

# “A PROBLEM FROM HELL”

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America and the Age of Genocide

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*For Mum and Eddie*

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## Chapter 9

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# Bosnia: “No More than Witnesses at a Funeral”

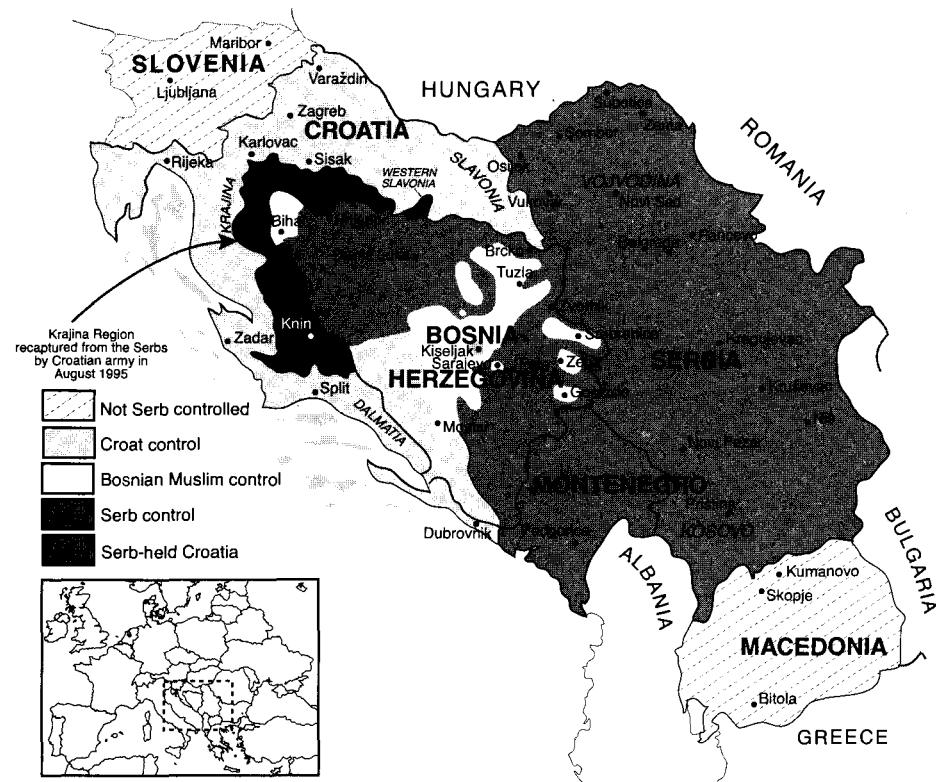
### “Ethnic Cleansing”

If the Gulf War posed the first test for U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War world, the wars in the Balkans offered a second. Before 1991 Yugoslavia was composed of six republics. But in June of that year, when Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic began to stoke nationalist flames and increase Serb dominance, the republic of Slovenia seceded, sparking a relatively painless ten-day war. Croatia, which declared independence at the same time, faced a tougher exit. Because Croatia had a sizable Serb minority and a picturesque and lucrative coastline, the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) refused to let it go. A seven-month war left some 10,000 dead and 700,000 displaced from their homes. It also introduced the world to images of Serb artillery pounding civilians in towns like Dubrovnik and Vukovar. By late 1991 it was clear that Bosnia (43 percent Muslim, 35 percent Orthodox Serb, and 18 percent Roman Catholic Croat), the most ethnically heterogeneous of Yugoslavia's republics, was in a bind. If Bosnia remained a republic within rump Yugoslavia, its Serbs would receive the plum jobs and educational opportunities, whereas Muslims and Croats would be marginalized and likely physically abused under Milosevic's



Ron Haviv-VII

Muslim and Croat prisoners in the Serb concentration camp of Trnopolje.



Map of Yugoslavia, depicting Serb gains, 1991–1995.

oppressive rule. But if it broke away, its Muslim citizens would be especially vulnerable because they did not have a parent protector in the neighborhood: Serbs and Croats in Bosnia counted on Serbia and Croatia for armed succor, but the country's Muslims could rely only upon the international community.

The seven members of the Bosnian presidency (two Muslims, two Serbs, two Croats, and one Yugoslav) turned to Europe and the United States for guidance on how to avoid bloodshed. Western diplomats instructed Bosnia's leadership to offer human rights protections to minorities and to stage a "free and fair" independence referendum. The Bosnians by and large did as they were told. In March 1992 they held a referendum on independence in which 99.4 percent of voters chose to secede from Yugoslavia. But two Serb members of the presidency, who were hardliners, had convinced most of Bosnia's Serbs to boycott the vote.<sup>1</sup> Backed by Milosevic in Belgrade, both Serb nationalists in the presidency resigned and declared their own separate Bosnian Serb state within the borders of

the old Bosnia. The Serb-dominated Yugoslav National Army teamed up with local Bosnian Serb forces, contributing an estimated 80,000 uniformed, armed Serb troops and handing almost all of their Bosnia-based arsenal to the newly created Bosnian Serb Army. Although the troops changed their badges, the army vehicles that remained behind still bore the traces of the letters "JNA." Compounding matters for the Muslims and for those Serbs and Croats who remained loyal to the idea of a multiethnic Bosnia, the United Nations had imposed an arms embargo in 1991 banning arms deliveries to the region. This froze in place a gross imbalance in Muslim and Serb military capacity. When the Serbs began a vicious offensive aimed at creating an ethnically homogenous state, the Muslims were largely defenseless.

In 1991 Germany had been the country to press for recognizing Croatia's independence. But in April 1992 the EC and the United States took the lead in granting diplomatic recognition to the newly independent state of Bosnia. U.S. policymakers hoped that the mere act of legitimating Bosnia would help stabilize it. This diplomatic act would "show" President Milosevic that the world stood behind Bosnian independence. But Milosevic was better briefed. He knew that the international commitment to Bosnia's statehood was more rhetorical than real.

Bosnian Serb soldiers and militiamen had compiled lists of leading Muslim and Croat intellectuals, musicians, and professionals. And within days of Bosnia's secession from Yugoslavia, they began rounding up non-Serbs, savagely beating them, and often executing them. Bosnian Serb units destroyed most cultural and religious sites in order to erase any memory of a Muslim or Croat presence in what they would call "Republika Srpska."<sup>2</sup> In the hills around the former Olympic city of Sarajevo, Serb forces positioned heavy anti-aircraft guns, rocket launchers, and tanks and began pummeling the city below with artillery and mortar fire.

The Serbs' practice of targeting civilians and ridding their territory of non-Serbs was euphemistically dubbed *etničko čišćenje*, or "ethnic cleansing," a phrase reminiscent of the Nazis' *Säuberung*, or "cleansing," of Jews. Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg said of the Nazi euphemism: "The key to the entire operation from the psychological standpoint was never to utter the words that would be appropriate to the action. Say nothing; do these things; do not describe them."<sup>3</sup> The Khmer Rouge and Iraqi Northern Bureau chief al-Majid had followed a similar rule of thumb, and Serb nationalists did the same.

As the war in Bosnia progressed, outsiders and insiders relied on the phrase "ethnic cleansing" to describe the means and ends employed by Serb and later other nationalistic forces in Bosnia. It was defined as the elimination of an ethnic group from territory controlled by another ethnic group. Although the phrase initially chilled those who heard it, it quickly became numbing shorthand for deeds that were far more evocative when described in detail.

The phrase "ethnic cleansing" meant different things on different days in different places. Sometimes a Serb radio broadcast would inform the citizenry that a local factory had introduced a quota to limit the number of Muslim or Croat employees to 1 percent of the overall workforce. Elsewhere edicts would begin appearing pasted around town, as they had in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. These decrees informed non-Serb inhabitants of the new rules. In the town of Celinac, near the northern Bosnia town of Banja Luka, for instance, the Serb "war presidency" issued a directive giving all non-Serbs "special status." Because of "military actions," a curfew was imposed from 4 p.m. to 6 a.m. Non-Serbs were forbidden to:

- meet in cafes, restaurants, or other public places
- bathe or swim in the Vrbaniya or Josavka Rivers
- hunt or fish
- move to another town without authorization
- carry a weapon
- drive or travel by car
- gather in groups of more than three men
- contact relatives from outside Celinac (all household visits must be reported)
- use means of communication other than the post office phone
- wear uniforms: military, police, or forest guard
- sell real estate or exchange homes without approval.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes Muslims and Croats were told they had forty-eight hours to pack their bags. But usually they were given no warning at all. Machine-gun fire or the smell of hastily sprayed kerosene were the first hints of an imminent change of domicile. In virtually no case where departure took place was the exit voluntary. As refugees poured into neighboring states, it was tempting to see them as the byproducts of war, but the purging of

non-Serbs was not only an explicit war aim of Serb nationalists; it was their primary aim.

Serb gunmen knew that their violent deportation and killing campaign would not be enough to ensure the lasting achievement of ethnic purity. The armed marauders sought to sever permanently the bond between citizens and land. Thus, they forced fathers to castrate their sons or molest their daughters; they humiliated and raped (often impregnating) young women. Theirs was a deliberate policy of destruction and degradation: destruction so this avowed enemy race would have no homes to which to return; degradation so the former inhabitants would not stand tall—and thus would not dare again stand—in Serb-held territory.

Senior officials within the Bush and later the Clinton administrations understood the dire human consequences of Serb aggression. This was Europe and not a crisis that could be shoved on to the desks of midlevel officials. More than ever before, Lemkinian voices for action were heard within the State Department, on Capitol Hill, and on America's editorial pages. A swarm of Western journalists in Bosnia supplied regular, graphic coverage. Yet despite unprecedented public outcry about foreign brutality, for the next three and a half years the United States, Europe, and the United Nations stood by while some 200,000 Bosnians were killed, more than 2 million were displaced, and the territory of a multiethnic European republic was sliced into three ethnically pure statelets.

The international community did not do nothing during the vicious war. With the Cold War behind it, the United Nations became the forum for much collective activity. The UN Security Council pointed fingers at the main aggressors, imposed economic sanctions, deployed peacekeepers, and helped deliver humanitarian aid. Eventually it even set up a war crimes tribunal to punish the plotters and perpetrators of mass murder. What the United States and its allies did not do until it was too late, however, was intervene with armed force to stop genocide. So although the European location of the crime scene generated widespread press coverage, a far more vocal elite lobby for intervention, and the most bitter cleft within the U.S. government since the Vietnam War, these factors did not combine to make either President Bush or President Clinton intervene in time to save the country of Bosnia or its citizens from destruction.

# Warning

## "Bloody as Hell"

Serb brutality in Bosnia came with plenty of warning. Intelligence officials are severely scolded and embarrassed if they fail to anticipate a crisis, but they face less opprobrium if they offer a "false positive" by predicting a crisis that does not unfold. The intelligence community is thus more prone to raise too many flags than too few. U.S. intelligence had already failed to forecast Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union. When it came to the Balkan wars, U.S. analysts were therefore especially careful to position themselves well out in front of the carnage. The brief war in Slovenia and the longer and more bloody one in Croatia in 1991 led officials in the U.S. government to predict that Bosnia's ethnic diversity and the Muslim plurality's defenselessness would make the next war the deadliest of all. Although reporters spoke later of the Bosnian conflict's "erupting," it would be more apt to say the Bosnian conflict arrived. Indeed, many felt it was a war that arrived virtually on schedule. The war's viciousness had been forecast so regularly and so vividly as to desensitize U.S. officials. By the time the bloodshed began, U.S. officials were almost *too* prepared: They had been reading warning cables for so long that nothing could surprise them.

Jim Hooper, a fastidious U.S. foreign service veteran, worked as the deputy director of the Office of East Europe and Yugoslav Affairs in the State Department's European Bureau from 1989 to 1991. He had joined the U.S. government in 1971 and spent the late 1980s consumed with the right kind of turbulence and upheaval—the historic roundtable negotiations that helped bring about the end of communism in Poland, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the velvet passage to democracy in Czechoslovakia. But ever since he read an article in the *Economist* in early 1989 that predicted the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, Hooper had been worried. In 1991, with Balkan leaders sounding ever more belligerent and nationalist militias sprouting, Hooper urged Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger to travel to the region. Eagleburger had served as U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1977 to 1981 and consulted on business there throughout the 1980s in partnership with Henry Kissinger. He spoke Serbo-Croatian and was enamored of the verdant landscape. In February 1991 Eagleburger

paid a trip to the region and warned Milosevic against violence. When he returned, he said to Hooper, "I thought you were exaggerating, that you were giving me the usual bureaucratic hype. But now that I've been there, I think you were much too optimistic. It is going to be bloody as hell." Eagleburger thought there was nothing the United States could do, that it was Europe's problem, and that any attempt to get involved would fail *and* harm the United States in the process.

Some of the loudest early-warning sirens and moral sermons came from Capitol Hill. Some, like Republican senator Bob Dole, brought a prior interest in the region. During World War II, the young Kansan had led an attack on a German machine-gun nest in Po Valley, Italy. When Dole saw his radioman go down, he crawled out of his foxhole to retrieve him. As he did, a shell exploded nearby, shattering his shoulder and his vertebrae. Shipped from Italy to Russell, Kansas, in a full-body cast, the young war hero earned press coverage that caught the eye of Dr. Hampar Kelikian, a Chicago reconstructive surgeon. Kelikian wrote to Dole and told him that if the young veteran could find the train fare, he would perform the necessary surgery at no cost. Dole's neighbors chipped in, filling an empty cigar box propped up in the window of the local drug store where Dole had served as a soda jerk. Kelikian not only operated on Dole in Chicago but also kept him company in the long recovery period by regaling him with stories about the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians. Kelikian had escaped to America as a boy after three of his sisters were massacred in the genocide.<sup>5</sup> Dole, who had never before heard of these crimes, was shocked. When he joined the Senate, he kept an eye trained on the Balkans.

Dole began denouncing Yugoslavia's human rights record in 1986. He introduced Senate resolutions expressing special concern about the state's systematic persecution of Albanians, who made up 90 percent of the population in Kosovo, Serbia. Each year Serb forces stepped up their violence against the Albanians, and Dole in turn amplified his denunciations. By 1990, with the rest of Eastern Europe liberalizing, Dole was describing the Yugoslav government as a "symbol of tyranny and repression" that was "murdering, maiming and imprisoning" its citizens.<sup>6</sup>

But none of the Kansas senator's rhetorical litanies had prepared him for the official visit he paid to Kosovo in August 1990. At first the Serb authorities tried to keep Dole and six Senate colleagues from entering Serbia's southern province, prompting Dole to storm out of a Belgrade meeting. They next tried to supply the group with a Serbian watchdog who would

prevent them from speaking freely to Albanians. In the end the Belgrade regime supplied a Serb driver who roared into Kosovo's capital at break-neck speed in order to block the American lawmakers from viewing the grim police state. As the bus entered Pristina, thousands of ethnic Albanians lined the streets and began chanting, "USA, USA." Dole later recalled "appalling and unforgettable" scenes of hundreds of people running across the fields to wave to the speeding bus, while police with guns and clubs mauled them.<sup>7</sup> After returning, Dole told the *Washington Post* of "tanks and troops everywhere, hundreds of demonstrators fleeing in all directions, trying to avoid the club-wielding security forces, and tear gas rising over the confusion and carnage." Scores were injured and hundreds arrested.<sup>8</sup> On the Senate floor Dole declared, "The United States cannot sit this out on the sidelines, we have a moral obligation to take a strong stand in defense of the individual rights of Albanians and all of the people of Yugoslavia."<sup>9</sup> Dole's act of "witnessing" conditioned his response to future reports of atrocity. As his chief foreign policy adviser, Mira Baratta, notes, "It is one thing to have a natural inclination to care about human rights, but it is another thing entirely when you see people who only want to wave at Americans getting pummeled before your own eyes. Once you have seen that, you just can't look away."

Congressman Frank McCloskey, a Democrat from Indiana, also dates his awakening to a weeklong trip he took to the Balkans during the war in Croatia in December 1991. The congressman had four experiences on the trip that, in hindsight, ably illustrate the nature of the entire Yugoslav mess and prepared him for Milosevic's double-dealings in Bosnia. They also altered the course of his political career and life. First, he was shelled by Serb forces while visiting the Croatian city of Osijek, a university town that reminded him of his own Bloomington. Second, he came upon the remains of a massacre that had been committed around the Croatian town of Vocin, some seventy miles southeast of the capital of Zagreb. Forty Croatian victims, most over the age of sixty, had been dismembered with chain saws, and McCloskey, who was one of the first to arrive on the scene, was revolted by the piles of mutilated body parts. Third, when he personally traveled to Belgrade to confront the Serbian authorities, President Milosevic told McCloskey solemnly that no matter what he had seen or thought he had seen, Osijek had not been shelled and no massacre had been committed in Vocin. "He was very smooth and polished, and described himself as a peace-loving man," McCloskey remembers. Milosevic told him that the corpses

were "part of a show" put on by the Croatian government. And fourth, a U.S. embassy official in Belgrade had warned him that although the ongoing war in Croatia was bad, the conflict in Bosnia would produce a "real slaughter." The war would rarely deviate from this text: shelling, massacre, straight-faced lies, and plenty of early warning of worse to come.

## Wishful Thinking

American policymakers have often fallen prey to wishful thinking in the face of what they later recognized to be genocide. But history has shown that this phenomenon is more human than American. Before the war began in Bosnia, many of its citizens, too, dismissed omnipresent omens. They were convinced that bloodshed could not happen there, that it could not happen then, or that it could not happen to them. In order to maintain this faith amid mounting evidence of horror, Bosnians found ways to link the widespread tales of terror to circumstances that did not apply to them. When Serb forces began targeting Croatian civilians in 1991, many Muslims in Bosnia told themselves that it was Croatian president Franjo Tudjman who was the nationalist and the obstructionist making it impossible to resolve the conflict peacefully. *Bosnia's* leaders would be more sensible and moderate. Besides, even if the Serb response to Croatia's declaration of independence was unduly violent, their beloved Yugoslavia would never turn on Bosnia, an ethnically jumbled microcosm of Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito's larger dream. Even once it was clear that war was consuming Bosnia and the radio brimmed with gruesome reports of summary executions and rapes, Muslims continued to console themselves that the war could never infect their neighborhoods. "That's a long way off," they would say. "We have been living together for years."

