it mean occupying the middle ground between two warring sides? Is it geometric? Or is there some other logic to it? If you demonstrate neutrality by taking the middle ground between a killer and his victim, then you betray your own values, in which case we should rethink everything we are doing.

DAVID HANNAY: It is perfectly clear from what Larry Hollingworth said that Morillon acted on his own when he made his speech from the balcony of the PTT building in Srebrenica with the flag. Once that became public, the choice [we faced in the Security Council] was whether to disown him or to support him. It was as simple as that. You asked how UNSC 819 came to be written. The main people behind the resolution were the Europeans, who were not prepared to drop Morillon despite the fact that he had acted without any authority whatsoever. There was absolutely zero enthusiasm for the Safe Area, as described in UNSC 819, certainly in my government. Our view was much closer to the views of Mrs. Ogata and the ICRC about Safe Areas than it was to those who wanted a militarized Safe Area. I never saw from London any criticism of the Safe Area agreement, as it was negotiated by UNPROFOR between the Bosnians and the Bosnian Serbs. I think there was a feeling that it was

⁵¹ UNSC, [“Resolution 819 \(1993\),”](#) S/RES/819, April 16, 1993.

not ideal, to put it mildly, but the agreement made it slightly more sustainable. The storm of protest that erupted over the agreement meant that it was never repeated in any of the other Safe Areas.

[BREAK]

TOM BLANTON: One of the policy questions that we have not yet discussed is the dilemma over whether to protect refugees in place, in the Srebrenica Safe Area, or evacuate them. If you organized evacuations, you could be accused of sanctioning ethnic cleansing. But we also know that the word “protection” in the title of UNPROFOR was an aspiration, not a reality. Larry, can you address the challenge you faced?

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: The first point is to ask, what do the local people want? What are their wishes? If they want to leave, are you imprisoning them by keeping them in? It is a great dilemma. We did not want to aid ethnic cleansing, but we also did not want to keep them as prisoners. My opinion always is, what is the view of the people themselves? If people genuinely want to leave, we should let them go.

MICHAEL DOBBS: The first evacuations were limited to the sick and the very elderly. A number of evacuation convoys were organized but at a certain point the Bosnian government called a halt. What was your perception of what the local population in Srebrenica wanted to do?

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: The people were in the most dire straits you can imagine. There was no way in the world that we were able to sustain them to anything like a minimum standard. I am not surprised that they wanted to go. They knew full well that with the conditions that were imposed on us, they were never going to be sustained. I am not surprised that every single person wanted to go.

They were all frightened that their families would be separated. The women and children thought that, if they got out, the Serbs would shell the city with all the men inside it.

MICHAEL DOBBS: What did your friends want to do, Muhamed?

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: In Srebrenica in 1993, it was obvious that staying in areas that were meant to be ethnically cleansed meant certain death. Everyone was trying to sustain life as much as possible. The men wanted to at least get their wives and children out as soon as possible to give them a chance of survival. Most civilians in Srebrenica wanted to get out as soon as possible. I'm talking from my own personal, private experience. Your main objective—today, too, in certain parts of the world—is the preservation of life. You have to save those who are caught in the middle between two warring parties and are direct victims of the atrocities. That did not reflect the view, perhaps, of the political structure of Srebrenica. They felt that if the women and children left Srebrenica, it would become a much easier territory to occupy.

If you have only one bullet in your gun, and you know that your wife and kids are a mile away behind you facing certain death, you will stand your ground no matter what. You will fight to the last drop of your blood. But if your wife and kids are no longer in Srebrenica, then you will do whatever you can to join them, even if that means that fighting your way out through almost one hundred miles of No Man's Land. From the point of view of the Bosnian military leadership, evacuating civilians from Srebrenica meant weakening the morale of the fighting force in Srebrenica. They did not represent the feeling of the majority of the people who only wanted to survive, to live somewhere else if Srebrenica was no longer a viable option.

As far as the demilitarization of Srebrenica is concerned, my personal view and the view of the Bosnian authorities at that particular time was that the Canadian troops were highly professional. They came in and erected checkpoints. One of the checkpoints, on the south side of the town, was one hundred meters away from my house. I was able to aid these checkpoints as a member of the local police. We would search anyone entering or leaving the enclave. This was a joint effort by UNPROFOR and the local police who were there to ensure that the agreement was followed.

If the local police or UNPROFOR found anyone with weapons at these checkpoints, the weapons were seized and destroyed on the spot. If someone was found carrying a concealed hand gun, the peacekeeper would take the magazine out of the pistol and destroy the pistol by throwing it under an APC. This was at the beginning when the demilitarized zone was confined to Srebrenica and its suburbs. Later on this was extended southwards to OP [Observation Post] Echo, OP Foxtrot and the other observation points.

LARRY HOLLINGWORTH: We must remember that at least 50 percent, if not more, of the population of Srebrenica were from outside Srebrenica. They had fled their own villages for what they thought was a better place. When they found that it was actually the worst place on God's earth, it's not surprising that they wanted to leave.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: I agree.

HASAN MURATOVIĆ: Whether to leave or be protected inside a safe zone is an immoral dilemma. When the [Srebrenica] safe zone was created, there was no clearly defined final goal. What was the final intention with this safe zone? How long was it meant to stay in place? What had to be done to enable people to leave the area or to defend themselves? Was there any other solution? We saw what the better solution was, both in Bosnia and later in Kosovo: equip an army to protect the place, with the assistance of air strikes. Let the army fight, and give support from the air. Or even reprimand seriously. When the Serbs were ordered to surrender weapons in Sarajevo, they surrendered their weapons because it was an ultimatum. But they were not reprimanded seriously in Srebrenica. Instead, there were negotiations with them.

Every peacekeeping force in Bosnia and every [foreign] civilian organization was supposed to follow the overall line of the UN, but they also worked and followed the line of their own governments. Deployments of UN peacekeepers reflected political interests of different countries from which they come: Turks and Egyptians in Sarajevo, French between Pale and Sarajevo, and between Banja Luka and Bihać, the Spanish in Mostar.

We must bear in mind these dual roles when examine the decisions that were taken. There was no consensus between European countries on what to do. There were different policies and different views. The creation of the Safe Area, as Madam Ogata said, was dubious from all points of view.⁵² You can protect a hospital, you can protect the population, only if you help them to defend themselves and have an overall goal in mind. The UN mission never had clearly defined goals in Bosnia. They lived from today to tomorrow, attempting to solve day-to-day problems.

CARL BILDT: I was not around at the time but I was involved in a similar situation in Žepa in 1995. The question is: if you assist in bringing people out of a difficult situation, are you an accomplice in ethnic cleansing or genocide, or not? This is both a moral and political dilemma for international organizations, when faced with situations like this. The war crimes tribunal, ICTY, dealt with this in the Zdravko Tolimir case but was unable to make up its mind. First the tribunal said: yes, you are an accomplice in a crime. Then they changed their position and said: no, you cannot really say that.⁵³ The fact that they go back and forth on this issue illustrates how difficult this is. Of course, it has vast implications for other operations around the world.