In retrospect, when Serb radio began broadcasting reports that Bosnian towns had been attacked by "Muslim extremists," non-Serbs might have checked their history books. The extremists tended to be those who made such announcements, justifying preemptive assaults. But Bosnians were not prepared for either the crackle of evening gunfire or the suddenly stern, familiar radio voice telling them, "Citizens are requested to remain in their homes and apartments for the sake of their own security."

Most Bosnians did as they were told. Under Tito's forty-five-year Communist rule, they had grown accustomed to listening to strongmen. In

many the muscle that twitches in defiance, or at least in apprehension, of state authority had atrophied for lack of use. Some might have questioned the source, but few dared to challenge it. The instructions made sense: danger outside; safety inside. Unfortunately, they made sense to those who issued them as well. Because the Muslims stayed indoors, they could be found playing cards, folding linen, or simply sleeping when the Serb police or militia arrived.

Bosnians were not especially naive or gullible. They erected what Primo Levi likened to a cordon sanitaire to shield them from murderous events they felt powerless to stop or avoid. They were confronted with a choice that for most was too awful to contemplate: fight or flight. Bosnia's Muslims were militarily unprepared to make war, but, like the Kurds who remained in Saddam Hussein's prohibited zones, they stared out at the fields they had tilled or the hills they had roamed for generations and could not bring themselves to take leave. In the primarily rural country, many clung to the cold walls that they or their ancestors had assembled brick by brick. They claimed even the patch of sky overhead. Every Bosnian seemed to have a river of his or her own—the Sava, the Una, the Sana, the Miljacka, the Drina—in which they had bathed as children, by which they had nestled romantically for the first time as teenagers. There was, they said, "a special bond between heart and grass."

Because the national story in Tito's era was one of "brotherhood and unity" in which ethnic identity was discounted and even disparaged, and because the communities had lived intermingled or in neighboring villages for so many years, many found it even harder to take seriously the threat from their neighbors. They maintained a faith in the power of familiarity, charm, and reason. They believed that individual destiny and personality would count for something.

As remarkable as the existence of this faith is its durability. In Cambodia even those subjected daily to the rigors and horrors of Khmer Rouge rule persisted in hoping that those who were hauled away were only being reeducated. In Bosnia, even two years into the war, when more than 100,000 of their neighbors had been killed and the bloodiest of displacements had taken place, thousands of Muslims and Croats stubbornly refused to leave Serb-held territory. Some had no money, and by then the Serbs had begun charging an "exit tax" of nearly \$1,000. But most who remained found the fear of death preferable to the reality of abandoning their homes. Foreign visitors would plead with them, remind them of the

lunacy (patently obvious to our transient, cosmopolitan eyes) of their perseverance. Those who tested the neighborhood thugs inevitably lost their homes and many, eventually, their lives. One month foreign visitors would meet an elderly family that would dip into its emergency stock of bread, cheese, and Turkish coffee and produce photos of missing family members. Several months later the visitors could return to find the quaint cul-de-sac reduced to blackened rubble. Or they might discover the Muslims' bungalow intact but occupied by Serbs who hung a Serb flag from the window, as protective lamb's blood had once been splashed above doorways. The Muslim occupants had vanished.

Human rights groups were quicker than they had ever been to document atrocities. Helsinki Watch, the European arm of what would become known as Human Rights Watch, had begun dispatching field missions to the Balkans in 1991. When the war in Bosnia broke out in 1992, the organization was thus able to call quickly on a team of experienced lawyers. In the early months of the war, Helsinki Watch sent two teams to the Balkans, the first from March 19 to April 28, 1992, the second from May 29 to June 19. Investigators interviewed refugees, government officials, combatants, Western diplomats, relief officials, and journalists. Aryeh Neier, executive director of Helsinki Watch, edited the impressive 359-page report, which contained gruesome details of a systematic slaughter. Neier found himself presiding over an organization-wide debate over whether the Serb atrocities amounted to genocide.

Neier had moved to the United States from Germany at age eleven as a refugee after World War II. As president of the history club at Stuyvesant High School in New York City, he had heard about the exploits of a fellow refugee, Raphael Lemkin, who had coined a new word. In 1952, forty years before the Bosnian war, Neier, a presumptuous sixteen-year-old, rode the subway to the new UN headquarters and tracked down Lemkin in one of its unused offices. Neier asked the crusader if he would come to speak to the Stuyvesant history club some afternoon. Never one to turn down a speaking engagement, Lemkin agreed, giving the future founder of Helsinki Watch his first introduction to the concept of genocide.

In the Helsinki Watch report, published just four months into the war in August 1992, the organization found that the systematic executions, expulsions, and indiscriminate shelling attacks at the very least offered "*prima facie* evidence that genocide is taking place." Neier had learned Lemkin's lessons well. The report said: "Genocide is the most unspeakable crime in the lexi-



con. . . . The authorization that the Convention provides to the United Nations to prevent and suppress this crime carries with it an obligation to act. The only guidance the Convention provides as to the manner of action is that it should be 'appropriate.' We interpret this as meaning it should be effective."<sup>10</sup>

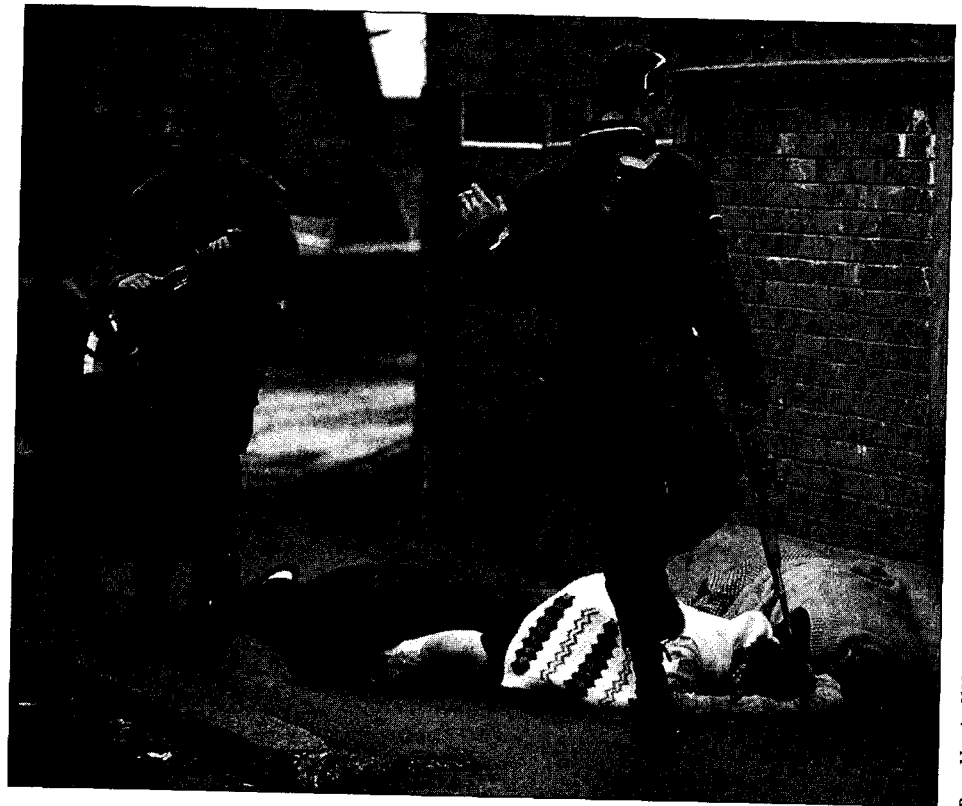
Helsinki Watch had a mandate different from that of Amnesty International. It criticized both the perpetrator state *and* the Western powers that were doing so little to curb the killing. But for all of their outrage, many individuals within the organization were uncomfortable appealing to the United States to use armed force. "We were in a real bind," Neier remembers. "The organization had never called for military intervention, and we couldn't bring ourselves to do so. Yet we could also see that the atrocities would not be stopped by any other means. What we ended up with was a kind of tortured compromise." In the report Helsinki Watch described U.S. policy as "inert, inconsistent and misguided."<sup>11</sup> It became the first organization to call upon the United Nations to set up an international war crimes tribunal to prosecute those responsible for these crimes. But when it came to the question of military intervention, it punted:

It is beyond the competence of Helsinki Watch to determine all the steps that may be required to prevent and suppress the crime of genocide. It may be necessary for the United Nations to employ military force to that end. It is not the province of Helsinki Watch to determine whether such force is required. Helsinki Watch believes that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to address this question.<sup>12</sup>

The Security Council was made up of countries, including the United States, steadfastly opposed to using armed force.

## A U.S. Policy of Disapproval

When Yugoslavia had disintegrated in June 1991, European leaders claimed they had the authority, the strength, and the will to manage the country's collapse. Europeans had high hopes for the era of the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of a borderless continent that might eventually challenge U.S. economic and diplomatic supremacy. Jacques Poos, Luxembourg's foreign minister, proclaimed "If anyone can do anything here, it is the EC. It is not



Serb Paramilitaries in Bijeljina, Bosnia, Spring 1992.

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the U.S. or the USSR or anyone else."<sup>13</sup> The United States happily stepped aside. "It was time to make the Europeans step up to the plate and show that they could act as a unified power," Secretary of State James Baker wrote later. "Yugoslavia was as good a first test as any."<sup>14</sup> Whatever the long-term promise of the European Union (EU), it was not long into the Balkan wars before European weaknesses were exposed. By the time of the Bosnian conflict in April 1992, most American decisionmakers had come to recognize that there was no "European" diplomacy to speak of. They were left asking, as Henry Kissinger had done, "What's Europe's phone number?" Yet anxious to avoid involvement themselves, they persisted in deferring to European leadership that was nonexistent.

U.S. and European officials adopted a diplomatic approach that yielded few dividends. Cyrus Vance, secretary of state under President Carter, and David Owen, a former British Labour Party leader, were appointed chairmen of a UN-EU negotiation process aimed at convincing the "warring

parties" to settle their differences. But nationalist Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia were intent on resolving difference by eliminating it. The "peace process" became a handy stalling device. Condemnations were issued. U.S. diplomats warned Milosevic that the United States regarded his military support for rebel Bosnian Serbs with the "utmost gravity." But because warnings were not backed by meaningful threats, Milosevic either ignored them or dissembled. "For Milosevic the truth has a relative and instrumental rather than absolute value," the U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann, observed. "If it serves his objectives, it is put to use; if not, it can be discarded."<sup>15</sup> Although Milosevic struck some as a habitual liar, most U.S. and European diplomats continued to meet his undiplomatic behavior with diplomatic house calls. Milosevic did not close off the diplomatic option as the Khmer Rouge had done. Instead, he shrewdly maintained contact with Western foreign servants, cultivating the impression from the very start of the conflict that peace was "right around the corner."

Most diplomats brought a gentlemen's bias to their diplomacy, trusting Milosevic's assurances. This was not new. Most notorious, Adolf Hitler persuaded Neville Chamberlain that he would not go to war if Britain and France would allow Germany to absorb the Sudetenland. Just after the September 1938 meeting, where the infamous Munich agreement was signed, Chamberlain wrote to his sister: "In spite of the hardness and ruthlessness, I thought I saw in his face, I got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he gave his word."<sup>16</sup> When it came to Milosevic, Ambassador Zimmerman noted, "Many is the U.S. senator or congressman who has reeled out of his office exclaiming, 'Why, he is not nearly as bad as I expected!'"<sup>17</sup> Milosevic usually met U.S. protests with incredulous queries as to why the behavior of Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia had anything to do with the president of Serbia, a neighboring state. He saw that the Bush administration was prepared to isolate the Serbs and brand them pariahs but not intervene militarily. This the Serbian leader deemed an acceptable risk.

Washington's foreign policy specialists were divided about the U.S. role in the post-Cold War world. One camp believed in the idealistic promise of a new era. They felt that the Gulf War eventually fought against Saddam Hussein in 1991 and the subsequent creation of the safe haven for the Kurds of northern Iraq signaled a U.S. commitment to combating aggression. Where vital American interests or cherished values were imperiled and

where the risks were reasonable, the United States should act. They were heartened by Bush's claim that the Gulf War had "buried once and for all" America's Vietnam syndrome. The United States had a new credibility. "Because of what's happened," President Bush had said soon after the U.S. triumph, "I think when we say something that is objectively correct—like 'don't take over a neighbor or you're going to bear some responsibility'—people are going to listen."<sup>18</sup> Still, for all the talk of a "new world order," Bush was in fact ambivalent. To be sure, the United States had made war against Iraq, a state that "took over a neighbor." But the United States had always frowned upon and occasionally even reversed aggression that affected U.S. strategic interests. Although Serbia's aggression against the internationally recognized state of Bosnia clearly made the Bosnian war an international conflict, top U.S. officials viewed it as a civil war. And it was still not clear whether the rights of individuals *within* states would have any higher claim to U.S. protection or promotion than they had for much of the century.

The other camp vying to place its stamp on the new world order was firm in the belief that abuses committed inside a country were not America's business. Most of the senior officials in the Bush administration, including Secretary of State Baker, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, were traditional foreign policy "realists." The United States did not have the most powerful military in the history of the world in order to undertake squishy, humanitarian "social work." Rather, the foreign policy team should focus on promoting a narrowly defined set of U.S. economic and security interests, expanding American markets, curbing nuclear proliferation, and maintaining military readiness. Although these were the same men who had waged the Gulf War, that war was fought in order to check Hussein's regional dominance and to maintain U.S. access to cheap oil. Similarly, when they established the safe haven for Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, the Bush administration had been providing comfort to Turkey, a vital U.S. ally anxious to get rid of Iraqi Kurdish refugees.

With ethnic and civil conflict erupting left and right and sovereignty no longer the bar on U.S. intervention it had been in Morgenthau's day, Bush's foreign policy team saw that the United States would need to develop its own criteria for the use of military force. In 1984 President Reagan's defense secretary, Caspar Weinberger, had demanded that armed interven-

tion (1) be used only to protect the vital interests of the United States or its allies; (2) be carried out wholeheartedly, with the clear intention of winning; (3) be in pursuit of clearly defined political and military objectives; (4) be accompanied by widespread public and congressional support; and (5) be waged only as a last resort.<sup>19</sup> Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, now resurrected this cautious military doctrine and amended it to require a "decisive" force and a clear "exit strategy."<sup>20</sup> Iraq had eventually threatened U.S. oil supplies, whereas Yugoslavia's turmoil threatened no obvious U.S. national interests. The war was "tragic," but the stakes seemed wholly humanitarian. It met very few of the administration's criteria for intervention.

Several senior U.S. officials may have also been influenced by personal idiosyncrasies in their handling of the Bosnian war. Secretary Baker relied heavily on his deputy, Eagleburger, whose diagnosis may have stemmed, in the words of Zimmerman, from "understanding too much." Knowing that Croatian president Tudjman was a fanatical nationalist and frustrated that the lovely Yugoslavia was being torn apart, Eagleburger seemed to adopt a kind of "pox on all their houses" attitude, which, according to several of his State Department colleagues, he fed Baker. This was not uncommon. Journalists and diplomats who had served time in Belgrade tended to bring a Yugo-nostalgia for "brotherhood and unity" to their analysis, which made them more sympathetic to the alleged effort of Yugoslav forces to preserve the federation than toward the nationalistic, breakaway republics that seemed uncompromising. They were right that the leaders of Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia were inflexible, and Tudjman was in fact a fanatic. But however blighted, the leaders of the secessionist states clued into Milosevic's ruthlessness faster than anyone in the West. The repressive policies of the Serbian president left no place in Yugoslavia for non-Serbs.

An "action memorandum" sent to Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger two weeks into the Bosnian war in April 1992 proposed a variety of detailed economic and diplomatic measures designed to isolate the Belgrade regime. Eagleburger's signature appears at the bottom of the document—beside the word "disapprove."<sup>21</sup> Critics of the Bush administration's response branded it a "policy of appeasement," but it might better be dubbed a "policy of disapproval," a phrase that testifies more accurately to the abundance of "soft" and "hard" intervention proposals that were raised and rejected.

U.S. policymakers had a number of options. Most made their way onto the editorial pages of the nation's major dailies. The United States might have demanded that the arms embargo be lifted against the Bosnian Muslims, making a persuasive case at the UN Security Council. "I completely agree with Mr. Bush's statement that American boys should not die for Bosnia," Bosnia's Muslim president Alija Izetbegovic said in early August 1992. "We have hundreds and thousands of able and willing men ready to fight, but unfortunately they have the disadvantage of being unarmed. We need weapons." The United States might have helped arm and train the Muslims, using its leverage to try to ensure the arms were used in conventional conflict and not against Serb or, later, Croat civilians. But President Bush was opposed to lifting the UN embargo. "There are enough arms there already," he said. "We've got to stop the killing some way, and I don't think it's enhanced by more and more [weapons]."<sup>22</sup>

If the Bush administration had been serious about stopping the killing of unarmed Bosnians, U.S. troops alone or in coalition (à la the Gulf War or Operation Provide Comfort) might have seized Sarajevo and enough surrounding territory to protect the airport against artillery attack. They might have fanned out from the capital to create a ground corridor to the port city of Split, Croatia, where aid could be delivered. U.S. fighter planes acting alone or with their NATO allies could have bombed the hills around Sarajevo to stop Serb mortar and artillery fire on the capital or to protect humanitarian relief flights. They might have bombed Serb military and industrial targets in Bosnian Serb territory or even in Serbia proper with the aim of deterring Serb aggression. Or most radical, they might have waged all-out war, reversing Serb land gains and allowing Bosnia's 2 million displaced persons to return home.

Instead, the Bush administration took a number of tamer steps aimed mainly at signaling its displeasure. In addition to withdrawing Ambassador Zimmerman from Belgrade, the United States closed its two consulates in Serbia, expelled the Yugoslav ambassador from the United States, and moved military forces to the Adriatic to begin enforcing the arms embargo and UN economic sanctions. But the Bush White House did nothing that caused the Serbs to flinch. Diplomatic and economic jabs were worth enduring if the reward for that endurance was an independent, ethnically pure Serb "statelet" in Bosnia.