MICHAEL DOBBS: What is your personal view?

CARL BILDT: My view is that you have to look at each situation as it is. It is difficult to have an overriding principle. You are normally interested in saving lives. The humanitarian imperative is often what drives people in situations like this.

⁵² See, for example, Hannay to FCO, "Bosnia: Mrs Ogata's views on Safe Areas," [Telno 1903](#), May 29, 1993. Ogata warned that safe areas could turn into "[large scale refugee camps](#)...closed in by the surrounding military forces."

⁵³ This issue relates to [Article 4 2 \(b\)](#) of the ICTY Statute, which gives the tribunal authority to prosecute the crime of genocide, specifically "causing serious bodily or mental harm" with "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group." The ICTY Appeals Chamber ruled in April 2015 that the Trial Chamber had failed to establish that the Muslims expelled from Žepa (in contrast to the Muslims expelled from Srebrenica) had suffered "serious mental harm" rising to the level of genocide. See [paragraphs 216-217](#), Appeal Judgment. This reversed the finding contained in [Paragraph 758](#) of the 2012 Trial Chamber judgment.

JORIS VOORHOEVE: I entirely agree with the overriding principle of saving lives. That takes priority over not cooperating with ethnic cleansing.

I would put Security Council Resolution 819, which we discussed this morning, in the category of "fake" actions. Fake actions create the impression that something has been decided and is being done when in actual fact nothing was decided or done. The only operational part of the resolution was that the Secretary-General should ["increase the presence of UNPROFOR."](#)⁵⁴ The resolution does not say what UNPROFOR should do. There is mention of Chapter VII, but that is meaningless because it does not say what part is under Chapter VII. Members of the Security Council would do better not to vote for such fake resolutions. There are other resolutions that were much stronger: for example, UNSC resolution 836, which also invoked Chapter VII and allowed the Secretary-General to use ["air power in and around the safe areas...to support UNPROFOR in the performance of its mandate."](#)⁵⁵ That was a very significant resolution that made use of Chapter VII.

The second point I want to make is very similar to the one raised by Mr. Bildt. I draw attention to the proposals made by Mrs. Ogata in 1992. She favored evacuation of the population of Srebrenica and negotiations between the Bosnian government and the Bosnian Serbs [on a land swap].⁵⁶ The Bosnians would have received a piece of land near Sarajevo that would have improved the defensibility of Sarajevo and made it possible to relocate the population of Srebrenica preventively. I understand the dilemma faced by the Bosnian government. I know there were discussions in the Bosnian government on a preventive evacuation. There were ministers in favor of preventive evacuation, but in the end they decided against. Political and ethical questions were confused, not only in the United Nations, but also in Bosnia.

TOM BLANTON: Let me ask David Hannay to respond. I think that you have argued that the so-called "fake resolution," 819, did actually achieve something, namely

⁵⁴ UNSC, ["Resolution 819 \(1993\),"](#) S/RES/819, April 16, 1993.

⁵⁵ UNSC, ["Resolution 836 \(1993\),"](#) S/RES/836, June 4, 1993.

⁵⁶ Sadako Ogata, ["Statement to the International Meeting on Humanitarian Aid for Victims of the Conflict in the former Yugoslavia,"](#) July 29, 1992.

heading off a Serbian offensive against Srebrenica. Had the Vance-Owen plan actually been adopted, we might be looking back at the establishment of these Safe Areas as a triumph for international diplomacy. Is that an accurate reflection of your view?

DAVID HANNAY: These Safe Areas resolutions—819 in the case of Srebrenica, and 836 setting out the overall policy—were never designed as anything other than a short term expedient. They had to be fitted into a wider political strategy which had to involve peace negotiations and a settlement. The destruction of Vance-Owen in the spring of 1993 was disastrous because it knocked away that option. It took three years to reconstruct the [peace negotiation] option which came to be known as Dayton. The Safe Areas should never have been seen as a long-term solution to anything. They were a short-term expedient that needed to be fitted into a proper political and military strategy but never was.

As 1993 and 1994 wore on, the expedient became more and more threadbare, as we will see when we talk about Goražde and Bihać. By the time of the Srebrenica massacre, it was completely worthless. The reason it was worthless was because no one did anything about the political framework. To my mind, the destruction of Vance-Owen was a disaster. If you read the Joint Action Program, you can see what the signatories thought about preserving Vance-Owen. They make a vague reference to [“building on the Vance-Owen process,”](#) but it was basically dead.⁵⁷ That was a real disaster. The Safe Areas were an expedient that became a policy.

TOM BLANTON: Jenonne, can you address that?

JENONNE WALKER: I agree with most of what David has said. I place less importance than he does on Vance-Owen. Obviously if there is a peace agreement, there is a peace agreement, whether it's the Vance-Owen plan or any other. What was lacking in all the UN Resolutions, and certainly in American policy and in the

⁵⁷ Permanent Representatives of France, Spain, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, [“Joint action programme,”](#) S/25829, May 24, 1993.

Joint Action Program, was any willingness to make the Serbs stop their aggression. The first serious thing that was done in the West was the NATO decision in August 1993 to take serious military action, air action, against anyone who continued shelling civilian settlements, which of course meant the Bosnian Serbs and their Serb backers.⁵⁸ It worked in February 1994, the first time it was tested, when we issued an ultimatum to the Serbs about pulling their weapons 20 kilometers beyond Sarajevo.⁵⁹ At the last minute, with Russian help, they complied because they really believed NATO air strikes were coming. Had that policy been continued, things might have been better sooner.

The Joint Action Program took most of us in Washington by surprise. I cannot remember why the senior European officials were in town. There had been some other event. The next day, I got a phone call from someone quite senior in the Defense Department saying, is something happening at the State Department that we are being cut out of? I said, no of course not, I would know about it. All of us were taken by surprise when Warren Christopher and his colleagues came out with the Joint Action Program, which was fake policy. It gave no bones to anything. I have no idea why Chris and his colleagues signed up to that. Most of us thought it was an embarrassment. I asked Tony Lake afterward if he had known this was going on. He was evasive. It was maybe the only time I failed to get a straight answer from Tony. I don't know if he was also taken by surprise. It was only the willingness to move from neutrality to using force to stop aggression that made it possible to implement Vance-Owen, Dayton, or any other peace plan.

Washington finally came to a willingness to seriously get behind a peace plan in the spring and early summer of 1994. We agreed then with the West Europeans, the EU, that we would join them in endorsing a plan, including a map, if they would agree that anyone who did not accept the plan within a certain period of time would

⁵⁸ Secretary-General of NATO, [“Press Statement by the Secretary-General,”](#) August 2, 1993.

⁵⁹ [“Decisions taken at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Permanent Session,”](#) February 9, 1994. [“Summary of Conclusions of Principals Committee Meeting on Bosnia,”](#) US National Security Council, February 18, 1994.

face serious NATO airstrikes.⁶⁰ After that, there was a period of pin prick air strikes until things finally became so bad that Washington said it would act alone if necessary. It was the enforcement that mattered, not the Vance-Owen map or the Dayton map or any other map.

TOM BLANTON: Peter, you had just arrived in Croatia in June 1993, and inherited a Safe Area or two?

PETER GALBRAITH: I'm struck by the disconnect between the incoherent policy in Washington and things actually going on the ground, even though they were well reported at the time. First a word about the Vance-Owen peace plan. If you look at it, you will see a lot of blue.

Far from being a peace plan, that map accelerated the conflict between Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats as the Bosnian Croats tried to seize the territory offered them by the map.⁶¹ By the summer of 1993, there was little the Clinton administration could do to follow through on the president's campaign pledges to help the Bosnian government. This was because of the war between the Muslims and the Croats. If you look at the map, you see Croatia to the west of Bosnia and Serbia to the east. There was no access to the Bosnian government areas as long as the Muslim-Croat war was going on.

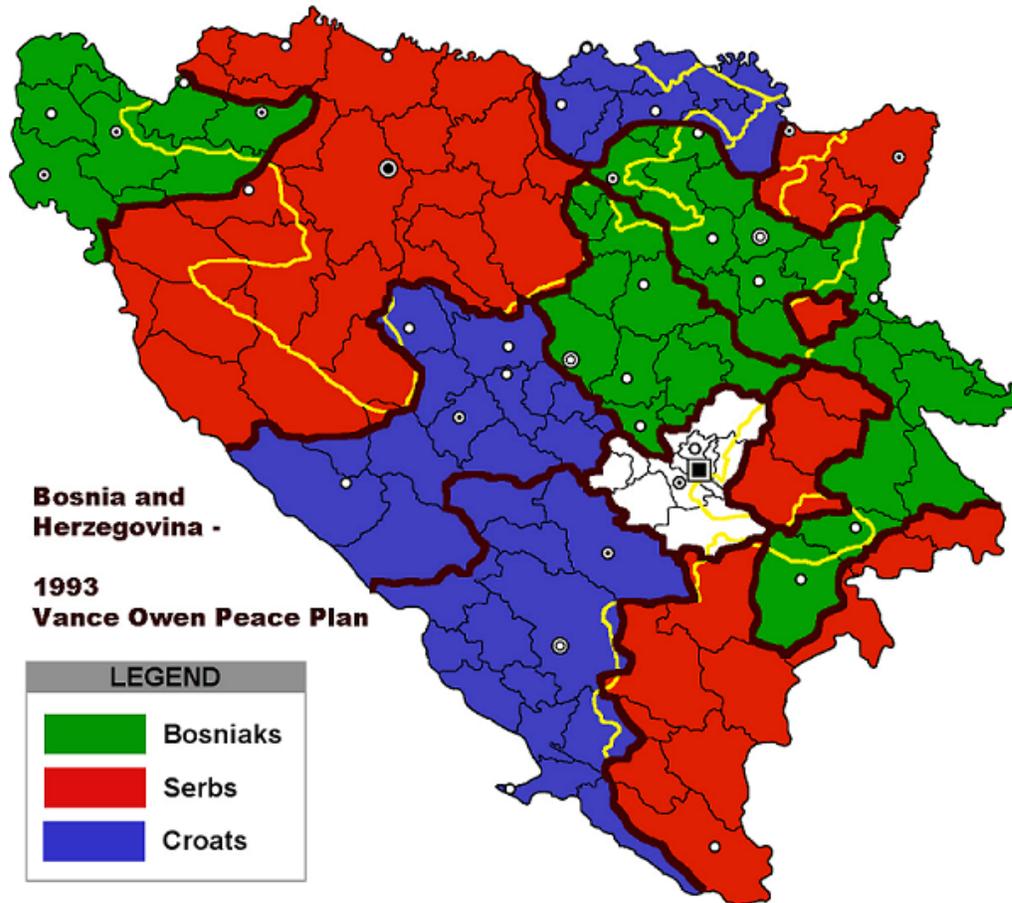
Without much policy guidance from Washington, the US embassy in Zagreb in the summer of 1993 began pressuring the Croatian government to end the atrocities the Bosnian Croats were committing in Bosnia.⁶² Through Foreign Minister Mate Granic and Defense Minister Gojko Susak, I got embassy officers into the heliport near Mostar where thousands of Bosnians were being held in appalling conditions. In July, I had a very contentious meeting with Mate Boban in which I

⁶⁰ In July 1994, a Contact Group made up of the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and Germany proposed a map with a 51/49 per cent territorial compromise between the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Bosnian Serbs. The basic principles of the Contact Group proposal were accepted at Dayton. For U.S. strategy during this period, see Lake to Clinton, "[Bosnia – Next Steps](#)," The White House, July 19, 1994.

⁶¹ Fighting flared between Bosnian Croats and Muslims after the Croatian Defense Council gave the Bosnian army a deadline of April 15, 1993 to withdraw from areas designated as Croat-dominated cantons under the Vance-Owen Peace Plan.

⁶² "[Decisions of Principals Committee Meeting on Bosnia](#)," May 17, 1993.

pressed him to release the detainees. By the end of the summer, we secured the release of about 5,000 Bosniak prisoners. We got access to the heliport in spite of the opposition of the US ambassador to Bosnia [Victor Jackovich] who was based in Vienna. But that's another story.



Proposed Vance-Owen peace plan, 1993

TOM BLANTON: So there were divisions even within the State Department and even between US ambassadors?

PETER GALBRAITH: Even within the bureaus. I used to refer to the European Bureau under Steve Oxman as the “Home Alone” Bureau.⁶³

JENONNE WALKER: Don't get into it.

PETER GALBRAITH: Why not? It's twenty-two years later.

Anyhow, in the fall of 1993 we began to put pressure on Tudjman, Šušak and Granić to change the [Bosnian Croat] leadership. They got rid of Bosnian Croat leader Mate Boban by the end of the year. That set the stage for the alliance between the Muslims and Croats that was expressed in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina [established by the Washington Agreement of March 1994].⁶⁴ This was a different construct from Vance-Owen. It did not offer all this territory to the Bosnian Croats and was a signal that the US strongly discouraged Tudjman from doing what he wanted to do, which was to grab a good part of Bosnia. That alliance then set the stage for us to tell the Croatians that we were going to look the other way as arms went through Croatia to Bosnia. We did not need to do the lift part [of life and strike] because arms deliveries were taking place. This changed the military balance. Before he died, Izetbegović told me that my message to Tudjman that the US did not object to arms transiting Croatia for Bosnia was the single most important thing that the United States did for Bosnia. This is a different perspective on how this evolved than the New York, and perhaps the NSC, perspective.