# Recognition

## What Did the United States Know?

No other atrocity campaign in the twentieth century was better monitored and understood by the U.S. government. U.S. analysts fed their higher-ups detailed and devastating reports on Serbian war aims and tactics. One classified April 14 information memorandum, for instance, described the Serbs'

clear pattern of use of force, intimidation, and provocation to violence aimed at forcibly partitioning [Bosnia] and effecting large forced transfers of population. . . . The clear intent of Serbian use of force is to displace non-Serbs from mixed areas (including areas where Serbs are a minority) to consolidate Bosnian Serb claims to some 60% of Bosnian territory . . . in a manner which would create a "Serbian Bosnia."<sup>23</sup>

Balkan watchers also knew Milosevic well enough to alert their superiors to his favorite stalling tactics. In the same memo the analyst wrote, "Belgrade practiced the strategy of the hyena in Croatia, curbing its most aggressive actions during peak moments of international scrutiny and condemnation but resuming them as soon as possible."<sup>24</sup> This was written just a week into the war.

Jon Western, an analyst in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, was one of many U.S. officials charged with processing Serb brutality on a daily basis. Western was on the fast track in the department. Fair-haired, blue-eyed, and nothing if not earnest, Western had joined the government in 1988. His first day's journal entry from INR, dated July 15, 1990, read: "This is the job I've always dreamed of." Western had grown up in North Dakota and never in his life seen a dead body. Yet suddenly in 1992 he found himself confronted by reports and photos that depicted human beings who "looked like they had been through meat grinders." From the beginning of the war, he was tasked with sifting through some 1,000 documents on Bosnia a day—open source reports from foreign and American journalists and international human rights groups, local press translations, classified cables from the field, satellite intelligence, refugee tes-

timony, and telephone and radio intercepts. He used the data to prepare Secretary of State Baker's morning intelligence summary.

In his training for the post of intelligence analyst, Western had been taught to greet reports with skepticism. And the stories emerging from Bosnia certainly seemed to warrant disbelief. One cable described a nine-year-old Muslim girl who had been raped by Serb militiamen and left lying in a pool of blood for two days while her parents watched, from behind a fence, as she died. He did not believe it. "You're taught to be objective," he remembered. "You're trained not to believe everything you hear."<sup>25</sup> Following in the footsteps of Morgenthau in Constantinople and Twining on the Cambodia–Thai border, Western confronted images he could not process. But the refugees kept talking, making themselves heard. The very same report about the Muslim girl crossed his desk a second time when a separate group of witnesses confirmed it independently to U.S. investigators.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the images were superficially mild. For instance, Western saw satellite photos that looked like they depicted the night sky—hundreds of luminous little stars dotted a black canvas. But the young analyst knew that the stars were not stars at all but the glowing embers of small fires that proud Europeans expelled from their homes built in their makeshift encampments in the woods. In June 1992 he found himself assigned to conduct a frame-by-frame analysis of television footage of the Sarajevo "breadline massacre," in which a Serb shell blew twenty-two shoppers apart. His was a taxing visual odyssey. Marshall Harris, Western's colleague in the State Department, remembers, "Jon had it the worst. He had to read everything that came in, no matter how horrific. The rest of us got a summarized version of the brutality, but he had to process every minute detail."

However gruesome his tasks, Western had a job to do. Beginning in late May, he set out to see if there might be a pattern in the refugee accounts and in the Serb military advance. He was leery of leaping to conclusions because the Bosnian Muslims had already gained a reputation for manipulating international sympathy. Western demanded corroboration. Could the refugees provide more descriptive detail about the weather on a particular day? Did they recall the color of the buildings in the so-called concentration camps? Could they describe the clothes of their supposed assailants?

Over the July 4 weekend in 1992, Western and a CIA colleague worked around the clock for three days, poring over mounds of classified and

unclassified material. Gathering military intelligence and refugee reports from all across Bosnia, they acquired the most clear-cut evidence yet of a vast network of concentration camps. The Serb tactics in Brcko in northern Bosnia resembled those in Zvornik in eastern Bosnia and Prijedor in western Bosnia. This suggested that the ethnic cleansing and the military attacks had been planned and coordinated. Bosnian Serb artillery would begin by unleashing a barrage on a given village; Serb paramilitaries would launch infantry assaults, killing armed men, rounding up unarmed men, and sending trembling women and children into flight. When most Serb forces moved to the next village, a cadre of paramilitaries and regulars stayed behind to "mop up." Within hours, they had looted valuables, shot livestock, and blown roofs off houses. Non-Serb life in Serb territory was banned. Some 10,000 Bosnians were fleeing their homes each day.<sup>27</sup>

The Serbs' next moves were spookily easy to predict. As Western remembers:

We could see the attacks coming by watching our computer terminal screens, by scanning the satellite imagery, or often just by watching television. We knew exactly what the Bosnian Serbs were going to do next, and there was nothing we could do. Imagine you could say, "In two days this village is going to die," and there was nothing you could do about it. You just sat there, waited for it to happen and dutifully reported it up the chain.

But the chain was missing some links. The question about what could be done, which was burning inside junior and midlevel officials, had already been answered by senior officials within the administration. Powell, Baker, Scowcroft, Cheney, Eagleburger, and Bush had decided the United States would not intervene militarily. That case was closed. John Fox of the State Department's Policy Planning Office recalls a climate that eschewed mention of the possibility of U.S. intervention. "For most of 1992, we couldn't send memos that called for the use of American force," Fox remembers. "The best we could do was to write arresting things that led inexorably to the conclusion that force would have to be used."

An ever-expanding posse of like-minded State Department officials piped cable upon cable up the State Department food chain in the hopes that one senior official would bite. There were no takers. The young hawks recognized that they had several forces working against them. First, their

higher-ups had narrowly circumscribed what everybody within the building understood to be "possible." There would be no U.S. military intervention in Bosnia. This was a fact, not a forecast. This shaped the thinking of those who sat before their computers or bumped into one another in the department's drab cafeteria and decided whether and how to appeal. Second, they were dealing with bureaucrats like themselves who were protective of turf and career and not at all in the habit of rocking the boat. Third, they knew that their strongest argument for intervention was a moral argument, which was *necessarily* suspect in a department steeped in the realist tradition. Fox remembers diversifying his written appeals, offering "something for everyone":

I used history, arguing that we had allowed fascism to triumph before in this building, and that it had proven not to be such a good idea. I argued that we should intervene because it was "the right thing to do." This is an argument you almost never make in government if you know what you are doing. It virtually guarantees that you don't get invited to the next meeting and that you gain a reputation for moralism. I warned them that if we let these killings happen this time around, they would be the ones stuck holding the smoking gun. Of the three types of argument—the historical, the moral, and the "cover your ass" kind—the latter was of course the most compelling.

U.S. foreign service officers knew that Secretary of State Baker believed that the United States did not "have a dog in this fight." But undaunted by their superiors' indifference, they kept the analysis coming. One of the most memorable overviews of the situation came from the pen of Ambassador Zimmerman, who, one month into the war, submitted a confidential cable to the secretary of state entitled "Who Killed Yugoslavia?" The cable was divided into five sections, each headed by a verse from "Who Killed Cock Robin?" Zimmerman had been recalled to Washington on May 16, 1992, and writing it was his last official act as ambassador. He argued that nationalism had "put an arrow in the heart of Yugoslavia" and placed the blame squarely on Balkan leaders like Croatia's "narrow-minded, crypto-racist regime" and the Milosevic dictatorship in Belgrade:

Innocent bystanders . . . never had a chance against Milosevic's combination of aggressiveness and intransigence. Historians can argue

about the role of the individual in history. I have no doubt that if Milosevic's parents had committed suicide before his birth rather than after, I would not be writing a cable about the death of Yugoslavia. Milosevic, more than anyone else, is its gravedigger.

Western leaders, he observed, were "no more than witnesses at Yugoslavia's funeral."<sup>28</sup>

Zimmerman asked Jim Hooper, recently promoted to become the State Department's director of the Office of Canadian Affairs, to join him in developing a menu of concrete policy options for Bosnia. Hooper was skeptical that Deputy Secretary Eagleburger would take his initiatives seriously. He thought Zimmerman was the one who needed to argue for air strikes, but Zimmerman insisted he would lose his access. "This was the classic bureaucratic trap," says Hooper. "If you go to the boss with bad news, the boss won't want to see you anymore." Hooper's wife urged him to accept anyway. "If you don't take this," she said, "you'll wonder for the rest of your life whether you could have made a difference." Hooper accepted the offer and spent the second half of 1992 running the Office of Canadian Affairs and, on a pro bono basis, trying to rally department support for intervention.

U.S. diplomats who worked day to day on Bosnia became eager to see a Western military intervention. They had not become so engaged with Cambodia or Iraq in part because they had been blocked from entering either country and directly witnessing the carnage. Newspaper coverage had been sparse, as journalists, too, were denied access. Americans were also probably less prone to identify with Kurds and Cambodians than they were with Europeans. But the most significant difference was that the Cold War had ended, and there was no geopolitical rationalization for *supporting* Serb perpetrators. Thus, for the first time in the twentieth century, U.S. military intervention to stop genocide was within reach.

But internal appeals alone were unlikely to make a dent in the consciousness of senior policy-makers so firmly opposed to intervening. The State Department dissenters needed help from American reporters, editorial boards, and advocacy groups. Initially, they did not really get it. Between April and early August many of the journalists who swooped into Bosnia had never visited the country before and compensated for their ignorance with an effort to be "even-handed" and "neutral." Many recall scavenging to dig up stories about atrocities committed by "all sides." Many did not

portray the war as a top-down attempt by Milosevic to create an ethnically pure Greater Serbia.

In early August 1992, however, the proponents of intervention within the U.S. government gained a weapon in their struggle: The Western media finally won access to Serb concentration camps. Journalists not only began challenging U.S. policy, but they supplied photographic images and refugee sagas that galvanized heretofore silent elite opinion. Crucially, the advocates of humanitarian intervention began to win the support of both liberals committed to advancing human rights as well as staunch Republican Cold Warriors, who believed the U.S. had the responsibility and the power to stop Serb aggression in Europe. The Bush administration's chosen policy of nonintervention suddenly came to feel politically untenable.

## Response (Bush)

### "Concentration Camps in Europe"

In the notorious Serb-run camps in northern Bosnia, Muslim and Croat detainees were inhumanly concentrated. Onetime farmers, factory workers, and philosophers were pressed tightly into barracks. One prisoner's nose nestled into the armpit or the sweaty feet of the eighty-five-year-old inmate beside him. The urine bucket filled, spilled, and remained in place. Parched inmates gathered their excretion in cupped hands to wet their lips.

The camps of Bosnia were not extermination camps, though killing was a favorite tool of many of the commanders in charge. Nor could they really be called death camps, though some 10,000 prisoners perished in them. Not every Bosnian Muslim was marked for death as every Jew had been in the Holocaust. Although injury and humiliation were inevitable, death was only possible. *Concentration* camps is what they were. Forever linked with gas chambers, concentration camps were not a Nazi invention. The Spaniards had used them in Cuba during a local rebellion in 1896, the British in South Africa during the Boer War at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup>

Thanks to its spy satellites, radio and phone communications, and agents on the ground, the United States had known of the Serb camps since May 1992. But midlevel and junior U.S. officials remember the offices above them were a "black hole." "We would send things up and nothing would



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come back," said Western. "The only time we would get a response was when the press covered a particular event."<sup>30</sup> U.S. analysts knew that Muslim and Croat men were being incarcerated and abused, but Bush administration officials never publicly condemned the camps or demanded their closure. It would take public outrage to force their hand.

Western journalists heard reports of the camps' atrocities but did not immediately accept them. The first convoy of Muslim and Croat refugees from northern Bosnia crossed into Croatia in June. Laura Pitter, a freelance journalist, remembers her reaction to the horrors described by the first wave of refugees:

They were talking about women being put in rape camps. They were talking about all these killings—some they said they'd seen, others they'd only heard about. They talked about people being thrown off cliffs, men being held and tortured and starved in camps. We stayed up talking to them until 2 a.m. So many different people from different places were describing these incredibly similar experiences. They seemed credible, but I still wondered if they were all just repeating the same rumors. No matter how much I heard, I just found it hard to believe. I couldn't believe. In fact, I didn't believe.

Pitter sat around her colleague's apartment that night debating the veracity of the reports. She filed stories over the course of the next week about the refugee crisis but talked only generally of the refugees' "allegations" of atrocities. A few weeks later she finally chose to file a more detailed story told to her by a man who was able to escape from a Serb-run camp with the help of a Serbian Orthodox priest. The camp, in the northwestern Bosnian town of Brcko, was situated in a slaughterhouse. The same machines formerly used to kill cattle were used to kill his fellow prisoners, the witness said. Pitter's news agency, United Press International, refused to run the story, saying there was not enough proof and citing legal concerns.

One Muslim, Selma Hecimovic, took care of Muslim and Croat women in Bosnia who had been raped at camps the Serbs established specifically for that purpose. She recalled the ways journalists and human rights workers pressed the victims and witnesses of torture:

At the end, I get a bit tired of constantly having to *prove*. We had to prove genocide, we had to prove that our women are being raped, that our children have been killed. Every time I take a statement from these women, and you journalists want to interview them, I imagine those people, disinterested, sitting in a nice house with a hamburger and beer, switching channels on TV. I really don't know what else has to happen here, what further suffering the Muslims have to undergo . . . to make the so-called world react.<sup>31</sup>

The first high-profile press reports of Serb detention camps appeared in July, and American and European journalists flooded to Bosnia. *Newsday's* Roy Gutman, a British film crew from the Independent Television News (ITN), and the *Guardian's* Ed Vuillamy led the way. On July 19, 1992, Gutman published an article from the Manjaca camp, where he accompanied representatives of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), then performing its first inspection. Supervised at all times by Serb escorts, Gutman was allowed to speak only with eight handpicked prisoners. Still, he managed to piece together—mainly from those inmates who had been recently released—tales of beatings, torture, and mass executions. One seventeen-year-old survivor described being hauled to the camp in a covered truck along with his father, grandfather, brother, and 150 others. He said eighteen people in the six-truck convoy died from asphyxiation.<sup>32</sup> In a story entitled "There Is No Food, There Is No Air," Gutman

relayed a Muslim relief worker's account that six to ten people were dying daily in the Omarska camp near the Serb-held town of Prijedor. On July 21 Gutman's *Newsday* story, "Like Auschwitz," described the deportation of thousands of Muslim civilians in sweltering, locked freight cars.<sup>33</sup> Gutman, who later won the Pulitzer Prize for his dispatches on the camps, used terms such as "sealed boxcars" and "deportations," which could only remind readers of events of fifty years before. He quoted a Muslim student who said, "We all felt like Jews in the Third Reich."<sup>34</sup>

Gutman relied on refugee testimony to give readers a glimpse of Omarska, the worst of the Serbs' camps, where several thousand Muslim and Croat civilians, including the entire leadership of the town of Prijedor, were held in metal cages and killed in groups of ten to fifteen every few days. A former inmate, Alija Lujinovic, a fifty-three-year-old electrical engineer, had been held in a northeastern Bosnian facility where he said some 1,350 people were slaughtered between mid-May and mid-June. Not surprisingly, just like the Khmer Rouge and the Iraqi government, the Serbs denied access to relief officials and journalists who wanted to investigate. On August 2, 1992, Gutman filed a story in which Lujinovic, the survivor, offered grim details of Serbs slitting the throats of Muslim prisoners, stripping them, and throwing them into the Sava River or grinding them into animal feed.

The following day U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher finally confirmed that the United States possessed evidence of the camps. He admitted that the administration knew "that the Serbian forces are maintaining what they call detention centers" and that "abuses and torture and killings are taking place." But he insisted that the Serbs were not alone, adding, "I should also note that we have reports that Bosnians and Croats also maintain detention centers." The United States did not have evidence that similar atrocities had occurred in the other camps, but Boucher still broadened the appeal for access. "All parties must allow international authorities immediate and unhindered access to all the detention centers," he said. "We've made clear right from the beginning of this that there were various parties involved in the fighting; that there were people on all sides . . . that were doing bad things."<sup>35</sup>

Even Boucher's diluted condemnation proved too much for his bosses. The following day, on instructions from Eagleburger, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Tom Niles backtracked, testifying on Capitol Hill that the administration in fact did not have "thus far substantiated informa-

tion that would confirm the existence of these camps."<sup>36</sup> Boucher's admissions had caused a spike in elite pressure for intervention. A senior State Department official said at the time, "Our intention was to move the ball forward one step, and the [news] reports moved it forward two steps."<sup>37</sup> With Niles's retreat, the Washington-based journalists became furious. The *Washington Post's* veteran correspondent Don Oberdorfer wrote in his journal, "I had rarely seen the State Department press corps—or what was left of it in August—so agitated."<sup>38</sup> From then on, the reporters assumed the administration was obfuscating or lying outright. Congressman Tom Lantos, the Holocaust survivor who had found the Bush administration's response to Iraqi atrocities "nauseating," was again enraged. He confronted Niles by grabbing the morning's *New York Times*, which led with the headline about the camps. "You remember the old excuse that while the gas chambers were in full blast killing innocent people, we could say, not very honestly, 'we don't know,'" Lantos challenged Niles. "Now, either Mr. Boucher is lying or you are lying, but you are both working for [Secretary of State] Jim Baker, and we are not going to read Boucher's statement in the *New York Times* and listen to you testify to the exact opposite."<sup>39</sup> Since no reporter had yet visited the Omarska death camp, the Bush administration could still claim that the refugee claims were unconfirmed.