ZLATKO LAGUMDŽIJA: Several speakers mentioned the Vance-Owen plan. Just to remind you about the meeting between Izetbegović and Vice President Gore on March 26, 1993 [the day after Izetbegović signed the Vance-Owen plan.]⁶⁵ US

⁶³ Stephen A. Oxman was Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs between April 1993 and August 1994 when he was succeeded by Richard Holbrooke. A *Washington Post* article on May 21, 1996 by John Pomfret and David Ottaway (“U.S. Envoy’s Balkan Role Criticized on Capitol Hill”) noted friction between Galbraith and other US envoys in the region.

⁶⁴ The Washington agreement reduced the amount of Bosnian territory controlled by Bosnian Croats from around 20 per cent to 10 per cent, more in line with pre-war ethnic divisions.

⁶⁵ Fuerth to Lake, “[Meeting between Vice President Gore and President Alija Izetbegović of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#),” Office of the Vice President, April 14, 1993. Gore received Izetbegović in Washington the day after Izetbegović signed the Vance-Owen peace plan at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

officials told Izetbegović that the US would [consider lifting the arms embargo](#) if Serbs refused to sign. We held a parliament session in the besieged city of Sarajevo at which the majority adopted the Vance-Owen plan after it was signed in Athens [on May 3, 1993] by Izetbegović and Karadžić. We accepted that plan. It was a very tough decision. This was one of those decisions when the president is asking you,



what is more important, the people or the country.

The Bosnian Serbs rejected the Vance-Owen plan on May 6 [at a meeting of the Republika Srpska assembly in Pale]. The Vance-Owen plan was not a dream scenario, but when you compare the Vance-Owen map with the Dayton map

[below], it is Disneyland. There is no Republika Srpska, there are no ethnically defined territories.

In the Vance-Owen map [see page 1-44 of transcript] there is a yellow line representing the Dayton peace agreement boundary between Republika Srpska and the Federation. Had the Vance-Owen plan been adopted, not only would the war have been stopped, but we would be a more functioning country than we are today. We accepted the plan because we were told that the international community was fully behind it. If Karadžić accepted it, we would proceed with peace implementation. If we accepted and the Serbs refused, the arms embargo would be lifted. That was a clear understanding. What happened was: we accepted, Karadžić refused, and the arms embargo remained. The Bosnian Serbs were afraid of the arms embargo being lifted, but they knew that this was a false threat by the international community. My point is that what happened in July 1995 was the consequence of the international community not carrying through on its threats and commitments.

TOM BLANTON: Can I ask John Shattuck to speak to a point that Jenonne was making about the Joint Action Program and Secretary Christopher. What was Secretary Christopher thinking, if this occurs really outside of a process that the NSC and others knew, and maybe Lake knew, but what happened? What was that dynamic like inside the Clinton administration?

JOHN SHATTUCK: Secretary Christopher went on a tour of European capitals in May 1993.⁶⁶ The expectation was that he would arrive with some new policies and there would be an opportunity for discussion. In fact, it was a sort of "listening tour." Not only was there no dialogue but there was really not much speech. This reflected the complete disarray inside the US Government with respect to formulating a policy implementing Clinton's campaign promises.

My job [as Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights] was to gather human rights information. We were constantly sidetracked. We would be brought in

⁶⁶ See Elaine Sciolino, "[Christopher Fails to Win Consensus](#)," New York Times, May 7, 1993.

from time to time, and then pushed back when it was felt that what my bureau was spotlighting was not going to be helpful to the political negotiations. I remember going with Peter Galbraith and Madeleine Albright to [Vukovar in January 1994](#) to a mass grave site [believed to contain the bodies of some 200 Croat patients who had disappeared from Vukovar hospital on November 20, 1991.] Our visit was seen as too high profile for Washington so I was then basically put under wraps and not allowed to travel back to Bosnia until July 1995 [following the Srebrenica massacre]. I give this as an example of the high degree of both confusion and hesitancy on the part of the United States to do the kind of spotlighting that needed to be done in order to change the policy.

JENONNE WALKER: I was on the “lift and strike” sales trip, during the first week of May 1993. Warren Christopher had supported that policy within the administration as opposed to “strike only.” I think he really believed in it. His presentation might have convinced a judge but there was no political “umph” to it at all. In capital after capital, looking at his briefing book and never making eye contact with anyone, he would go through all the other options we had considered and explain why we had rejected them. Finally, when everyone was sound asleep or daydreaming, he would get to “lift and strike” and explain why that was the least bad of the available options. I don't understand whether he changed his mind. When we got off the airplane in London, our first stop, on Sunday, May 2, we were greeted with a huge headline in the Sunday Times saying, "Britain will veto US plan to arm Bosnian Muslims," before the conversations had even begun.⁶⁷ That didn't help the atmosphere. It was a disaster of American diplomacy. We never actually dropped the policy but we didn't do anything to push it after that. It was part of our gradual, much too slow, movement to being willing to take more serious action.

We were keenly aware that our allies were on the ground taking risks that we were not sharing. If we really stood up to Serbian aggression, their peacekeepers, the "peace observers" or "violence observers," would be put in

⁶⁷ See James Adams & Andrew Grice, [“Britain will veto US plan to arm Bosnian Muslims,”](#) Sunday Times (UK), May 2, 1993.

serious danger that we were not prepared to share. We were very deferential to their views for a long time. We thought in August 1993 that we had an agreement on a serious NATO air threat. That fell apart with the dual key arrangement. The first test was in Sarajevo after the marketplace bombing in February 1994 which showed that the credible threat of force would make a difference. By the spring, or early summer of 1994, we were willing to endorse a peace plan in return for Europeans' commitment to serious air strikes. I remember Tony Lake's working hard to get a consensus among Clinton's top advisers. He kept saying to me, "Just trust me, I'll get us there." Meanwhile, lots of people were dying. Lake finally got Clinton's agreement to a plan before surfacing it to other members of the Principals Committee.

TOM BLANTON: Let's go back to UNSC Resolution 836 of June 4, 1993.⁶⁸ Joris Voorhoeve, among others, compared 836 favorably with 819. The documents, however, record severe criticism from the Secretariat and a huge gap between the tough language of the resolution and what was happening on the ground. There is a wonderful exchange between the Secretariat working paper of May 28 and a David Hannay cable back to London the following day that illustrates this difference of opinion.⁶⁹ Hannay complains about "the scandalously slanted Secretariat paper" that was "almost certainly the work of Tharoor." David, you seem to be concerned that the working paper is advocating a heavy option requiring at least 15,000 more troops while you are arguing for a "light" option.⁷⁰ Will you explain this debate for us?

⁶⁸ UNSC, "[Resolution 836 \(1993\)](#)," S/RES/836, June 4, 1993.

⁶⁹ Annan to Stoltenberg, "[Safe areas](#)," UN DPKO, MSC-870, May 28, 1993. Hannay to FCO, "[My Telno 1881: Bosnia: Safe Areas Resolution](#)," UK Mission to the UN, Telno 1911, May 29, 1993.

⁷⁰ The [May 28 Working Paper](#) covered the proposed safe areas of Sarajevo, Bihac, Tuzla, Goražde, Srebrenica, and Žepa. The Secretariat initially believed that 15,000 extra troops would be needed to deter possible aggression against the safe areas, but later increased its estimate to "32,000 additional ground troops." [See UN Srebrenica report, [paragraph 94](#)]. A June 14 report by the UN Secretary General [S/25939] quoted General Wahlgren as saying that he would need [34,000 additional troops](#), in addition to the 24,000 already in theater, in order "to obtain deterrence through strength." Wahlgren stated, however, that it would be possible to "start implementing" UNSC Resolution 836 with a "[light option](#)" of around 7,600 more troops, relying primarily "on the threat of air action" to deter attacks on the safe areas. [See also: UN Srebrenica report, [paragraph 96](#)]. The 7,600 extra troops were authorized by UNSC

DAVID HANNAY: By May 1993, I and other members of the Security Council (principally France, the Russian Federation, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, i.e. a significant portion), were operating on the basis of the Joint Action Program. Personally, I thought the Joint Action Program was an appalling idea, but you are paid to carry out the instructions of your government. The governments had signed up to the Joint Action Program. The Joint Action Program said [\[in Paragraph 4\]](#) that “we will work to secure early adoption of the new United Nations Security Council Resolution now under discussion.”⁷¹ The reason why we reacted very negatively to the Secretariat paper was because it was quite clearly designed to frustrate that. I think history will be quite kind to the United Nations Secretariat when they said, “It's not going to work.” But that is not where we were then, and that was why we could not accept the working paper.

On the difference between the light and the heavy options. To be honest, the heavy option was a joke. The heavy option was what we call in the jargon: “Give me half a million men and I will march to Moscow.” Absolutely, half a million men, march to Moscow. That's probably not a very good idea, but OK. The [light option](#) was a realistically feasible one.⁷² It was conceivable that we could get 7,600 more troops. It was conceivable that they could protect the Safe Areas for a period of time. That is why we favored that option, along with all the other signatories of the Joint Action Program.

TOM BLANTON: Shashi?

SHASHI THAROOR: This all happened in “a hundred hurries,” which was all too often the case at this time. The Security Council asked for a paper. I think David, in all fairness, was playing a very complicated game. On the one hand, he had to ward off demands from Diego and the non-aligned, who were calling for much more

resolution 844 of June 18, 1993, but it took more than a year to deploy them to Bosnia. [\[S/1994/1389\]](#). Fewer than 3,000 had arrived in theatre by January 1994. [\[A/48/847\]](#).

⁷¹ Permanent Representatives of France, Spain, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, [“Joint action programme,”](#) S/25829, May 24, 1993.

⁷² Boutros-Ghali, [“Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 836 \(1993\),”](#) S/25939, June 14, 1993.

explicitly pro-Bosniak action. On the other hand, there was background pressure from the Americans to preserve an appearance of action while maintaining the viability of UNPROFOR. The British and French, meanwhile, were far too deeply committed on the ground to suddenly change the entire strategy on a dime. We in the Secretariat had the impossible task of being asked to produce a paper at less than twenty-four hours' notice. I think we went on until 4 a.m. putting this blessed thing together. As is probably apparent from the quality of the writing, it was a product of many hands and many heads. I certainly bear responsibility for it as the leader of the team. As I unkindly pointed out to David when he got angry with me, the military input actually came from a British officer, Major Adrian Foster, who had been detailed to me from the British Army. The poor fellow got pulled out [of the UN Secretariat] for his contribution to this paper.⁷³

It is true that 34,000 was an [unrealistic figure](#). We had no expectation of ever getting those numbers. The reason why we gave those numbers, which came from serious military planners, was to let the Security Council know that this was the kind of number they needed to be talking about that if they wanted to have Safe Areas that were defensible. If not, they ought to alter their mandate accordingly. That was the purpose of providing them the heavy option. We in DPKO came under very heavy pressure, right from Boutros' office, to also provide a light option. We had no intention of coming up with a light option on our own. It was done because of political pressure from key governments who learned early on that this was going to be a very heavy thing, perhaps from their own people on our team.

I had two people who were full time UN officials on my team. Everybody else was seconded from governments: the military people, the police, and the whole lot. Again, this is normal. I always used to joke to the US Mission that I had more people following my work than I had to do it. That was chronically the case. They certainly had their own sources of information. While we were still putting together this blessed thing in twenty-four hours, word came that we had to produce a "light

⁷³ In an August 15, 2015 email communication to the organizers, retired General Adrian Foster disputed Tharoor's recollection of events. He said he "completed" a full tour in New York and denied being "pulled out" by London.

option.” So we came up very reluctantly with a light option. As you can see from the May 28 cable, I could only [send the paper to General Wahlgren](#) in the field after we had submitted it to the Council.⁷⁴ We had no time. There was simply no question of being able to consult. So we sent it off and indeed it got a very frosty reception. David shouted at me a few times. If looks could kill, I would not be here today. At the end of it, the Council was determined to go ahead with a resolution.

In addition to the working paper, we also sent a cable to Wahlgren on June 2, asking for his comments.⁷⁵ At this point, some of the key questions have already come up very clearly. David talked about what he was paid to do. We in the Secretariat were paid to uphold our mandates and principles, one of which is outlined in paragraph 3, "...a Safe Area cannot be 'safe' if one party within it remains armed and able to attack those outside it. There should therefore be an obligation for the BH Army also to treat the Safe Areas as safe, that is, to desist from any hostile activity therein, even though the Council resolution does not require it to disarm or withdraw."⁷⁶ This was an impossible contradiction to square since the non-aligned wanted us to take the side of the Bosniaks. The British and the French did not because their own troops were on the ground. They wanted to give the appearance of responding to all the moral outrage on television and coming out of Washington.

We had to concoct an operational mandate that made sense out of all this and worked on the ground, which was impossible. I go on in the next paragraph to talk about the question of Serb cooperation with these arrangements. The French had told us, I'm quoting here, "...France (on behalf of the sponsors) has stated, in informal consultations of the Security Council, that the draft resolution assumes the consent and co-operation of the parties but that non-cooperation would involve consequences under chapter VII."⁷⁷ The assumption here is that the Serbs agree to be bombed by NATO if the Bosniaks shoot and they shoot back. I mean, come on. Obviously this has certain implications for the mission. I put the onus on the

⁷⁴ Annan to Stoltenberg, "[Safe areas](#)," UN DPKO, MSC-870, May 28, 1993.

⁷⁵ Annan to Stoltenberg/Wahlgren, "Security Council Deliberations on "safe areas," [MSC-896](#), June 2, 1993.