On August 5 Boucher said Red Cross officials had visited nine camps and reported "very difficult conditions of detention." But he said, "they have not found any evidence of death camps." The Holocaust standard, he implied, had not been met. Boucher went on to note that the Red Cross had not yet been allowed to visit the most notorious camps. Asked what the United States would do when evidence had been gathered against those responsible, Boucher said he did not know of any plans for a war crimes tribunal. And no, he stressed, the administration was not considering using force.<sup>40</sup>

President Bush remained immobile on the question of U.S. intervention. In an interview published the same day, he was quoted as saying that military force "is an option that I haven't thought of yet." He met the objections of critics by falling back on the Powell-Weinberger doctrine. "Now we have some people coming at me saying, 'Commit American forces,'" Bush said. "Before I'd commit forces to a battle, I want to know what's the beginning, what's the objective, how's the objective going to be achieved and what's the end."<sup>41</sup> These were of course reasonable questions,



but there was no indication that anyone at the upper levels of the U.S. government was trying to supply answers.

## Analogy and Advocacy

Bill Clinton, the Democratic challenger in the upcoming presidential election, was clocking miles and racking up promises as he toured the country. On August 5, 1992, the day after Niles stammered his way through his House hearings, Clinton told an audience of black teenagers at a school in East St. Louis, Illinois, with regard to Serb concentration camps, "We may have to use military force. I would begin with air power against the Serbs to try to restore the basic conditions of humanity."<sup>42</sup> Clinton was a committed multilateralist. He said the UN demands that Serb camps be closed and aggression halted "should be backed by collective action, including the use of force, if necessary." The United States, he said, should "be prepared to lend appropriate support, including military, to such an operation."<sup>43</sup>

Clinton was more of a hawk than Bush on Bosnia, but one could see signs that the former antiwar protester was deeply uncomfortable with the idea of *American* military action. Even as Clinton delivered his sternest warnings to Serb forces, he also sounded nervous that Yugoslavia might steal center stage from the domestic agenda that was far dearer to him. Both his faith in the United Nations and his privileging of the home front were evident in his remarks to the Illinois children:

I want us to be focused on the problems of people at home. I'm worried about kids being killed on the streets here at home. I think we'll have more people killed in America today than there are killed in Yugoslavia, or what used to be Yugoslavia, probably.

But I think that we cannot afford to ignore what appears to be a deliberate, systematic extermination of human beings based on their ethnic origin. The United Nations was set up to stop things like that, and we ought to stop it.<sup>44</sup>

Like many liberal internationalists, Clinton referred to the United Nations as if it might someday become an institution with a mind, a body, and a bank account of its own. But the UN was dependent on the United

States for one-quarter of its budget, on the Security Council for authorization and financing of its missions, and on member states for peacekeepers.

Still, Clinton, the challenger, slashed at what he saw was a Bush Achilles' heel. Whatever his squeamishness about force, with all of the media attention suddenly focused on Serb atrocities, Clinton was not going to pass up a chance to criticize the incumbent for his idleness. Clinton campaigned on an interventionist plank, criticizing Bush in a written statement for his inaction on the grounds that "if the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide."<sup>45</sup> Clinton advocated tightening economic sanctions, using force to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and to open Serb camps to inspections, and bombing the Serb units that were pummeling Sarajevo.

Clinton's pressure was reinforced by shocking revelations from Bosnia, where Penny Marshall and Ian Williams of British Independent Television News and Ed Vulliamy of the *Guardian* finally managed to reach Omarska. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic had visited London in late July. At a press conference he had denied the atrocity allegations and challenged journalists "to come and see for themselves." He was sure he could empty the worst of the camps before the television crews arrived, but he miscalculated, and the British journalists beat him to northern Bosnia.

Initially, local Serb officials blocked the ITN and *Guardian* reporters' visit by denying permission. Then the Bosnian Serbs stationed soldiers in the woods near the camps who began firing at the journalists' car. The Serbs claimed that "Muslim mujahideen" were doing the firing, making the visit too dangerous. But finally, on August 5, Marshall, Williams, and Vulliamy were granted limited access to what was rumored to be a death camp. Allowed into the canteen, the journalists saw wafer-thin men with shaven heads eating watery bean stew. From across a courtyard, they spotted rows of men being drilled by harsh Serb taskmasters. But they were not allowed to visit the prisoners' sleeping quarters or the notorious "White House," which they had heard was a veritable human abattoir. Disappointed to have been so limited in their access, the journalists were bundled into the car and out of the camp. As they departed, however, they drove past another camp, Trnopolje, where they happened to spot a group of prisoners who had just arrived from the camp of Keraterm, which had a reputation similar to Omarska's. The new arrivals were in terrible shape, and ITN's Williams and Marshall leaped out of the car and began filming the ghastly scene. The ITN news producer who met his camera team in

Hungary deliberately chose the footage most reminiscent of the Holocaust. "After viewing their ten tapes, I advised that the image that would shake the world was of skeletal men behind barbed wire," he said. "They sparked thoughts of Auschwitz and Belsen."<sup>46</sup>

ITN broadcast the first television pictures from Trnopolje on August 6, 1992. The images of wilting Muslims behind barbed wire concentrated grassroots and elite attention and inflamed public outrage about the war like no postwar genocide. In July 45 percent of Americans had disapproved of U.S. air strikes and 35 percent approved. Now, without any guidance from their leaders, 53 percent of Americans approved, whereas 33 percent disapproved. Roughly the same percentage supported contributing U.S. forces to a humanitarian or peacekeeping mission.<sup>47</sup> While the Bush administration had portrayed the "Bosnia mess" as insoluble, editorialists now met the administration head-on. "It is not merely an 'ethnic conflict,'" the *New Republic* editors wrote. "It is a campaign in which a discrete faction of Serbian nationalists has manipulated ethnic sentiment in order to seize power and territory. . . . There have been too many platitudes about the responsibility of 'all factions' for the war. This lazy language is an escape hatch through which outside powers flee their responsibilities."<sup>48</sup>

Even Jon Western, the intelligence officer who had been dutifully documenting the horrors, was stunned when he first came face to (televised) face with the Muslim prisoners he had long been monitoring from afar. "There is an enormous difference between reading about atrocities and seeing those images," Western says. "We had all the documentation we needed before. We knew all we needed to know. But the one thing we didn't have was videotape. We had never *seen* the men emaciated behind barbed wire. That was entirely new." As had occurred when television reporters gained access to the frozen, bluish remains of Kurdish victims in Halabja, popular interest and sympathy were aroused by pictures far more than they had been by words. Between August 2 and August 14, the three major networks broadcast forty-eight news stories on atrocities in Bosnia, compared to just ten in the previous twelve days.<sup>49</sup>

Even with the camps exposed, the tales of the refugees were still difficult to confirm, and the stories, as always, sounded far-fetched. *Newsweek's* Joel Brand visited the Manjaca camp and interviewed a gaunt prisoner in the presence of the camp commandant. Brand asked the man how he had lost so much weight. The prisoner's voice shook as he eyed the forbidding Serb commander. He blamed his condition on hospital confinement and not

starvation. Only when the prisoner turned his head did Brand see that his left ear had been seared off. The interview was abruptly terminated.<sup>50</sup>

Reporters and television producers followed ITN's lead, relaying images that evoked heightened Holocaust sensitivity among viewers. Television producers often accompanied their daily Bosnia coverage with scenes from Holocaust newsreels. Vulliamy, who gave some fifty-four radio interviews the day he broke the camp story in the *Guardian*, was himself frustrated by the tendency to make linkages to the Holocaust. When one radio station led into his interview by playing Hitler thundering at the Nuremberg rallies, Vulliamy hung up the phone. "I had to spend as much time saying, 'This is not Auschwitz,' as I did saying, 'This is unacceptably awful,'" Vulliamy recalls. Two years later, when he met Holocaust Museum Director Walter Reich, Vulliamy asked Reich if he thought the phrase "echoes of the Holocaust" was appropriate. "Yes," Reich said, "very loud echoes."

In newspapers around the country, the analogy recurred. The *Cincinnati Enquirer's* Jim Borgman depicted Croat and Muslims skeletons walking from the "Serbian concentration camp" through a door labeled "SHOWERS" and into a room with one showerhead.<sup>51</sup> *U.S. News and World Report* described "locked trains . . . once again carrying human cargoes across Europe," noting that "the West's response to this new holocaust has been as timid as its reactions to the beginnings of Hitler's genocide."<sup>52</sup> An August *Washington Post* editorial declared: "Images like these have not come out of Europe since a war whose depredations and atrocities—it has been agreed again and again—would never be allowed to recur."<sup>53</sup> The *New York Times* editorial the next day read: "The chilling reports from Bosnia evoke this century's greatest nightmare, Hitler's genocide against Jews, Gypsies and Slavs." The *Chicago Tribune* editorial asked: "Are Nazi-era death camps being reprised in the Balkans? Unthinkable, you say?" and answered, "Think again. . . . The ghost of World War II genocide is abroad in Bosnia."<sup>54</sup> However disturbing viewers and readers found images from prior genocides, there was nothing quite like their discomfort that such horrors could occur again *in Europe*.

Journalists generally reported stories that they hoped would move Western policymakers, but pundits and advocates openly clamored for force. Jewish survivors and organizations put aside Israel's feud with Muslims in the Middle East and were particularly forceful in their criticism of U.S. idleness. In a private meeting with National Security Adviser Brent

Scowcroft, American Jewish leaders pressed for military action. The American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League published a joint advertisement in the *New York Times* headlined, "Stop the Death Camps." The ad declared:

To the blood-chilling names of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and other Nazi death camps there seem now to have been added the names of Omarska and Brcko. . . . Is it possible that fifty years after the Holocaust, the nations of the world, including our own, will stand by and do nothing, pretending we are helpless? . . . We must make it clear that we will take every necessary step, including the use of force, to put a stop to this madness and bloodshed.<sup>55</sup>

On August 10, 1992, President Bush met with Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who also likened the camps to those of the Nazis. The same day thousands of Jewish American protesters marched on the White House.

The Holocaust analogy was also invoked with regard to the allies' handling of the crisis. The interminable and seemingly fruitless Vance-Owen peace process caused many to draw comparisons between the Western "appeasers" of 1992 and those who had kowtowed to Hitler in Munich in 1938. For example, *Time* magazine wrote, "The ghastly images in newspapers and on television screens conjured up another discomfiting memory, the world sitting by, eager for peace at any price, as Adolf Hitler marched into Austria, carved up Czechoslovakia."<sup>56</sup> Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* called President Bush a "veritable Neville Chamberlain."<sup>57</sup>

This public commentary aided dissenters within the bureaucracy. They began filtering much of what they read and saw through the prism of the Holocaust. Fox recalls:

It was the shock of recognition of those images. It was the visual memory that most of us had through documentaries. It was the likeness of the thing. It didn't add anything to our knowledge to know about the camps in August. There was much more death after they were revealed than before. . . . But we had all sat through 500 documentaries on the Holocaust. I had been to Auschwitz. We had all experienced the college curriculum. The Holocaust was part of the equipment that one brought to the job.

Jim Hooper had delved into the history of the State Department's weak response to the Holocaust. He pressed his government colleagues to read British historian Martin Gilbert's *Auschwitz and the Allies* and supplied them with a stream of facts about parallels with the Holocaust that they could use internally. Twining, Solarz, Galbraith, and other advocates of an interventionist, humanitarian policy had invoked the Holocaust before, but neither Cambodia nor Iraq had resonated like Bosnia. The Bosnian war brought both a coincidence of European geography and imagery.

### "We Will Not Rest Until. . ."

The association of the television imagery with the Holocaust and the outrage of elite opinion-makers forced President Bush to speak out. Three months before an election, with Clinton snapping at his heels, he had to confront the possibility of intervening. Bush held a press conference on Friday, August 7. Fox vividly recalls the moment when Bush made his remarks: "I remember hearing Bush say, 'We will not rest.' And I thought to myself, 'How on earth is he going to finish this sentence?' Will he say, 'We will not rest until we liberate the camps'? 'We will not rest until we close the camps'? 'We will not rest until we rest'? I knew he didn't want to do anything, so I wondered what on earth he could say." In fact, Bush himself made the Holocaust link:

The pictures of the prisoners rounded up by the Serbian forces and being held in these detention camps are stark evidence of the need to deal with this problem effectively. And the world cannot shed its horror at the prospect of concentration camps. The shocking brutality of genocide in World War II, in those concentration camps, are burning memories for all of us, and that can't happen again. And we will not rest until the international community has gained access to any and all detention camps.<sup>58</sup>

Bush's pledge not to rest until the international community gained access to the camps left the administration ample room for maneuver. Would the access demand be satisfied by a single international visit? Would it entail stationing foreign observers in or near the enclosed premises? Even if helped in the short term, would prisoners be punished more in the long term?

The camp story had sent shock waves through Foggy Bottom. But many of the midlevel officials within the State Department who lobbied for intervention were concerned that all the attention paid to the camps risked drowning out the larger truth: The Serbs were killing or expelling non-Serbs from any territory they controlled or conquered. Still, in a parallel to Peter Galbraith's decision to tap American outrage over chemical weapons' use in Iraq, the Bosnia hawks within the department opted to take what they could get. They reasoned that attention to the concentration camps and the Holocaust parallels might succeed in drawing attention to the wider campaign of genocide.

Richard Holbrooke, who had served as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs under President Carter, was a board member of the International Rescue Committee, America's largest nongovernmental relief organization. He decided to visit Bosnia just after the camp story broke. There he encountered an angry British aid worker, Tony Land, who expressed his amazement at the sudden attention to the camps. "For six months, we have seen Sarajevo systematically being destroyed without the world getting very upset," Land told Holbrooke. "Now a few pictures of people being held behind barbed wire, and the world goes crazy."<sup>59</sup> Holbrooke videotaped the results of Serb ethnic cleansing, filming house upon house that had been blown up by Serb soldiers and militia. He saw petrified Muslims handing over their property deeds to the local Serb authorities in exchange for bus passage out of the country. And he interviewed refugees who recounted the abduction and disappearance of Muslim men. When he returned to the United States, Holbrooke wrote an article in *Newsweek* that urged lifting the arms embargo against the Muslims and bombing Serb bridges and military facilities. He also asked rhetorically, "What would the West be doing now if the religious convictions of the combatants were reversed, and a Muslim force was now trying to destroy two million beleaguered Christians and/or Jews?"<sup>60</sup> Knowing that Clinton had spoken out on Bosnia and sensing an opening, Holbrooke wrote a memo to Clinton and vice presidential candidate Al Gore in which he stressed: "This is not a choice between Vietnam and doing nothing, as the Bush Administration has portrayed it. . . . Doing nothing now risks a far greater and more costly involvement later."<sup>61</sup>

Although President Bush's statement resolved little on the ground in Bosnia, it did require U.S. bureaucrats to begin a high-level intelligence scramble to gather all available data on the camps.<sup>62</sup> Within six weeks of

Bush's pledge, the intelligence community had compiled a list of more than 200 camps that included the names of commanders. Because of America's top-flight technical intelligence-gathering capabilities, this information had been available to any interested party all along. But before the August public "shaming," senior Bush administration officials had placed no premium on knowing. There was no point in receiving details about crimes that they did not intend to confront. When Jon Western had conducted his investigation, he had done so juggling a portfolio that included Poland, Croatia, and Bosnia. Nobody above him had ordered—or much welcomed—his July 4 weekend intelligence scramble. But now the president had commissioned a well-staffed search. The sequencing was quite typical. As Fox notes: "The intelligence community is responsive to what the bosses want to know. You could say 'I'm deeply interested in a green-eyed abominable snowman,' and you'd get all the briefings you could ever want. But when the higher-ups are blaming the killings on the victims, you aren't going to get much intelligence."

## U.S. Policy: Diplomacy, Charity, Futility, Perversity, Jeopardy

The United States did not couple its new public commitment to document Serb aggression with a plan to stop it. As a way of defusing the pressure stirred up by the camp images, U.S. and European officials pointed optimistically to a UN-EU peace conference scheduled for late August in London. There "the parties" would be convinced to stop fighting. Eagleburger pledged \$40 million of U.S. humanitarian aid and said he expected the London agreements to produce "a substantial diminution" in the shelling of Sarajevo.

Under public fire the Bush administration made another move that seemed more consequential. On August 13, 1992, the United States and its allies passed a Security Council resolution authorizing "all necessary measures" to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. Many believed that this was a precursor to military intervention against the Serbs. But in fact it only paved the way for reinforcing a small UN contingent that had been positioned in Bosnia since the beginning of the war in April 1992. On top of 100 UN monitors already on the ground, an additional 6,000 peacekeepers, including some 1,800 British troops, deployed. U.S. public support

for contributing its share of peacekeepers was high (80 percent), and the U.S. Senate even approved money for U.S. participation in a UN military force. But the Bush team refused requests for troops, choosing instead to finance relief and transport missions carried out by others.<sup>63</sup> The Security Council resolution, which implied a willingness to use force, was intended to frighten the Serbs into ceasing the slaughter. But even the deterrent value of the threat was undermined when assistant secretary Niles admitted, "The hope is that the adoption of the resolution would obviate the need for force."<sup>64</sup> When asked about the concentration camps, President Bush said the United States would use relief to address "these tremendous humanitarian problems."<sup>65</sup> Events, Americans were told, constituted civil war or a humanitarian "nightmare," but not a genocide.

As pressure picked up, the Bush administration also developed a spin on events in the Balkans that helped temper public enthusiasm for involvement. Three portrayals emerged in the daily press guidance and in the statements of administration officials. The language muddied the facts and quenched some of the moral outrage sparked by the camp photos. Because the American public and the Washington elite began with no prior understanding of the region and because the conflict was indeed complicated, the administration was able to inscribe its version of events onto a virtually blank slate.

First, senior officials viewed and spun the violence as an insoluble "tragedy" rather than a mitigatable, deliberate atrocity carried out by an identifiable set of perpetrators. The war, they said, was fueled by bottom-up, ancient, ethnic or tribal hatreds (not by the top-down political machinations of a nationalistic or opportunistic elite), hatreds that had raged for centuries (and, by implication, would rage for centuries more). This of course invited a version of Hirschman's futility justification for inaction.<sup>66</sup> Defense Secretary Cheney told CNN, "It's tragic, but the Balkans have been a hotbed of conflict . . . for centuries."<sup>67</sup> Bush said the war was "a complex, convoluted conflict that grows out of age-old animosities [and] century-old feuds."<sup>68</sup> Eagleburger noted, "It is difficult to explain, but this war is not rational. There is no rationality at all about ethnic conflict. It is gut, it is hatred; it's not for any common set of values or purposes; it just goes on. And that kind of warfare is most difficult to bring to a halt."<sup>69</sup>

Bosnia was racked by a "civil war" (not a war of aggression) in which "all sides" committed atrocities against the others. "I have said this 38,000 times," said Eagleburger, "and I have to say this to the people of this coun-

try as well. . . . The tragedy is not something that can be settled from outside and it's about damn well time that everybody understood that. Until the Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it."<sup>70</sup>

Second, administration officials argued there would be perverse consequences to confronting the Serbs. Military engagement or the lifting of the arms embargo could endanger the delivery of humanitarian aid. It could cause the Serbs to retaliate against Muslim civilians or European peacekeepers. And thus such well-meaning steps would in fact do more harm than good.

Third, owing to the ancient hatreds and to the particular topography of the region, military intervention would bring about a Vietnam-like quagmire, putting U.S. soldiers in jeopardy. Reporters pressed Bush on whether the United States would use force, and the president downplayed the possibility:

Everyone has been reluctant, for very understandable reasons, to use force. There is a lot of voices out there in the United States today that say "use force," but they don't have the responsibility for sending somebody else's son or somebody else's daughter into harm's way. And I do. I do not want to see the United States bogged down in any way into some guerrilla warfare—we lived through that.<sup>71</sup>

One deterrent to U.S. involvement was the estimated steep cost of intervening. The U.S. military's authoritative monopoly on estimating likely casualties lowered the prospects for intervention. Since Vietnam, U.S. generals had opposed U.S. military involvement in virtually all wars and had never favored intervention on mere humanitarian grounds. In the summer of 1992, the Bush administration debated whether or not to contribute U.S. military aircraft to a humanitarian airlift for Sarajevo. Military planners said that some 50,000 U.S. ground troops would be needed to secure a thirty-mile perimeter around the airport.<sup>72</sup> In fact, the airlift eventually was managed with a light UN force of some 1,000 Canadian and French forces at Sarajevo airport. At an August 11 Senate hearing, Lieutenant General Barry McCaffrey, assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, told Congress 400,000 troops would be needed to enforce a cease-fire.<sup>73</sup> Scowcroft concedes that the military's analysis was "probably" inflated but says that "armchair strategists" could not very well challenge

the Joint Chiefs.<sup>74</sup> Ambassador Zimmerman remembers his frustration at the military trump card that the Joint Chiefs played time and again. "They never said, 'No, we won't,' or 'No, we can't,'" he recalls. "They just tossed around figures on what it would take that were both unacceptable and, because of who was supplying them, uncontested."

When humanitarian land corridors were proposed, according to Scowcroft, the "troops-to-task" estimate came back at 300,000. This was a daunting figure that many independent observers deemed utterly disproportionate to the quality and commitment of the Serb troops attacking unarmed civilians in Bosnia. But military experts proliferated and pontificated, repeatedly citing the impenetrability of the mountainous landscape and the heroic fortitude of Tito's Partisans in World War II, who tied down the Nazis in pitched battle for months. Powell and Defense Secretary Cheney convinced the President that the risks of military engagement were far too high—even to use U.S. airpower to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Bosnia's hungry civilians.

The one-word bogey "Vietnam" became the ubiquitous shorthand for all that could go wrong in the Balkans if the United States became militarily engaged.<sup>75</sup> For some, the war in Vietnam offered a cause for genuine concern, as they feared any operation that lacked strong public support, implicated no "vital interests," and occurred on mountainous terrain. But many opponents of intervention proffered the Vietnam analogy less because they saw a likeness between the two scenarios than because they knew of no argument more likely to chill public enthusiasm for intervention.

The Bosnian Serbs took their cue, taunting the Americans whenever the prospect of intervention was raised. They warned of casualties and "mission creep." Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic exploited allied anxiety, threatening to retaliate against UN peacekeepers in Bosnia if NATO bombed from the air: "We'll determine the time and the targets, doing our best to make it very painful," Karadzic warned, daring the United States to act.<sup>76</sup> "The United States sends 2,000 marines, then they have to send 10,000 more to save the 2,000," he said. "That is the best way to have another Vietnam."<sup>77</sup> The same message was delivered by nationalists in Serbia itself. After ringing the bells of the Serb Orthodox churches and raising black flags emblazoned with skulls, Serb Radical Party leader Vojislav Seselj jeered at the Americans, saying, "We would have tens of thousands of volunteers, and we would score a glorious victory. The Americans would have to send thousands of body bags. It would be a new Vietnam."<sup>78</sup>

The fact that one of the handful of senior officials that opposed intervention was General Colin Powell was especially important. Powell, who had won a Bronze Star and Purple Heart in Vietnam, was fresh off his Gulf War blitz. It is usually forgotten, but when the Bush administration had debated going to war with Iraq, Powell had lobbied against it. Because he could not pinpoint an exit strategy for U.S. forces ahead of time, he argued, it was better to stay home. After the United States won the Gulf War, however, Powell's dominance was undisputed. Those who argued that Bosnia would not deteriorate into Vietnam could not compete with the highly respected veteran. Many of the "Balkan hawks" had not served in Vietnam. Their recent experience in the Balkans counted for little. Zimmerman remembers: "I hadn't served in Vietnam, but I knew the Serbs. And they bore no resemblance to the Vietnamese Communists. They didn't have the commitment to the cause of Bosnia. Theirs wasn't a holy crusade. Theirs was a land-grab. They weren't the same quality of soldiers. They were weekend warriors, and many of them were drunk a lot of the time. It was just very, very different."

General Powell, who opposed any U.S. role in delivering humanitarian aid or enforcing a no-fly zone over Bosnia, made an unusually public pitch to keep U.S. troops and airplanes grounded. He first called Michael Gordon of the *New York Times* into his office to deliver a lecture on why an intervention in Bosnia would not work. "As soon as they tell me it is limited," Powell told Gordon, "it means they do not care whether you achieve a result or not. As soon as they tell me 'surgical,' I head for the bunker."<sup>79</sup> Then, when a *New York Times* editorial criticized the U.S. military's "no-can-do" attitude, Powell fired back, himself publishing an op-ed in the paper that argued against deploying U.S. troops in harm's way "for unclear purposes" in a conflict "with deep ethnic and religious roots that go back a thousand years."<sup>80</sup>

With the November 1992 election approaching, Powell did not have to win many converts within the administration. Bush was unwilling to risk American lives in Bosnia in any capacity. Senior U.S. officials in the Administration said they viewed Bosnia as a "tar baby" on which nobody wanted their fingerprints.<sup>81</sup>

One way the administration deflected attention away from Bosnia was to focus on another humanitarian crisis, in Somalia. President Bush learned of the famine not from international media coverage, which was initially belated and thin, but from the personal appeals of U.S. ambassador Smith

Hempstone in Kenya and those of Senators Paul Simon (D.-Ill.) and Nancy Kassebaum (R.-Kans.).<sup>82</sup> The Joint Chiefs instinctively opposed sending U.S. troops to Somalia. But on August 14, 1992, Bush abruptly altered course, ordering a very limited intervention. U.S. C-130 cargo planes, not ground troops, were deployed to aid in the relief effort. Bush also pledged to help transport 500 Pakistani peacekeepers to the embattled country. According to senior officials involved in the planning, the White House saw an opportunity to demonstrate it had a heart, to respond to domestic criticisms on the eve of the Republican Party's national convention, and to do it relatively cheaply. The nightly news coverage of Bosnia from the middle to the end of August dropped to one-third of what it had been earlier in the month.<sup>83</sup> Even though U.S. troops would not deploy to Africa for several months, the Somalia famine had already begun drawing attention away from the Balkans.

Within the bureaucracy the State Department's cold exterior continued to be hotly contested. On August 25, 1992, George Kenney, the acting Yugoslav desk officer, stunned the Beltway by resigning from the State Department. News of Kenney's departure made the front page of the *Washington Post*. "I can no longer in clear conscience support the Administration's ineffective, indeed counterproductive, handling of the Yugoslav crisis," the foreign service officer wrote in his letter of resignation, which the newspaper quoted. "I am therefore resigning in order to help develop a stronger public consensus that the U.S. must act immediately to stop the genocide."<sup>84</sup> Kenney, like so many, favored lifting the arms embargo and bombing the Bosnian Serbs. In London for the UN-EU peace conference, Eagleburger asked, "Who knows Kenney?" He then publicly dismissed the act of the junior official, saying, "To my mind that young man has never set foot in the former Yugoslavia."<sup>85</sup> But Kenney's exit gave the public its first taste of the battle raging inside the department. And U.S. officials who remained disgruntled by the U.S. policy were introduced to a new option. "When you're in the foreign service," Kenney's counterpart on Bosnia, Marshall Harris, notes, "every part of the institution and the culture frowns on leaving. It just isn't seen as an option. The fact that George had done it awakened us to thinking of resignation as a real possibility."

With the November 1992 election nearing, foreign policy had been demoted. James Baker and a few of his top foreign policy advisers had been transferred to the White House, where they managed the president's

reelection campaign. Eagleburger had been promoted to acting secretary of state. Many U.S. officials thought Eagleburger had long been making the Bosnia policy; now his title reflected his influence.

Hooper requested a meeting with the new secretary and surprised his colleagues by being granted one. At a half-hour session in mid-September, Eagleburger appeared willing to listen. At the end of the meeting, he asked Hooper to prepare a memo that explicitly spelled out his recommendations for a new policy. Hooper and his colleague Richard Johnson, another career foreign service officer, prepared a twenty-seven-page memo and employed the dissent channel to be sure it reached Eagleburger's desk. The State Department had introduced the channel at the end of the Vietnam War so that those who disagreed with policy could make their views known to senior officials without having to clear them with their immediate bosses. "This was the one thing we could do that didn't have to be cleared," recalls Hooper. "Nobody could stop you from sending it—not your boss, not the secretary of state, not anybody." Eagleburger did not respond until after the election, but on Veteran's Day, November 11, 1992, he summoned Hooper and Johnson to his office. After a two-and-a-half-hour session in which Eagleburger peppered the men with questions, he escorted them out of his office and commended them for their critique. "Thanks for telling me my policy is full of horseshit," a grinning Eagleburger said. The normally lugubrious Hooper was speechless. Johnson said wearily, "I see you were listening."

Both dissenters were surprised that their message had not been delivered by other sources. Bill Montgomery, Eagleburger's office director, told Hooper, "You're the only ones. Nobody else in the bureaucracy is telling him this." The department's officials who cared about America's Bosnia policy could be divided into three groups—the dissenters who favored U.S. intervention (mainly in the form of air strikes), the senior policymakers who actively opposed it, and most numerous, the officials who supported bombing but assumed it would not happen so did nothing.

President Bush himself never paid much attention to the conflict in Bosnia. National Security Adviser Scowcroft remembers that about once a week Bush would turn to him and say, "Now tell me again what this is all about?" This was at a time when some 70,000 Bosnians had been killed in seven months.

Scowcroft speaks very candidly about the formulation of the Bush administration's response, expressing no regret. If he had to formulate poli-

cy all over again, the calculus would yield the same outcome. The atrocities were awful, but they occurred in a country whose welfare was simply not in the U.S. national interest:

We could never satisfy ourselves that the amount of involvement we thought it would take was justified in terms of the U.S. interests involved. . . . We were heavily national interest oriented, and Bosnia was of national interest concern only if the war broke out into Kosovo, risking the involvement of our allies in a wider war. If it stayed contained in Bosnia, it might have been horrible, but it did not affect us.

War that spread was deemed threatening to the United States. Regardless of how many civilians died, one that remained internal was not.

## Genocide?

Although the Holocaust analogy was employed frequently in this period, the question of whether events constituted genocide or not was controversial as always. The killings, the rapes, the torture, the camps, the cleansing together convinced lawyers at Helsinki Watch to use the term. The Serbs had set out to destroy the Bosnian Muslim population, and even if they were not exterminating every person, they were ravaging the Muslim community and doing all they could to ensure it would never recover.

The Bush administration assiduously avoided using the word. "Genocide" was shunned because a genocide finding would create a moral imperative. The day after the ITN footage of Keraterm aired, Bush told a news conference: "We know there is horror in these detention camps. But in all honesty, I can't confirm to you some of the claims that there is indeed a genocidal process going on there."<sup>86</sup> Policymakers preferred the phrase "ethnic cleansing."

Scowcroft believes genocide would have demanded a U.S. response, but ethnic cleansing, which is the label he uses for what occurred in Bosnia, did not:

In Bosnia, I think, we all got ethnic cleansing mixed up with genocide. To me they are different terms. The horror of them is similar, but

the purpose is not. Ethnic cleansing is not 'I want to destroy an ethnic group, wipe it out.' It's 'They're not going to live with us. They can live where they like, but not with us.' . . . There is a proscription on genocide, but there is not a proscription on killing people. . . . Therefore there is something of a national interest in preventing genocide because the United States needs to appear to be upholding international law.

During the reign of the Khmer Rouge, a small-scale debate over applying the word genocide had been played out mainly on America's editorial pages. It did not occur in the U.S. government, where such a finding was considered moot in the face of a determined U.S. policy of nonengagement. When Iraq targeted the rural Kurds, Galbraith's claim of genocide was rejected by the Reagan administration on the grounds Hussein was not exterminating all Kurds but was suppressing rebellion. The Bosnia debate over "genocide" was notable because it was the most wide-ranging, most vocal, and most divisive debate ever held on whether Lemkin's term should apply.

Some U.S. officials who debated the "is it" or "isn't it" saw it simply as a question of truth. The Serbs were systematically killing and expelling Muslim and Croat civilians from territory they controlled. The talk of "ancient hatreds" implied a degree of inevitability and spontaneity belied by the carefully coordinated, top-down nature of the killing, which was better signaled by the term "genocide." These officials wanted to gather and publish evidence of atrocities in order to set the record straight and show that a group of individuals had *decided* to target non-Serbs for destruction. Others hoped to see Serb attacks labeled "genocide" so as to trigger the genocide convention, which the United States had ratified and which they read to legally oblige a U.S. military response. They knew as well from polls and instinct that the term "genocide" moved Americans. A later poll showed that while 54 percent of Americans favored military intervention in Bosnia, that figure rose to 80 percent when those surveyed were told that an independent commission had found genocide under way.<sup>87</sup> This was a key point: Whatever America's legal obligations, U.S. officials hoped a finding of genocide might at least frighten politicians into thinking they would pay some political price for inaction. Both reasons for pursuing application of the word "genocide"—to clarify the nature of the violence and to generate or tap public outrage—were motivated by a



desire to make the higher-ups act. They believed that a dominant majority in the United States would support intervention to stop a murderous minority in the Balkans if they only knew what it was they were stopping.

Richard Johnson, the foreign service officer who had accompanied Hooper to meet with Eagleburger, set out to investigate why the "g-word" controversy persisted when the separating of the men from the women and children; the beatings, rapes, and murders; and the specific targeting of the educated and political elites satisfied the convention's requirements. He cornered sixteen State Department and NSC officials for formal interviews. He found that any confusion over the Serbs' genocidal intent stemmed from the State Department's reluctance to stir moral outrage and its failure to devote the human or material resources needed to collect evidence of a systematic attempt to destroy a substantial part of the Bosnian Muslim group. The White House never issued a directive calling for research and analysis to determine whether a genocide case could be made against Serbian president Milosevic or against rump Yugoslavia (composed of Serbia and Montenegro).

In the waning days of the Bush administration, the focus of State Department dissenters shifted from rescue to punishment. Jon Western, for one, intensified his effort to collect proof of atrocities. He hoped to turn the heaps of evidence that had been gathered since April into "courtroom-ready" intelligence. Although no international criminal court existed, the frustration with international impotence, the relentlessness of some spirited advocates of prosecution (such as Neier at Helsinki Watch), and probably also the resonance of the crimes in Bosnia with those of World War II caused European and U.S. policymakers to begin considering setting up a tribunal. By December 1992 Western and others had set out to answer two questions: Was there sufficient evidence of war crimes to think about prosecuting perpetrators, and did these crimes constitute a legal genocide? Western took a plodding approach to tackling the issue, which was unpopular with some of his colleagues. "I felt we weren't going to get a smoking gun," recalls Western. "Milosevic was never going to call up his henchmen and say, 'Go commit genocide.' We had to develop the case by showing the systematic nature of the campaign. Only by working backwards could we show intent."

Western had company. In October 1992, upon the recommendation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the UN Human Rights Commission's special rapporteur for ex-Yugoslavia, the allies had created an impartial commission

of experts to assess the atrocity reports.<sup>88</sup> The five-member War Crimes Commission convened for the first time in December 1992 in Geneva. Coincidentally, this inaugural session was held in the same building as one of the many cease-fire negotiations sponsored by the Vance-Owen, UN-EU "International Conference for the Former Yugoslavia." By this time the defeated Bush administration was concerning itself with its legacy, which, when it came to Yugoslavia, needed quick repair. At that meeting Eagleburger urged several new steps, including enforcement of a no-fly zone, possibly lifting the arms embargo against the Muslim-led Bosnian government, and accountability for suspected war criminals. Eagleburger declared:

We have, on the one hand, a moral and historical obligation not to stand back a second time in this century while a people faces obliteration. But we have also, I believe, a political obligation to the people of Serbia to signal clearly the risk they currently run of sharing the inevitable fate of those who practice ethnic cleansing in their names. . . . They need, especially, to understand that a second Nuremberg awaits the practitioners of ethnic cleansing, and that the judgment and opprobrium of history awaits the people in whose name their crimes were committed.<sup>89</sup>

What made Eagleburger's December 1992 remarks significant was that the top U.S. diplomat "named names." An unlikely midwife to the justice movement, Eagleburger said that the United States had identified ten war crimes suspects that should be brought to trial. His list included the prominent Serb warlords Zelko "Arkan" Raznjatovic and Vojislav Seselj, as well as the Serb political and military leaders Milosevic, Karadzic, and Ratko Mladic.<sup>90</sup> Eagleburger also described specific crimes—such as the Serb siege of Sarajevo, the Yugoslav army's destruction of the Croatian city of Vukovar in 1991, and the Serb murder of 2,000–3,000 Muslims near Brcko.