⁷⁶ See [paragraph 3](#), MSC-896, op. cit.

⁷⁷ See [paragraph 4](#), MSC-896, op.cit.

Generals by saying the report called for in [paragraph twelve](#) [of UNSC resolution 836] would have to come very largely from UNPROFOR.⁷⁸ We were not going to sit and do a repetition of the working paper exercise, having been burned by it. We said, “You chaps [UNPROFOR commanders] tell us how you want to operationalize this.” It was not just passing the buck, it was being realistic. They were the ones who would have to implement it on the ground. Let them come up with the operational concept. They weren't happy, as you can see from subsequent context. There is another cable on June 3 [Z-703], where we spell out certain specific challenges.⁷⁹ Then the resolution is adopted. So the mandate was becoming more and more operationally impossible to define.

By the way, Jenonne, the American pressure on air strikes was not helpful. Professor Eliot Cohen came up with a [wonderful line](#) about air power being an “unusually seductive form of military strength” in Washington. He wrote that air power, “like modern courtship...appears to offer gratification without commitment.”⁸⁰ That is precisely what the Americans seemed to be wanting to do. They were going to be flying from a great height, drop bombs, and fly away, while the rest of us would wake up on the ground the next morning and live with the consequences. This was the fundamental dilemma that both the troop contributors and the Secretariat were grappling with.

HASAN MURATOVIĆ: In my view, UNSC Resolution 836 was a good resolution. It provided the grounds for calling in air strikes, and for NATO to act. It was up to the decision-makers later to decide whether they wanted to strike or not, to prevent attacks and disaster. There is nothing in the resolution that says, “Don't act in this case, or that case.”

MICHAEL DOBBS: We do not have General Wahlgren with us as he is no longer alive, but we do have his June 3 cable reacting to what was happening in New York. He

⁷⁸ UNSC, “[Resolution 836 \(1993\)](#),” S/RES/836, June 4, 1993, [paragraph 12](#).

⁷⁹ Wahlgren to Annan, “[Security Council Deliberations on 'Safe Area'](#),” UNPF-HQ, Z-703, June 3, 1993.

⁸⁰ See Eliot A. Cohen, “[The Mystique of U.S. Air Power](#),” *Foreign Policy*, January/February 1994, argues that US military strategists in the Balkans drew the wrong conclusions from the January 1991 bombing of Iraq at the start of the Persian Gulf War.

states very clearly his opposition to air strikes. In [paragraph five](#), he states "We have indicated in our correspondence over the months that air strikes would simply bring UNPROFOR and UNHCR operations to an end." In [paragraph eight](#), he goes on: "In conclusion, I doubt if the current Troop Contributing Nations would agree to leave their contingents in UNPROFOR under the proposed mandate. One simply cannot make peace and war at the same time."⁸¹ In Wahlgren's absence, perhaps Rupert Smith could give us his take on Wahlgren's critique and the extent to which he and others shared it. Rupert, you were coordinating UK policy at the Ministry of Defense as the Assistant Chief of Defense Operations at the time?

RUPERT SMITH: I was at the Ministry of Defense, but I had no sense of coordinating anything. It was a very confused period for all the reasons that have been explained. I don't remember this document. I would like to make a point about the force numbers being quoted, which goes back to the relationship between military advice and military action and political direction. I remember those numbers being bandied about. Major Foster was certainly communicating back to London, asking questions about what we thought and what was possible. The question we kept asking was: are we to defend this territory as a piece of ground? Or are we to defeat and destroy those attacking this territory? It completely alters the method and the numbers involved.

We eventually were told by the other side of Whitehall [reference to the Foreign Office]: you are defending territory. The moment you say that these blobs on the map are to be defended, you get these high numbers. You have to put men on the ground, feed them, and so on. There was no desire to consider the idea of destroying or defeating the attacker. You are not to be offensive at all. That, I think, reflects the general atmosphere of the UN force as a whole. I was not part of that, but I think I could easily have written something like Wahlgren's memo if I was sitting in his chair at that time.

TOM BLANTON: David Harland.

⁸¹ Wahlgren to Annan, "[Security Council Deliberations on 'Safe Area'](#)," UNPF-HQ, Z-703, June 3, 1993.

DAVID HARLAND: My comment is a very ancient one from an hour ago. On evacuation versus ethnic cleansing, I think this goes to the heart of how the war was fought. I put this question to President Izetbegović when I was writing the UN Srebrenica report. I said that the Serbs had accused him of blocking evacuations with UN assistance from Srebrenica and in Sarajevo and waging war by using civilians as shields. He told me, "We have a choice, sometimes, between a territory and the people. Of course, both are important, but we will not allow the Bosniak people to be put into ghettos." In other words, the policy was: human shields. The policy was to physically block people from trying to escape embattled areas and therefore make it harder for the enemy to attack without inflicting civilian casualties.



David Harland, center, next to Muhamed Durakovic and Larry Hollingworth

[Turns to the debate about UNSC 836]. Those of us who were on the receiving end of all this guidance, including the guidance from UNPROFOR Headquarters, felt a deep frustration. I was in Pale every day with the Bosnian leadership and was often at Sarajevo airport with Hasan Muratović. As Hasan says, the Serbs were very, very responsive to the perceived level of threat coming from

NATO, and later from the Rapid Reaction Force. Whenever it seemed to them that the mandate was not clear enough to allow any serious threat to be used against them, they would probe further. It is true that there were political compromises involved [in drafting UN resolutions] and it was ugly and muddled and morally wrong and absent in strategy. Nevertheless, as Hasan said, those of us on the receiving end felt there was plenty of language, particularly in Resolution 836, that would have allowed for the application of force. It was frustrating after these debates took place [in New York] to receive guidance saying you should do even less than the resolution says.

ZLATKO LAGUMDŽIJA: You mentioned Wahlgren's cable of June 3, 1993, in which he says "One simply cannot make peace and war at the same time."⁸² End of cable. I think this goes to the core of the misunderstanding [over the nature of peacekeeping]. In October 1991, President Izetbegović made a very famous public statement saying, "Sleep peacefully, there is no need to fear, because it takes two to tango."⁸³ Actually, for war, you need one. When you have two, there is no war. Someone decides to go to war if he feels he is in a stronger position. That is when you have a war. At the same time, you cannot make peace, especially under Chapter VII of the UN Charter without being ready to go to war. Otherwise you end up sending a lot of religious leaders over there. This is the fundamental misunderstanding between us.

JORIS VOORHOEVE: Security Council Resolution 836 is an example of clarity. It's very good. It says that Member States may take "all necessary measures, through the use of air power" to "support UNPROFOR in the performance of its mandate."⁸⁴ The problem is not the light or heavy option, but the fact that this resolution was not used. There was an enormous gap between the language of the resolution and the actual application up until August 1995. After the fall of Srebrenica, this resolution

⁸² Wahlgren to Annan, "[Security Council Deliberations on 'Safe Area'](#)," UNPF-HQ, Z-703, June 3, 1993.