According to Eagleburger, though he had supported the idea of a court for several months, it had been Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel who convinced him to speak out. Wiesel had visited the region in November, making stops in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Banja Luka, including the Manjaca concentration camp. When Wiesel returned home, he had what he called a "long talk" with Eagleburger in which he convinced him that speaking out

was a moral obligation. But Eagleburger made it clear he was not calling for the forcible seizure of the men he named. Karadzic, one of those just branded, freely wandered the halls outside the main conference hall in Geneva.<sup>91</sup> He would remain a valued negotiating partner for two and a half more years. In addition, the United States did not follow up on Eagleburger's statement by assigning officials within the State Department or U.S. intelligence community to build legal cases against these leaders. According to Johnson, when the State Department finally began submitting evidence to the UN War Crimes Commission, it assigned the task to a foreign service officer in the Human Rights Bureau with no knowledge of Balkan affairs and to a short-term State Department intern just out of college.<sup>92</sup>

The closest the Bush administration came to acknowledging genocide was on December 18, 1992, when the United States joined a long UN General Assembly resolution that held Serbian and Montenegrin forces responsible for aggression and for "the abhorrent policy of 'ethnic cleansing,' which is a form of genocide."<sup>93</sup> The American voice was one of many. It was probably not heard and certainly not heeded.

Around the same time, Hooper and Johnson entered a second memo into the State Department dissent channel arguing for a legal finding of genocide. The memo was circulated on December 20, 1992. It quickly garnered signatures from the assistant secretaries of state for INR, legal affairs, European affairs, and International Organizations. With those signatures in place, however, the department practically shut down for the holidays until January 3, 1993. A memo that found that the Serbs were committing genocide sat unexamined for two weeks while State Department officials celebrated Christmas and the New Year. When Secretary Eagleburger returned, he said at last that he agreed. But he also said that it would be unfair for the Bush administration to issue a finding of genocide just as the next administration was taking over. As Western put it: "The last act of the Bush administration was not going to be, 'Oh, by the way, this is genocide. We haven't been doing anything about it. Oops. It's all yours!'" On January 19, 1993, the last day of the Bush administration, Patricia Diaz Dennis, the assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs equivocated unintelligibly:

In Bosnia, our report describes widespread systematic atrocities, including the rapes and killings of civilian victims to the extent that it probably borders on genocide. We haven't yet decided whether or not

it's a legal matter. The conduct in Bosnia is genocide, but clearly the abuses that have occurred there over the last year are such that they, as I said, border on that particular legal term.<sup>94</sup>

Before leaving office, President Bush did something that would have grave bearing on the Clinton administration's foreign policy: he sent 28,000 U.S. troops to feed starving civilians in Somalia. Although President Bush viewed the Somalia mission as purely humanitarian, National Security Advisor Scowcroft saw two national interests present that were "intimately connected with our decision not to intervene in Yugoslavia." He argued at the time, first, that the United States had to demonstrate that "it was not that we were afraid to intervene abroad; it was just that the circumstances weren't right in Bosnia." Second, Scowcroft believed that the United States had to show Muslim nations that the U.S. decision to stay out of Bosnia was not rooted in the victims' Muslim faith. "For me, Somalia gave us the ability to show they were wrong," he says. "It was a Southern Hemisphere state; it was black; it was non-Christian; it was everything that epitomized the Third World." When asked why the Third World mattered at all to U.S. vital interests, Scowcroft says, "The opinions of leaders in the Third World matter because to be a 'world leader,' you have to convince people it is in their interest to follow. If everyone hates you, it is hard to be a world leader."

The Somalia intervention made it far less likely that the United States would do something to curb the killing in Bosnia. Bush had ordered a humanitarian intervention; U.S. troops were otherwise engaged.

Meanwhile, the war raged on in Bosnia. The only good news Bosnians received as they endured their first winter of war was that their interventionist ally Bill Clinton had won the U.S. presidential election. Help, they felt sure, was on the way.

## Response (Clinton)

### "An Early and Crucial Test"

If Americans have learned to shrug off campaign pledges, the potential beneficiaries of those promises overseas are often less jaded. Clinton the presidential candidate had argued that the United States did have a dog in

the Bosnian fight. And even though President Bush had used the bully pulpit to argue against action, by the time of Clinton's inauguration in January 1993, some 58 percent of Americans believed military force should be used to protect aid deliveries and prevent atrocities.<sup>95</sup> Clinton chose as his top foreign policy adviser Anthony Lake. Lake had earned a reputation as a man of conscience for resigning from the National Security Council to protest President Nixon's 1970 decision to send U.S. troops into Cambodia. In *Foreign Policy* magazine in 1971, Lake and a colleague had reflected on the process by which Americans of noble character could have allowed themselves to wage the Vietnam War, which had such immoral consequences: "The answer to that question begins with a basic intellectual approach which views foreign policy as a lifeless, bloodless set of abstractions," they wrote:

A liberalism attempting to deal with intensely *human* problems at home abruptly but naturally shifts to abstract concepts when making decisions about events beyond the water's edge. "Nations," "interests," "influence," "prestige"—all are disembodied and dehumanized terms which encourage easy inattention to the real people whose lives our decisions affect or even end.<sup>96</sup>

When Lake and his Democratic colleagues were put to the test, however, although they were far more attentive to the human suffering in Bosnia, they did not intervene to ameliorate it.

Soon after being tapped to become national security adviser, Lake received a lengthy memo from Richard Holbrooke, who had just returned from Bosnia. On this trip, his second, taken just after Christmas 1992, Holbrooke visited Sarajevo, where he saw the town's Muslims burning books in an effort to warm their frigid homes. He stayed in the Holiday Inn, whose rooms were still stained with blood left over from the early killings. He also interviewed survivors of Serb camps in northern Bosnia. One man who described the horror of life in the Manjaca camp fished out two wooden figures from beneath his mattress. The figures, which he had carved with a piece of broken glass, depicted prisoners as they had been forced to stand: with their heads down and hands tied behind their backs. When Holbrooke had made a motion to hand them back, the former prisoner stopped him. "No," he said. "Please take them back to your country and show them to your people. Show the Americans how we have been

treated. Tell America what is happening to us." On January 1, 1993, while Holbrooke waited at Sarajevo airport for Serb clearance to depart, he wrote in his journal: "If I don't make my views known to the new [Clinton] team, I will not have done enough to help the desperate people we have just seen; but if I push my views, I will appear too aggressive. I feel trapped."<sup>97</sup> He returned to the United States and carried the carved figures around with him, appearing with them on the Charlie Rose show and getting them photographed and printed in a full-page, color spread in the *New York Times Magazine*. In his memo to Lake and Clinton's new secretary of state, Warren Christopher, Holbrooke offered to serve as a U.S. mediator in the Balkans. He never received a response to his offer.

The Clinton foreign policy team did undertake a thorough Bosnia policy review. The foreign service veterans who had served in the Bush administration needed time to adjust to the new sense of possibility. "Career officers, who had been conditioned to temerity through two years of Bush administration inaction, inattention, and pre-election jitters, did not seem to realize that they could now speak openly and even favorably of military solutions," Bosnia desk officer Harris later observed.<sup>98</sup>

The Clinton team at least seemed prepared to offer a candid diagnosis of the conflict. On February 10, 1993, ten months after the start of the war and with some 100,000 estimated dead, Secretary Christopher, another veteran of the Carter administration, issued a statement far sterner than any of those of senior Bush administration officials:

This conflict may be far from our shores, but it is certainly not distant from our concerns. We cannot afford to ignore it. . . . Bold tyrants and fearful minorities are watching to see whether ethnic cleansing is a policy the world will tolerate. If we hope to promote the spread of freedom, if we hope to encourage the emergence of peaceful ethnic democracies, our answer must be a resounding no.<sup>99</sup>

The secretary then vividly described Serb ethnic cleansing "pursued through mass murders, systematic beatings, and the rape of Muslims and others, prolonged shellings of innocents in Sarajevo and elsewhere, forced displacements of entire villages, [and] inhuman treatment of prisoners in detention camps." He said he recognized that the world's response would constitute "an early and crucial test of how it will address the critical concerns of ethnic and religious minorities in the post-Cold War world."

But Christopher's prescriptions were weak. He vowed to bring "the full weight of American diplomacy to bear on finding a peaceful solution."<sup>100</sup> He did not deliver an ultimatum to the Serbs. He did not mention military force. The Serbs faced only the familiar obligation to turn up for peace talks. Deprived at home of running water, gas, electricity, and basic goods, most Balkan officials welcomed the opportunity to take diplomatic (and shopping) trips to plush hotels in New York, London, and Geneva.

Although interventionists within the State Department were distraught at the vagueness of the newly unveiled policy, they attempted to put a positive spin on the announcement. "We saw we had started with this horrible Christopher statement," Harris recalls. "But we knew things were bad and weren't going to get better, particularly after Milosevic himself saw this statement. At least this administration understood what was going on over there. We figured events would quickly force Christopher to revise our policy."

## Open Dissent

On the eve of Christopher's much-anticipated policy announcement, career foreign service officers Hooper and Johnson had stepped up to the microphone at the State Department's "open forum," a program that enables department employees and guests of employees to speak in small or large settings about pressing policy dilemmas. Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani had used the same forum to urge the United States to respond to Saddam Hussein's Anfal offensive against the Kurds. Whereas just two dozen people had turned up to hear Talabani in 1988, however, more than 200 gathered to hear Hooper and Johnson in 1993. In Hooper's ten-minute speech, which he had agonized over for weeks, he relayed the message he had received earlier from Eagleburger's office director: Overwhelming support for intervention among the department's rank and file was not being communicated up the chain. Just because his colleagues were hearing people by their watercoolers speaking about Bosnia did not mean that the message was reaching the seventh floor, where power (in the form of the secretary and his or her most senior advisers) is concentrated.

Hooper denounced the Western powers' reliance on mere negotiations, declaring:

If the conflict reflected legal and constitutional differences over the breakup of Yugoslavia, creative diplomacy and split-the-difference negotiations would offer promise. We could rely on the tools of our profession—memos, cables, communiqués, meetings, visits, and talking points—to facilitate a genuine peace process. But the conflict is driven by a Serb bid for racial and national supremacy. As such, it can be halted, reversed, and defeated *only* by military force.

This was the first time in a twenty-year bureaucratic career that Hooper had allowed his frustration to erupt in public. He likened America's "self-deluding" faith in the peace process to that of the Allies before World War II, reminding listeners, "The problem with Munich wasn't its clauses or the map." Hooper referenced the history books he had been reading, playing up the department's quietude during Hitler's genocide. "Not every institution gets a second chance," Hooper said, pausing for effect. "This is our second chance." The department should declare "unequivocally, officially, and publicly" that Serbia was practicing genocide. Hooper's remarks were unclassified and disseminated via cable to all diplomatic posts. "You would not believe the number of people in the department who came up to me after that speech to thank me," he recalls.

Still, Hooper knew that few of his concerned colleagues would dare to challenge their superiors. He decided to enlist a voice of moral authority from outside the building: Elie Wiesel. Wiesel had already played a key role convincing Eagleburger to name names in December 1992. And on April 22, 1993, at the opening ceremony for the Holocaust Museum in Washington, Wiesel spoke extemporaneously to President Clinton, who was seated behind him. "Mr. President, I cannot *not* tell you something," Wiesel memorably declared, turning away from the podium to face the president. "I have been in the former Yugoslavia last fall. I cannot sleep since what I have seen. As a Jew I am saying that. We must do something to stop the bloodshed in that country."<sup>101</sup>

President Clinton was quick to distinguish the two crimes. "I think the Holocaust is on a whole different level," he told reporters later in the day. "I think it is without precedent or peer in human history." U.S. inaction over Bosnia could not be compared with the U.S. failure to bomb the railroads to the Nazi camps. Still, he acknowledged that "ethnic cleansing is the kind of inhumanity that the Holocaust took to the nth degree," and said, "I think you have to stand up against it. I think it's wrong." But then he again

revealed his ambivalence, cautioning, "That does not mean that the United States or the United Nations can enter a war."<sup>102</sup>

On April 28, 1993, at Hooper's request, Wiesel spoke out again—this time to a packed Dean Acheson Auditorium at the State Department. More than 300 people assembled to hear Wiesel critique U.S. idleness. The most dramatic moment occurred not in the auditorium but at a small lunch gathering after the event. Wiesel remembers turning to Peter Tarnoff, the undersecretary for political affairs and exclaiming, "These are camps, for heaven's sake! Can't you just liberate one of them?" Tarnoff did not respond, but Ralph Johnson, the principal deputy assistant secretary for European affairs, attempted to defend the administration. "We're afraid that if we did try to liberate them, there would be retaliation and the prisoners inside would be killed," Johnson said. After a long, awkward silence, Wiesel looked up, eyes flashing, and he said quietly, "Do you realize that that is precisely what the State Department said during World War II?"

As Hooper, Wiesel, and others continued to try to provoke a more aggressive policy by pointing to the Holocaust, Clinton's team entered an ungainly wiggle campaign to avoid calling events genocide.

On March 30, 1993, at a Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee hearing, Senator Dennis DeConcini (D.—Ariz.) challenged Christopher: "Is there any doubt in your mind that indeed genocide has occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina?" he asked. The secretary of state responded: "There's no doubt in my mind that rape and ethnic cleansing and other almost indescribable acts have taken place and it certainly rises to the level that is tantamount to genocide. The technical definition is not perhaps what's important here, but what is important is that it is atrocious conduct, it is atrocity after atrocity and must be stopped."<sup>103</sup> Both Clinton and Christopher tended to speak about the conflict as if they were still on the campaign trail and not the individuals best positioned to bring about the stoppage.

Congressman McCloskey, the Democrat from Indiana, became the Hill's most forceful crusader to see the term applied. In November 1992 McCloskey had traveled for a second time to the region, this time to Bosnia, where he saw that the dire predictions issued to him in Belgrade the previous year had been borne out. He heard tales of rapes, beatings, and castrations with gardening shears that invigorated his efforts on the House Armed Services Committee. "The stories of the people were unbeliev-

able," McCloskey recalls. "It was almost a Pol Pot-like scenario in terms of what the Serbs were doing to the intellectuals, the teachers, the engineers." McCloskey was particularly moved by an eighty-one-year-old Muslim woman who took McCloskey aside and described watching the Serbs kill her entire family. Before the Serbs entered her home, she had begged her son to shoot her to spare her what she knew she would witness. But he refused, and she had to watch Serb militiamen butchering him. When she met McCloskey, she was so devastated by her memories that she faulted her son for lacking the courage to kill her.

When McCloskey returned to the United States, he told this woman's story again and again to relay not only the savagery of the Bosnian war but the tragedy of its legacy. Atrocity survivors were often bracketed as the "lucky ones," but many were left with parting images of their loved ones so horrific that they envied the dead. The memories were doubly devastating. A friend or relative being bludgeoned, stabbed, or shot. And the sight of the person reduced in their final moments to primal behavior. In Bosnia, where gardens were so often turned into killing fields and homes became infernos, families who were minding their own business inside were rarely prepared for the late-night knock on the door. And for those executed in the middle of the night, it was this very lack of preparedness—the fact that they were enacting their humanity until the very end—that ensured they had tasted life too recently to surrender it. They had not yet given up either on the possibility of persuasion or the killer's capacity for mercy. Although they felt shame in doing so, they went to unseemly lengths to hang on. While the victims' hopes were rewarded with a bullet down the throat or a knife in the groin, the survivors' memories of those last moments drowned out all others.<sup>104</sup> Instead of remembering friends and loved ones for the ways they lived, survivors remembered them for the ghastly ways they died.

McCloskey replayed his unexpected and unwanted bloody Balkan anecdotes often enough to irritate his colleagues on the Hill. All told he made nearly a dozen trips to the region during the three-and-a-half-year war. On his return McCloskey chased potential allies around the halls. "Staking out these issues, people looked at you like you were living on the moon," he recalls. "They would say to me, 'But that has nothing to do with Decatur, Illinois,' or 'My constituency isn't interested in that.'" Most of McCloskey's colleagues found ways to avoid him. McCloskey was especially disappointed when his colleagues attacked him personally for his stand. Ron Dellums (D.—Calif.), the chairman of the Armed Services

Committee, castigated McCloskey as a warmonger. McCloskey recalls: "I almost walked out of the meeting and resigned right then and there from the committee. There was no justice to allowing people to be killed and mutilated. To me it was a very obvious issue. I guess I could understand somebody not agreeing with me, but to call me a 'warmonger,' that was just too much."

McCloskey had secured a copy of the genocide convention and frequently returned to its text. "There are degrees of genocide and different genocidal leaders have different capabilities for destruction," McCloskey recalls. Like Lemkin and Galbraith, McCloskey was adamant that the Holocaust not be treated as the threshold for action. "I had to show people there was nothing in the genocide convention that says a crime has to hit Nazi proportions to count as genocide."

On April 1, 1993, at a House International Operations Subcommittee hearing, McCloskey began the first of a memorable series of exchanges with Secretary Christopher on the use of what became known as the "g-word":

**Rep. McCloskey:** Previously to the Congress in response to a question as to whether or not genocide has taken place in Bosnia, the reply from State was that acts tantamount to genocide have taken place. I think that's not a clear answer to a very important and policy-driving question. Would you order a clear, explicit determination, yes or no, if the outrageous Serb systematic barbarism amounts to genocide?

**Sec. Christopher:** With respect to the definition of the circumstances in Bosnia, we certainly will reply to that. That is a legal question that you've posed. I've said several times that the conduct there is an atrocity. The killing, the raping, the ethnic cleansing is definitely an atrocious set of acts. Whether it meets the technical legal definition of genocide is a matter that we'll look into and get back to you.<sup>105</sup>

Later that month outgoing department spokesman Richard Boucher asked Bosnia desk officer Harris to draft a statement that said that "the United States Government believes that the practice of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia includes actions that meet the international definition of genocide." But the statement was killed—according to Harris—by incoming spokesman Thomas Donilon after he consulted with Secretary Christopher.

## A Healthy Exchange

As the policy horizon became clear, those who worked the issue day to day grew more, not less, uneasy. Harris, an eight-year veteran of the State Department, decided he had little to lose by openly challenging the administration's timidity. Soon after Christopher's appearance on Capitol Hill, just as the Serbs looked destined to overrun the Muslim-held town of Srebrenica, Harris drafted a letter to Christopher that noted that the United States was trying to stop a Serb "genocide" with political and economic pressures alone. "In effect," the letter said, "the result of this course has been Western capitulation to Serbian aggression."<sup>106</sup> The policy had to change. Every State Department country officer that Harris approached agreed to sign the letter—desk officers for Serbia and Montenegro, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia, as well as several officials involved in East European affairs and U.S. policy at the United Nations—forming a group that became known as the "dirty dozen." Harris believes he could have got many more signatures if he had had the time to do so. "When you are in a bureaucracy, you can either put your head down and become cynical, tired and inured," Harris observes. "Or you can stick your head up and try to do something."

The junior and midlevel officials were aided by their influential allies outside the State Department. The "dirty dozen" dissent letter was leaked, and the message of the dissenters was reinforced by a chorus of appreciative cries from elite opinion-makers. The war was dragging on, and many prominent Americans were distressed by Clinton's passivity. Well-known hawks from across the Atlantic weighed in. In a television interview former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who had admonished President Bush not to "go all wobbly" after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, said of Bosnia: "I never thought I'd see another holocaust in my life again." She later wondered whether she should get into the "rent-a-spine business."<sup>107</sup>

Senator Joseph Biden (D.-Del.) had partnered with Dole in a bipartisan Senate campaign to aid the besieged Muslims. Under President Bush, the pair had introduced legislation that would have authorized the provision of up to \$50 million in Defense Department stocks of military weapons and equipment to the Bosnian Muslims as soon as the embargo was lifted. Biden visited Sarajevo in April and, on his return, his rage intensified. Sounding a lot like Theodore Roosevelt three-quarters of a century earlier,

Biden accused the Clinton administration of placing relief workers and peacekeepers in circumstances in which they did not belong and then using their presence as an excuse for inaction. The new world order was in shambles, he declared, because the United States and its allies were giving a new meaning to collective security. "As defined by this generation of leaders," Biden said, "collective security means arranging to blame one another for inaction, so that everyone has an excuse. It does not mean standing together; it means hiding together."<sup>108</sup>

In May 1993, as a result of pressure from inside and outside, Clinton finally agreed to a new U.S. policy, known as "lift and strike." The president dispatched Secretary Christopher on a high-profile trip to Europe to "sell" America's allies on lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims and bombing the Serbs, the two measures recommended by Hooper and Johnson in their twenty-seven-page dissent the previous year and by Holbrooke and countless others in the media. The Bosnian Muslim leadership continued to stress that it did not want U.S. troops, only an end to U.S. support for a UN sanction that tied their hands and left the Serbs with an overwhelmingly military advantage.

But Clinton's support for the plan proved shallow and Christopher's salesmanship nonexistent. According to journalist Elizabeth Drew, Hillary Clinton gave her husband a copy of Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*, a deftly written travel book that portrays people in the Balkans as if they were destined to hate and kill.<sup>109</sup> Fearful of a quagmire in an unmendable region, Clinton reportedly "went south" on lift and strike. One NATO official who was present at the meeting between Secretary Christopher and NATO secretary-general Manfred Woerner remembers Christopher's singular lack of enthusiasm for the policy. He never lifted his nose from his notes. "Christopher started talking about the proposed U.S. policy of lift and strike, but doing it in a way that emphasized the disadvantages rather than the advantages," the official recalls. "There was a moment when Woerner realized what was going on: He was being invited to think the policy was a bad idea. The problem was he didn't think it was a bad idea at all." Christopher returned to the United States saying he had enjoyed a healthy "exchange of ideas," with his European counterparts. There had indeed been a healthy exchange. As Richard Perle, a former Bush administration Defense Department official put it, "Christopher went over to Europe with an American policy and he came back with a European one." The lift and strike policy was abandoned.

In the wake of Christopher's visit, the United States and the other powers on the UN Security Council settled upon a compromise policy. Instead of lifting the embargo and bombing the Serbs, they agreed to create "safe areas" in the Muslim-held eastern enclave of Srebrenica, in the capital city of Sarajevo, and in four other heavily populated civilian centers that were under Serb siege. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told the Security Council that 30,000 troops would be needed to protect them. Thanks largely to the American refusal to contribute soldiers and fatigue among European states with troops already in Bosnia, only a tiny fraction of the forces needed to man, monitor, and defend these pockets arrived. President Clinton himself called the safe areas "shooting galleries." The problem remained unsolved, the Serbs remained virtually unimpeded, and the outrage that had briefly focused Clinton's attention on the tragedy gradually subsided. The world's gaze shifted. And the safe areas were left lightly tended and extremely vulnerable.

When the lift and strike plan surfaced, the young foreign service officers had believed that the system might reward them for their dissent. They were devastated by the safe-area compromise. They had seen the Christopher trip as the last, best hope to change the policy and save the shrinking country of Bosnia. Senator Dole, the Senate minority leader, took to the editorial pages, criticizing Clinton for finally coming up with a "realistic" Bosnia policy and then dropping it "when consensus did not magically appear on his doorstep." Dole warned that even if it seemed that only humanitarian interests were at stake in Bosnia, in fact *American* interests were under siege as well. If Clinton stood by in the face of Serb atrocities in Bosnia, Milosevic would soon turn on Albanians in Kosovo, provoking a regional war. Islamic fundamentalists were using Western indifference to Muslim suffering as a recruiting device. And global instability was on the rise because the United States and its allies had signaled that borders could be changed by force with no international consequence. "The United States, instead of leading, has publicly hesitated and waffled," Dole wrote. "This shirking and shrinking American presence on the global stage is exactly the type of invitation dictators and aggressors dream of." He urged Clinton to summon his NATO allies and issue an ultimatum: The Serbs must adhere to the latest cease-fire accord, permit the free passage of all humanitarian convoys, place its fearsome heavy weapons under UN control, and disband its paramilitary forces. If they failed to meet the U.S. demands, air strikes should begin and the arms embargo against the

Bosnian Muslims should be lifted so that the Muslims themselves could protect the vulnerable safe areas.<sup>110</sup>

Dole was ignored right along with the State Department's in-house hawks.

### "A Long Way from Home"

The Clinton White House deplored the suffering of Bosnians far more than had the Bush White House, but a number of factors caused Clinton to back off from using force. First, the U.S. military advised against intervention. Clinton and his senior political advisers had little personal experience with military matters. The Democrats had not occupied the White House since 1980. General Colin Powell, who remained chairman of the Joint Chiefs until the end of September 1993, was still guided by a deep hostility to humanitarian missions that implicated no vital U.S. interests. Clinton was particularly deferential to Powell because the president had been publicly derided as a "draft dodger" in the campaign and because he had bungled an early effort to allow gay soldiers to serve in the U.S. armed forces.

Second, Clinton's foreign policy architects were committed multilateralists. They would act only with the consent and active participation of their European partners. France and Britain had deployed a combined 5,000 peacekeepers to Bosnia to aid the UN delivery of humanitarian aid, and they feared Serb retaliation against the troops. They also trusted that the Vance-Owen negotiation process would eventually pay dividends. With the Serbs controlling some 70 percent of the country by 1993, many European leaders privately urged ethnic partition. Clinton was also worried about offending the Russians, who sympathized with their fellow Orthodox Christian Serbs.

Third, Clinton was worried about American public opinion. As the Bush team had done, the Clinton administration kept one eye on the ground in Bosnia and one eye fixed on the polls. Although a plurality in the American public supported U.S. intervention, the percentages tended to vary with slight shifts in the questions asked. And U.S. officials did not trust that public support would withstand U.S. casualties. The more poll-conscious officials were criticized for adopting a "Snow White approach" to foreign policy. In effect, they asked, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, how can we get the highest poll numbers of them all?" And they worked to dampen

moral outrage, steering senior officials to adopt the imagery and wording of "tragedy" over that of "terror." "Many people, while sympathizing with the Bosnian Muslims, find the situation too confusing, too complicated and too frustrating," said Defense Secretary William Perry. "They say that Bosnia is a tragedy, but not our tragedy. They say that we should wash our hands of the whole situation." According to Perry, there was "no support, either in the public or in the Congress, for taking sides in this war as a combatant, so we will not."<sup>111</sup>

Americans have historically opposed military campaigns abroad except in cases where the United States or its citizens have been attacked or in instances where the United States has intervened and then appealed to the public afterward, when it has benefited from the "rally-around-the-flag" effect. In the absence of American leadership, the public is usually ambivalent at best. Six months before Pearl Harbor, 76 percent of Americans polled favored supplying aid to Britain, but 79 percent opposed actually entering World War II.<sup>112</sup> Once the United States was involved, of course, support soared. Two months before the invasion of Panama in 1989, just 26 percent of Americans supported committing troops to overthrow military strongman Manuel Noriega, but once it came, 80 percent backed the decision to invade.<sup>113</sup> A week after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, before President Bush had mobilized support for U.S. combat, a majority of Americans opposed invading Iraq or even staging air strikes against Iraqi military bases. Four out of ten went so far as to say that the United States "should not get involved in a land war in the Middle East even if Iraq's invasion means that Iraq permanently controls Kuwait."<sup>114</sup> Even after the president had deployed troops to the Gulf and demonized Hussein as "Hitler," Americans preferred to stick with economic and diplomatic sanctions. Asked directly in November 1990 if the United States should go to war, 58 percent said no. Some 62 percent considered it likely that the crisis could "bog down and become another Vietnam situation."<sup>115</sup> When the prospect of U.S. casualties was raised, support dropped further.<sup>116</sup> Yet when U.S. troops battled the Iraqi Republican Guard, more than 80 percent backed Bush's decision to fight.<sup>117</sup>

Instead of leading the American people to support humanitarian intervention, Clinton adopted a policy of nonconfrontation. The administration would not confront the Serbs, and just as fundamentally, they would not confront opponents of intervention within the U.S. military or the Western alliance. Clinton's foreign policy team awaited consensus and drifted into



the habits of its predecessor. Clinton himself testified to what would be his deep ambivalence about a U.S. role in the Balkans: "The U.S. should always seek an opportunity to stand up against—at least *speak out against*—inhumanity," he said.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, the administration's language shifted from that of moral imperative to that of an amoral mess. The "futility" imagery of tribal hatreds returned. Secretary of State Christopher said, "The hatred between all three groups . . . is almost unbelievable. It's almost terrifying, and it's centuries old. That really is a problem from hell. And I think that the United States is doing all we can to try to deal with that problem."<sup>119</sup> British foreign secretary Neville Chamberlain once called the strife over Czechoslovakia "a quarrel in a foreign country between people of whom we know nothing." In May 1993 Secretary Christopher described the war in Bosnia as "a humanitarian crisis a long way from home, in the middle of another continent."<sup>120</sup>

Many senior officials found it difficult to argue with their junior officers about the magnitude of the moral stakes at play in Bosnia. But as had happened with regard to the Holocaust, Cambodia, and northern Iraq, they resolved their internal conflicts by telling themselves that other interests and indeed other values trumped those involved in the Balkans. Intervention in Bosnia might have perverse consequences for the very people the United States sought to help. The more peacekeepers who were present in Bosnia helping deliver relief or deterring attacks against safe areas, the more Western policy became hostage to concerns about the peacekeepers' welfare. If the arms embargo were lifted or the Serbs bombed, humanitarian aid would be suspended, UN peacekeepers withdrawn, negotiations canceled, and the intended beneficiaries, Bosnia's Muslims, made far worse off.

Some very cherished goods at home would also be jeopardized. After more than a decade of Republican rule in the White House, leading Democrats spoke about the importance of carrying out domestic reforms. Jimmy Carter had squandered his opportunity by getting mired in a hostage crisis in Iran, people said; Clinton could not forfeit this historic moment. Dick Morris, Clinton's erstwhile pollster who liked to dabble in foreign policy decisionmaking, made noninvolvement in Bosnia a "central element" of his advice. "You don't want to be Lyndon Johnson," he said to Clinton early on, "sacrificing your potential for doing good on the domestic front by a destructive, never-ending foreign involvement. It's the

Democrats' disease to take the same compassion that motivates their domestic policies and let it lure them into heroic but ill-considered foreign wars."<sup>121</sup> Sure, the moral stakes were high, but the moral stakes at home were even higher.<sup>122</sup>

## Atrocities "on All Sides"

To quell the unease that lurked in the halls of Foggy Bottom, senior officials drifted into the familiar "blame-the-victim" approach invoked whenever one's morals collide with one's actions. No genocide since the Holocaust has been completely black and white, and policymakers have been able to accentuate the grayness and moral ambiguity of each crisis. The Armenians and Kurds were not loyal to the state. In Bosnia the Muslim army carried out abuses, too. "All sides" were again said to be guilty. President Clinton said, "Until these folks get tired of killing each other, bad things will continue to happen." In the *New Republic* Anna Husarska noted the illogic of Clinton's position. "I guess if President Clinton had been around during the 1943 uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, he would also have called it 'those folks out there killing each other,'" she wrote. "How would he describe the brief armed rebellion in the Treblinka concentration camp?"<sup>123</sup>

Bosnia desk officer Harris remembers his supervisor Mike Habib's questioning reports on Serb shelling:

He didn't want us to be seen pointing the finger when we weren't going to do anything. So he'd say, "How do you know it's the Serbs?" I would say that the Serbs were positioned outside the town with heavy weapons and the town was being shelled, so the Serbs were shelling the town. That wasn't good enough. I had to write, "There was shelling" or "There were reports of shelling." It was as if there was spontaneous combustion across Bosnia.

It is probably no coincidence that the less-experienced U.S. officials were likelier to let their human response to the carnage bubble over. These low-ranking officials did not allow their understanding of the slim odds of American intervention to cloud or alter their assessments of the problem. But their internal analysis and ongoing appeals met silence. They sent

reports daily from intelligence officers, embassy staff, and journalists in the field up the chain of command and watched them become more sanitized at each rung of the ladder. By the time the analysis reached the secretary of state—when it did—the reports would have been unrecognizable to their original drafters. "The Clinton policy was unrealistic, but nobody wanted to change it," says Harris. "So those who defended it consciously and unconsciously contorted the reality on the ground in Bosnia to make the chosen policy seem sensible." Unwilling to alter the policy, officials in the Clinton administration had to reinterpret the facts.

On May 18, 1993, Christopher delivered unfathomable remarks to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in which he stunned listeners by insinuating that the Bosnian Muslims themselves had committed genocide:

First, with respect to the moral case that you make, one of the just absolutely bewildering parts of this problem is that the moral case is devastating and clear that there are atrocities, but there are atrocities on all sides. As I said in my statement, the most—perhaps the most serious recent fighting has been between the Croats and the Muslims . . . you'll find indication of atrocities by all three of the major parties against each other. The level of hatred is just incredible. So, you know, it's somewhat different than the holocaust. It's been easy to analogize this to the holocaust, but I never heard of any genocide by the Jews against the German people.<sup>124</sup>

Before this testimony, according to one State Department official, Christopher had sent an urgent appeal to the department's Human Rights Bureau, requesting evidence of Bosnian Muslim atrocities.<sup>125</sup>

In Bosnia, as time passed, the conflict did take on more and more of the appearances of a civil war. During the Bush era, Serb paramilitaries, police, and regular armies had rounded up unarmed civilians and hauled them into camps; they had shelled city centers, looted homes, raped women, and expelled nearly 2 million Muslims and Croats from their homes. By the time Clinton took office, the Serbs had completed much of their ethnic cleansing and occupied almost three-quarters of the country. The Muslims had gradually assembled a ragtag army. They had also developed a smuggling network that enabled them to endure the Serbs' frequent suspensions of humanitarian aid and to begin equipping their defenders with light arms. A Serbo-Croatian expression says, "It takes two spoons to make

noise." Although the Muslims had begun to make noise by meeting Serb attacks, they mustered only a teaspoon against a shovel, and only in certain areas of the country. By the time Clinton's cabinet began rummaging to prove parity, the Muslims had lost additional favor by going to war with Croats in central Bosnia (largely on the Croats' instigation). This complicated the picture by creating multiple aggressors. When the Muslims had no arms, no army, and no chance against the high-powered Serbs in 1992, the Bush administration had been careful to stress there were "no good guys." By mid-1993, when those same Muslims had acquired arms, an army, and a second front, it is not surprising that the language of "factions" and "warring parties" predominated.

The reality of the Bosnian "resistance" was far more pathetic. The heavily armed Serb forces donned crisp uniforms donated by the Yugoslav National Army from which they descended, whereas the Bosnian Muslim forces looked as though they had pieced together their uniforms by touring a host of garage sales, plucking garments of all shapes, sizes, and colors from a variety of different neighborhoods. Nothing fit or matched. Their efforts seemed so amateur that they evoked George Orwell's descriptions of the antifascists' attempt to defend the town of Barcelona against an attack by Franco's forces. The motley group in Spain had sought to shore up their positions by stacking sandbags outside their defenses and uprooting heavy cobblestones from the central plaza. Yet lacking the required mercenary instinct, they had patiently stopped to number each cobblestone with chalk so that they could return the stones to their rightful slots after the fighting had subsided.

One reason Western negotiators and U.S. policymakers succumbed to the temptation to equate all sides might be that they were equally frustrated by all sides. Diplomats quickly discerned that none of the Balkan leaders—Muslim, Serb, or Croat—were particularly concerned about the fate of their own people. With few exceptions, the political leaders did not seem moved by the ways their intransigence in negotiations doomed those on the battlefield or in the streets. This divide between warmakers and war casualties was not new. In 1917 when Siegfried Sassoon refused to return to the French front, he prepared a "A Soldier's Declaration," arguing that politicians who did not themselves suffer the conflict would deliberately prolong it. In the letter, printed in the *Times*, Sassoon said he hoped he might "help to destroy the callous complaisance with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of the agonies which they do not

share and have not sufficient imagination to realize."<sup>126</sup> The callousness and lack of imagination that characterized Bosnia's wartime Serb, Croat, and Muslim leaders gave Western diplomats legitimate grounds for despair.