⁸³ See Steven Burg & Paul Shoup, *Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention: Crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1990-93*, page 78.

⁸⁴ UNSC, "[Resolution 836 \(1993\)](#)," S/RES/836, June 4, 1993.

became the legal basis for the use of air power and deterrence. What is often forgotten in the discussion in the United Nations and the member states, because of the confusion we talked about, is the tremendous importance of deterrence. You tell a warring party, "If you do this, there will be very serious consequences. We have escalation dominance and you cannot challenge us." There was no escalation dominance in 1993 for the reasons that Jenonne Walker and John Shattuck explained. There was confusion in Washington about what to do in this terrible situation.

After the fall of Srebrenica, everything became clear. Air power was used in a very adequate fashion. I would like to draw attention to this because the use of deterrence was discredited after the end of the Cold War. It was seen as something related to nuclear weapons, but it is an age old principle of using military power. You show beforehand that if the opposite side goes too far, there will be very serious consequences. The Serbs understood this message. This was the message that was delivered at the [London Conference](#) on July 21, 1995.⁸⁵ I wish, of course, that this change of course had taken place several weeks earlier, in which case it would have saved the lives of 8,000 people in Srebrenica.

JOHN SHATTUCK: Apart from the organizers and David Hannay, I am the only person around the table who attended the Rwanda conference a year ago.⁸⁶ In both Bosnia and Rwanda, you have a very complex set of messages, which essentially serve as green lights to aggressors. Events in Rwanda were shaped in part by [decisions taken in Somalia](#), as a result of the Blackhawk Down incident [October 3-4, 1993] when 18 US Rangers lost their lives.⁸⁷ The decision to withdraw the whole US force in Somalia [in March 1994] served, in some respects, as a green light for what

⁸⁵ See John Darnton, "[Accord in London](#)," New York Times, July 22, 1995. The London conference of 16 countries involved in the Bosnia war, including the United States, Britain, and France, threatened the Bosnian Serbs with the use of "substantial and decisive air power" in the event of an attack on the Goražde and other safe areas. NATO began large-scale bombing of Bosnian Serb targets on August 30, two days after the shelling of the Markale market place in Sarajevo, killing 37 people.

⁸⁶ "[International Decision-Making in the Age of Genocide: Rwanda 1990-1994](#)," Rapporteur's Report, April 6, 2015.

⁸⁷ Colin Keating to Wellington, "[Security Council: Rwanda](#)," New Zealand Mission to the UN, C04408/NYK, May 3, 1994.

happened later in Rwanda. There were many elements to the Rwandan genocide, but underneath it all it was the danger that the international community was essentially sending a green light to the aggressors. I think we see a similar dynamic in Bosnia with respect to these events in 1993 and 1994.

By the way, all these events are taking place in the same time frame. The Rwanda genocide began in April 1994 (following the assassination of Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6). We are in this same post-Cold War framework. Deterrence is no longer on the table and negotiation and discussion appear to be the more appropriate tools for dealing with these cases of small fire aggression occurring in places where the world is falling apart after the end of the Cold War. It is not until later that we adopt the concept of diplomacy backed by force. The recognition that a credible threat of force, or sometimes the actual use of force, is necessary to achieve diplomatic objectives underpins the whole Dayton process. During this 1993-1994 period, I do not think the threat of force was credible. General Smith has made that point very eloquently, but I wanted to add the comparative element. We are dealing with a larger geopolitical framework characterized by failed states, mass atrocities, and even genocide.

The only way to engage on these issues is to put a spotlight on them by gathering the evidence that is needed for people to understand what is going on. I thought it was a big mistake for the US to sidetrack its human rights reporting prior to the horrific events of July 1995. Our embassies, particularly the embassy in Croatia, certainly kept the spotlight on [human rights violations], but with all due respect it was not sufficient. US policymaking was not underpinned by the daily reporting of what was actually happening on the ground that would have been needed to mobilize public opinion around the concept of diplomacy backed by force.

DIEGO ARRIA: UNSC Resolution 836 was one of the most debated. It was very controversial. As the representative of Venezuela, [I abstained](#) together [with](#)

[Pakistan](#).⁸⁸ The non-aligned group had been the more enthusiastic supporters of the Safe Area concept, but this resolution did not respond at all to the needs of the situation. I believed that we would have achieved more by arming the Bosnians than by expecting the United Nations to do something for the Bosnians. I read today President Clinton's conversation with French President Chirac [on July 13, 1995, after Srebrenica fell] in which he harshly criticizes the Bosnians for [leaving Srebrenica without "putting up a fight."](#)⁸⁹ At the same time, he says we cannot arm the Bosnians. This explains why we were against the resolution. I remember I had the British ambassador and the French ambassador in Venezuela pressing my Foreign Minister to ask me to change my vote. I did not pick up the phone. When it came to the vote on 836, I abstained.

Had the Secretariat Working paper been adopted, we probably would not have had the outcome we did in Srebrenica.⁹⁰ That paper was exactly what we wanted. I remember entering the Security Council reading the paper and saying, "My god, finally we have something of some substance and importance." Then, all of a sudden, it disappeared. I think that David Hannay or Jean-Bernard Mérimée must have called Boutros-Ghali and got him to withdraw the document, because it suddenly vanished from the table. I had also personally written to Madam Ogata, asking her to outline the requirements of a real Safe Area. She produced a document along the same lines as the Secretariat. Unfortunately this course of action was not adopted, which is why we abstained on the resolution.

ANDRÉ ERDÖS: When a Council resolution is passed under Chapter VII, with wording like "take all necessary measures," that was the equivalent of the nuclear option. It gives a green light to strong, concrete enforcement measures. We do not

⁸⁸ UNGA, ["The fall of Srebrenica,"](#) A/54/549, November 15, 1999. UNSC resolution 836 was adopted on June 4, 1993, by 13 votes to none, with abstentions from Pakistan and Venezuela. Arria explained his abstention by pointing to a lack of "necessary means and resources" for implementing the resolution and lack of clarity about the use of force. He said that until these questions were satisfactorily answered "the safe areas would not be safe at all."

⁸⁹ Anthony Gardner & Alexander Vershbow, ["Telcon with French President Jacques Chirac,"](#) The White House, July 13, 1995.

⁹⁰ Annan to Stoltenberg, ["Safe areas,"](#) UN DPKO, MSC-870, May 28, 1993.

always have this language in Council resolutions. The fact that we did not follow up on this language undermined the image of the United Nations.

I was representing a non-permanent member country. We were not even a non-aligned country. We had just experienced a transition towards democracy, and were knocking on the doors of the European Union and NATO. We were looking at these guys as our friends and future allies. We were in a very difficult situation because we were the only country on the Council [in 1993] that really understood Yugoslavia. Look at the map and you will see how far Hungary is from Bosnia. We were very close to the Austrian position, who were also on the Council in 1992, as part of the western group. Other Council members referred us as “the Hapsburgs.” It was very funny. We could have imagined the emperor Franz Josef saying, “My sons, this is wonderful, but why do you need two ambassadors? “

I was frustrated by the lack of knowledge about Yugoslavia, not so much on the part of Venezuela, Cape Verde or Morocco, but on the part of the permanent members. One of the permanent representatives told me in a private conversation that Bosnia was a “Titoist invention.” Another, rather dramatic example: In 2000, Newsweek magazine published a chronology of important 20th century events. The entry for 1914 was as follows: “Yugoslav archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo.” We were the only country on the Council—I say this in all modesty—who knew what Bosnia was, geographically and historically.⁹¹

When the Austro-Hungarian monarchy occupied and later annexed Bosnia, it was part of the monarchy. There were three governor generals in Bosnia, two of whom were Hungarians. When I went to Srebrenica in April 1993 [as part of the Arria delegation], there was an immediate reaction from the refugees when I said I was from Hungary. They knew what Hungary was. For me, it was a gift of life that

⁹¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina became a Protectorate of Austria-Hungary at the Congress of Berlin in July 1878 following the Russo-Turkish war. It had previously been under Ottoman rule for more than 300 years, since 1463, and remained technically under the administration of the Sultan. Austria-Hungary annexed the territory outright in 1908, enraging pan-Slavic nationalists. After Austria-Hungary’s defeat in World War I, Bosnia joined the South Slav Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which was later named Yugoslavia. After the victory of Marshal Tito’s Communist Partisans in World War II, Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of six republics of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

we happened to be on the Security Council when we had this number one issue of Yugoslavia around our necks.

The whole issue of forcible population transfers, and the establishment of ethnically pure homogeneous countries, is a lethal one for central and Eastern Europe even today, despite the fact that two decades have passed since these events. It is a poisonous Pandora's box. We were following what was happening and were afraid of the implications, which went way beyond the unfortunate country of Bosnia to the entire area from the Baltics to the Mediterranean. We committed a grave error in not taking the appropriate preventive measures, with the necessary mandates and financial resources.

At the same time, we were not a big player. We were not a permanent member of the Security Council, and had no blue helmets on the ground, unlike the British, the French, and others. We didn't want to go into a neighboring country. This did not prevent us from expressing our criticisms out loud as to the mismanagement of the conflict. We were not always privy to the behind the door consultations.



Obrad Kestic, right, with David Rohde

OBRAD KESIC: Somebody mentioned the effectiveness of the threat of air strikes on the Serb leadership in Pale. As with every issue that we are discussing, this is very complex. It played out in different ways with the political leadership and the military leadership. The political leadership was convinced that the war would end through negotiations. They thought that any [foreign] intervention would upset what they saw as progress towards a settlement to the conflict. A settlement of course in line with what they were trying to achieve.

The military leadership, on the other hand, saw possible air strikes as a threat to their ability to conduct the war successfully. They would tell the political leadership, "Your indecisiveness is threatening our troops and our ability to hold this territory. We need to take action." This culminates when the military, and Ratko Mladić, ask for a declaration of war. They tried to do that several times. The political leadership always turned them down.

We speculate about the Bosnian army successfully launching military operations [as a consequence of a "lift and strike" policy], but that is not necessarily the case. There is a disconnect between a decision to arm one of the parties and their ability to use the weapons. First of all, you would have upset humanitarian operations: you would not be feeding people. Second, the other side is not going to passively sit and watch their enemies being armed. Such a step would have forced the Republika Srpska leadership to take decisive military action. It would have also put pressure on Serbia to take action as well. "Lift and strike" was a little bit of a red herring. In the end the only decisive change to the military balance of power was direct intervention by NATO on the side of the Bosnians. Nothing short of that would have changed the military balance. It could actually have led to something totally different than people here are assuming.

CARL BILDIT: I was Prime Minister of Sweden in 1993. Sweden was not heavily involved in the politics of the war in Yugoslavia, but we were deeply affected. We took roughly 3,000 refugees a week at the height of the war, roughly the period that

we are speaking about at the moment.⁹² We had a deep interest in saving people down there because we knew that we would have to help them elsewhere. It was us and the Austrians and the Swiss, and to some extent the Germans, that bore the brunt of the refugee influx. That was one of the reasons why we decided to [commit a mechanized battalion](#).⁹³

We had a tradition of UN peacekeeping, but we had not been in such a complicated situation since the Congo. We sent in a mechanized battalion together with the Danes and Norwegians, including Leopard tanks, which was very controversial at the time. We ended up in the middle of the Croat-Muslim fight [in central Bosnia] the autumn of 1993. We were appalled by the absence of any political strategy, but we felt a humanitarian imperative driven to a certain extent by pressure home to do whatever we could about the refugee situation.

There has subsequently been a discussion in Sweden: did we do any good? I think we did an awful amount of good in the sense that we saved "x" number of people. Whether we contributed to a political solution is debatable because that was well above us. We lost lives down there and saved quite a lot of people. We helped to stabilize Tuzla region for the duration of the war.

PETER GALBRAITH: What Obrad described is more or less my understanding of what actually happened. By the summer of 1995, the balance of power was shifting. Allowing arms to get to Bosnia via Croatia was a better option than having the US unilaterally lift the embargo. If the US had itself lifted the embargo UNPROFOR would have withdrawn. Instead of American arms, the Bosnians got Russian weapons, which were weapons they already knew how to use. While the Russian government opposed lifting the arms embargo, the free market system made Russian weapons readily available to Bosnians. However, Bosnian Serbs saw the US Congress moving toward lifting the arms embargo. It was at that point that they decided they needed clean up their internal lines, eliminate the enclaves, Srebrenica,

⁹² See ["Generosity of 'Big Hearted' Danes is Tested by Influx of Refugees,"](#) Christian Science Monitor, May 18, 1993.

⁹³ Boutros-Ghali, ["Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Resolution 871 \(1993\),"](#) S/1994/300, March 16, 1994, [page 21](#).

Žepa, Gorazde and Bihać. Obrad is right that the way war ended was through direct military intervention, but it was intervention by Croatia, not by NATO.

DAVID HANNAY: Before we end the discussion of UNSC 836, I wanted to echo Minister Muratović in saying that it was very comprehensive. It provided the legal basis for Boutros-Ghali to ask NATO to issue a successful ultimatum over Sarajevo in February 1994. It was also the basis for the military action against the Bosnian Serbs in August and September 1995 after Srebrenica fell. There was never a new mandate. There never needed to be a new mandate. The 836 mandate covered both those military options. The real question is not what was wrong with the 836 mandate but why the mandate was not applied more forcefully and effectively. There was nothing wrong with the mandate.

[End of Session 1]