But American and European frustration stemmed mainly from the foreigners' impatience with the Muslim refusal to quit. The cherished but churlish "peace process" hinged upon the Muslims' agreeing to surrender much of the territory from which they had been brutally expelled. Many diplomats felt that the Muslims should sign away the country in the interest of peace. Because the Serbs took so much territory so quickly, they were able to portray themselves as positively pacifist, whereas the Muslims wanted to take back their homes.

A subsequent CIA study found that Serbs were "responsible for the vast majority of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia." Croats and Muslims had committed "discrete" atrocities, the CIA found, but theirs lacked "the sustained intensity, orchestration, and scale of the Bosnian Serbs' efforts."<sup>127</sup> Hardly a partisan of U.S. intervention, the CIA concluded that "90 percent" of the atrocities committed during the three-and-a-half-year war were the handiwork of Serb paramilitary and military forces.

### "No National Interest"

In July 1993 the Olympic city of Sarajevo came under fierce artillery fire and looked poised to fall. The U.S. press abounded with stories on the human toll of the carnage. As the world looked to the United States for leadership and solutions, Secretary Christopher came clean with the thinking that had come to inform and justify Clinton policy. When a reporter asked what the United States would do to stop what seemed to be the imminent fall of Sarajevo, Christopher responded: "That's a tragic, tragic situation in Bosnia, make no mistake about that. It's the world's most difficult diplomatic problem I believe. It defies any simple solution. The United States is doing all that it can consistent with our national interest."<sup>128</sup> Christopher was a veteran of the Carter foreign policy team that had helped introduce the rhetoric of human rights into foreign policy. But here only national interests, narrowly defined, would count, and Bosnia was not one. The United States would do what it could to help provide humanitarian relief, to maintain economic sanctions against Serbia, and to support diplomatic efforts. When the journalist continued to press him,



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Christopher bristled: "I would ask you to go back and either look at what I said or I'll say it again. What I said was the United States is doing all that it can consistent with its national interest, and I've discussed before at some length what our national interest is in this situation."

A few of the State Department junior officials who worked daily on the former Yugoslavia were watching Christopher on television in their offices. While their boss floundered under the reporters' continued grilling, they joked that the secretary seemed to be "scouring the room for a black or Asian face" so that he could call on somebody who might steer the discussion away from the "problem from hell." The following day, the Bosnian Serbs fired 3,777 shells into Sarajevo in a sixteen-hour period, one of the highest counts ever recorded.<sup>129</sup>

Between the outbreak of war in April 1992 and July 1993, America's new breed of "conscientious objectors" had continued to believe in the possibility of changing policy from inside the U.S. government. The interventionists within the ranks were not told to their faces that their ideas were off the wall. Bureaucratic ritual had become better at incorporating dissent, and they were shrewdly "domesticated" or assigned the role of "official dissenters." They argued positions that were predictable and thus

easier to dismiss. Former National Security Council official James C. Thomson Jr., who resigned the NSC over Vietnam, described the ways the Johnson administration had once "warmly institutionalized" Undersecretary of State George Ball as the "inhouse devil's advocate" on Vietnam. Ball had been urged to speak his piece. Thomson remembered,

Ball felt good, I assume (he had fought for righteousness); the others felt good (they had given a full hearing to the dovish option); and there was minimal unpleasantness. The club remained intact; and it is of course possible that matters would have gotten worse faster if Mr. Ball had kept silent, or left before his final departure in the fall of 1966.

According to Thomson, the president greeted the arrival at meetings of Bill Moyers, his dissenting press secretary, with an affectionate, "Well, here comes Mr. Stop-the-Bombing."<sup>130</sup>

By the summer of 1993 the Bosnia dissenters in the State Department and on Capitol Hill, too, had been "heard" and discounted. In this case Clinton and his senior officials might well have greeted a hawk like McCloskey and Dole on Capitol Hill or Harris, Hooper, and Western in the State Department as "Mr. Start-the-Bombing."

## Exit

The State Department is difficult to leave. As with most hierarchical institutions, rituals entrench the solidarity of "members." Stiff "initiation costs" include fiercely competitive foreign service exams, tedious years of stamping visas in consular offices around the world, and dull desk jobs in the home office. Because of the association of service with "honor" and "country," exit is often seen as betrayal. Those few who depart on principle are excommunicated or labeled whistle-blowers. U.S. foreign policy lore is not laden with tales of the heroic resignee.

A further deterrent to exit is that the very people who care enough about a policy to contemplate resigning in protest often believe their departure will make it less likely that the policy will improve. Bureaucrats can easily fall into the "efficacy trap," overestimating the chances they will succeed in making change.<sup>131</sup> Dropping out can feel like copping out. The perverse result is that officials may exhibit a greater tendency to stay in an institution the worse they deem its actions.

By August 1993, despite all of these factors weighing against exit, existence within the State Department had become so insufferable for a small group of young officers that they took their leave. They found the U.S. policy so timid, so passive, and so doomed to fail that they chose to disassociate themselves from the administration and to go public with their discontent.

For Marshall Harris, the Bosnia desk officer and the lead author of the April 1993 dissent letter, there was nothing conscientious about objecting to a policy that would never change. In July Harris had drafted an "action memorandum" that outlined options for easing the siege of Sarajevo. By the time it had arrived on the seventh floor, however, the memo had been demoted to a "discussion paper." Christopher's "no national interests" pronouncement on July 21 was the last straw. On August 4, 1993, one year after the skeletal figures in the concentration camps had appeared on television and foreign service officer George Kenney had resigned, Harris followed suit. He quit only after he had lined up a job with Congressman McCloskey, who had turned criticizing the administration's Bosnia policy into a nearly full-time pursuit. "I was lucky," Harris recalls. "I could at least go straight to a job where I felt like I still had an official voice and might still influence policy." In a letter addressed to Secretary Christopher, Harris wrote, "I can no longer serve in a Department of State that accepts the forceful dismemberment of a European state and that will not act against genocide and the Serbian officials who perpetrate it."<sup>132</sup>

Harris was tired of the hypocrisy of Clinton's rhetoric. The administration refused to lead either the American people or its European allies and then complained that its policy was constrained by a lack of support from both. Speaking at a press conference the day after his resignation, Harris, thirty-two, delivered his first public verdict on the administration:

If [President Clinton] were to lead, that would bring the American public along, that would bring along the congressmen who are reluctant to do anything, and it could inspire our European allies to do more. . . . I think the administration would be surprised what it could accomplish if it confronts this issue head on. When it adopts a defeatist mode . . . it's going to get defeatist results.<sup>133</sup>

Like Kenney, Harris was quickly disparaged by his higher-ups. Some said he quit because he had been shut out of the policy loop. State Department spokesman Mike McCurry shrugged off the impact of the resignation,

pointing out that Harris was easily replaceable and saying, "We will fill the position with someone who is interested in working on the Administration's more aggressive policy to save Sarajevo and Bosnia from demise."<sup>134</sup> But Harris's colleagues within the department congratulated him for his courage and thanked him for giving voice to their frustration.

Jon Western, the State Department intelligence analyst, was driving with his wife into work from their home in Alexandria, Virginia, when he learned the news. Glancing at the *New York Times*, he saw a front-page story on Harris's departure. Western was stunned. Beneath the morning paper, he happened to be carrying his own detailed letter of resignation. Christopher's declaration that carnage in Bosnia was not a national interest had pushed him over the edge as well. The thirty-year-old could no longer sleep at night, reading about fathers and sons orally castrating one another or preteen girls raped in front of their parents. This was not a civil war, as Christopher kept saying; it was genocide. Western had been mulling resignation for several months, as he knew the daily death beat was getting the best of him. A few weeks before the Christopher press conference, he had visited the Holocaust Museum and heard the narrator, television journalist Jim Lehrer, recite the words of the Department spokesmen from 1943 and 1944 saying they had information on concentration camps in Europe but had "no ability to confirm the reports." Immediately he found himself transported to August 1992, when Assistant Secretary Tom Niles had said the administration did not have "substantiated information that would confirm the existence of these camps." Western himself had supplied Niles with all the evidence he needed.

On August 6, 1993, after reading the story about Harris's departure, Western went ahead and submitted his resignation letter. "I am personally and professionally heartsick by the unwillingness of the United States to make resolution of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia a top foreign policy priority," Western wrote. He took the elevator from his office on the fourth floor up to the seventh floor and handed the letter to the secretary of state's secretary. Word traveled so fast that by the time he had returned to his office minutes later, his phone had begun ringing off the hook. Harris was in Geneva when he heard about his colleague's exit and was surprised and pleased. Western was simply exhausted. In his journal entry that day, he described himself as "thoroughly demoralized and depressed."

Two weeks later Steven Walker, the Croatia desk officer, became the third diplomat to depart the State Department that month. On August 23, 1993,

Walker wrote, "I can no longer countenance U.S. support for a diplomatic process that legitimizes aggression and genocide."<sup>135</sup> Criticized for his testy response to the earlier exits, Christopher had convened a meeting with Balkan officials on August 13 to clear the air. Now with yet another exit, the secretary had begun to wonder whether the cascade of resignations would ever subside. This time he was far more conciliatory. His spokesman McCurry described Walker's exit as "an honorable form of protest" and said the Bosnian war was "just as frustrating for the secretary as it is for people at the country-desk-officer level who work on the problem."<sup>136</sup>

Nothing like this had happened before. It was the largest wave of resignations in State Department history. The departure of so many promising young officers reflected a degree of despair but also a capacity for disappointment among officials not evident in the previous genocides. In the past, U.S. officials had internalized the policy constraints and the top-level indifference. There were few feuds. But Bosnia caused an enormous policy rift that played itself out in the morning papers, which in turn bolstered the confidence and legitimated the outrage of officials who opposed U.S. policy from within.

After the three resignations, the State Department tried to improve morale by redecorating the offices, putting in new furniture and carpet, and shortening the tours of duty. As Harris remembers, "I guess they thought if they gave us soothing blue walls, people wouldn't be prone to fly off the handle and leave." But it was the policy, not the interior design, that was the problem.

National Security Adviser Lake, who had himself once resigned in protest, was now architect of a policy that was causing others to flee. In his *Foreign Policy* article "The Human Reality of Realpolitik," written in 1971, two decades before he became national security adviser, Lake had complained that the human dimensions of a policy were rarely discussed. "It simply is not *done*," Lake wrote. "Policy—good, steady policy—is made by the 'tough-minded.' . . . To talk of suffering is to lose 'effectiveness,' almost to lose one's grip. It is seen as a sign that one's rational arguments are weak." He had urged that policymakers elevate human costs and benefits to the category of "one of the principal and unashamedly legitimate considerations in *any* decision." In the 1990s, nearly a half century after the Holocaust and two decades since Vietnam, many believed that under Lake's leadership the U.S. foreign policy establishment would be more sensitive to human consequences. Yet at the State Department, officials say, to talk of

human suffering remained something that was "not done." Those who complained about the human consequences of American decisions (or here, nondecisions) were still branded emotional, soft, and irrational. The language of national interest was Washington's lingua franca, and so it would remain.

Lake says he was torn when he heard of the departures:

On the one hand, I agreed with them. They realized that the United States needed to do more, and they were willing to put their careers on the line on behalf of principle. If I had completely disagreed with them, then I could have just dismissed them as grandstanders. But I didn't have that option. On the other hand, I thought they were making it sound easier than it was to change course. There was no unanimity within the government on the issue, never mind with our European allies.

Lake devoted much of his time at the White House to managing the U.S. response to the crisis in the Balkans. Although he chaired a lot of meetings and generated a dense paper trail, he coordinated more than he led. "If you want to take ownership of an issue," one senior U.S. official says, "you have to do more than hold meetings and express your moral convictions. You have to make risky decisions and prove you have the courage of your convictions." Lake personally favored intervention, but did not recommend it to the president because he could not get consensus within the cabinet. With Secretaries Christopher and Perry as well as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs opposed to NATO air strikes, Lake opted for diplomacy and humanitarian relief, all the while attempting to reconcile these tame measures with the president's public promises never to tolerate ethnic cleansing. The endless, seemingly fruitless meetings led another high-level U.S. official to reflect, "It wasn't policy-making. It was group therapy—an existential debate over what is the role of America."<sup>137</sup> Lake did not go toe-to-toe against Pentagon officers and civilians who argued that air-power alone could not halt Serb terror. "When our senior military guys were saying, 'This mission can't be done,'" Lake explains, "it's hard to say, 'Listen, you professionals, here's an amateur's view of how and why it can be done.'"

Clinton's always awkward relations with the military were deteriorating further because the U.S. intervention in Somalia staged by Bush before he

left the White House had begun spiraling out of control. In March 1993 the time had seemed ripe for U.S. troops deployed in December 1992 to slip away. UN peacekeeping forces would remain to preserve the peace and continue the relief operation. But just as the bulk of U.S. forces were withdrawing, the Security Council, at the urging of the United States, expanded the peacekeepers' mandate to include disarming the militias and restoring law and order. On June 5 the faction headed by Mohammed Farah Aideed ambushed lightly armed Pakistani peacekeepers, killing two dozen of them. The Americans lobbied for and U.S. special forces carried out a manhunt aimed at tracking down and punishing the Pakistanis' assailants. On October 3, 1993, U.S. Army rangers and Delta special forces attempted to seize several of Aideed's top advisers. Somali militia retaliated, killing eighteen U.S. Soldiers, wounding seventy-three, and kidnapping one Black Hawk helicopter pilot.<sup>138</sup> The American networks broadcast a video interview with the trembling, disoriented pilot and a gory procession in which the naked corpse of a U.S. ranger was dragged through a Mogadishu street.

On receiving word of these events, President Clinton cut short a trip to California and convened an urgent crisis-management meeting at the White House. When an aide began recapping the situation, an angry president interrupted him. "Cut the bullshit," Clinton snapped. "Let's work this out." "Work it out" meant walk out. Republican congressional pressure was intense. Clinton appeared on television the next day, called off the manhunt for Aideed, and announced that all U.S. forces would be home within six months. Bosnian Serb television gleefully replayed the footage of the U.S. humiliation, knowing that it made U.S. intervention in Bosnia even less likely. A week after the Mogadishu firefight, U.S. forces suffered further humiliation in Haiti, as angry anti-American demonstrators deterred the USS *Harlan County* from landing troops to join a UN mission there. The Pentagon concluded that the president would not stand by them when U.S. forces got into trouble. Multilateral humanitarian missions seemed to bring all risk and no gain.

Although a U.S. ground invasion of the Balkans was never proposed even by the most hawkish Bosnia defenders, the Pentagon feared that what began as a limited U.S. involvement in Bosnia would end up as a large, messy one. The "active measures" proposed to punish ethnic cleansing would send the United States "headlong down a slippery slope," Defense Secretary Perry said. "At the bottom of that slope will be American troops in ground combat."<sup>139</sup>

The combination of the departures of three internal (if junior) advocates and the persistence of the ineffectual U.S. policy left the department far more hopeless and cynical than it had been before. The junior officers who replaced the resignees worked around the clock as their predecessors had done, but in the words of one, they were not "emotionally involved, only morally involved." It is hard to know what this distinction means exactly, except that it hints at the way the three resignees were branded after they took their leave. They were publicly hailed as honorable men, but a whisper campaign blasphemed them for their unprofessional stands.

The State Department quieted down. The longer Clinton served in office, the greater the distance that grew between him and his campaign promises and the less sensible it seemed to continue to contest what appeared to be an entrenched policy of noninvolvement. The use of the Holocaust analogy diminished. "The State Department wanted professionals who would not think what Warren Christopher was doing was the equivalent of not bombing the railroads to Auschwitz," says one Balkan desk officer. The State Department Balkan team was there to do "damage control" for the administration. They were not there to kick up a fuss.

## Defeat on All Fronts

Not everyone quieted down. Like a broken record, Congressman McCloskey continued to seize every opportunity to badger administration officials. When Christopher blamed all sides as a way of explaining the weak U.S. policy, McCloskey pounced, slamming Christopher's attempt to posit "moral equivalency." In what was becoming a ritual between the two men, the Indiana congressman asked again for the State Department's position on the term "genocide." "I know—you know that my request is still pending right now," McCloskey said. A skilled lawyer, Christopher agreed that the Serbs were aggressors, which was irrefutable, but again seized the opportunity to obfuscate. Christopher responded:

Mr. McCloskey, thank you for the question and for giving me an opportunity to say that I share your feeling that the principal fault lies with the Bosnian Serbs, and I've said that several times before. They are the most at fault of the three parties. But there is considerable fault

on all three sides, and . . . atrocities abound in this area as we have seen in the last several days and weeks. But I agree that the aggression coming from Serbia is the . . . principal perpetrator of the problem in the area.

With respect to genocide, the definition of genocide is a fairly technical definition. Let me just get it for you here. I think I can get it in just a moment.

Christopher paused, read from the convention, and then said:

I would say that some of the acts that have been committed by various parties in Bosnia, principally by the Serbians, could constitute genocide under the 1948 convention, if their purpose was to destroy the religious or ethnic group in whole or in part. And that seems to me to be a standard that may well have been reached in some of the aspects of Bosnia. Certainly some of the conduct there is tantamount to genocide.<sup>140</sup>

As he had done in March, Christopher called the atrocities "tantamount to genocide" but refused to deliver a formal finding to that effect. Other U.S. officials were thus left to squirm for themselves.

During a September 15, 1993, hearing of the House Europe and Middle East Subcommittee, McCloskey pressed Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Stephen Oxman, who stuck to the qualifier of "tantamount":

**Rep. McCloskey:** As you know, since April, I've been trying to get an answer from State as to whether these activities by the Bosnian Serbs and Serbs constitute genocide. Will I get a reply on that today?

**Mr. Oxman:** I learned, just today, that you hadn't had your response. And the first thing I'm going to do when I get back to the Department is find out where that is. We'll get you that response as soon as we possibly can. But to give you my personal view, I think that acts tantamount to genocide have been committed. Whether the technical definition of genocide—I think this is what the letter that you're asking for needs to address.

**Rep. McCloskey:** Right.

**Mr. Oxman:** And I think you're entitled to an answer.

**Rep. McCloskey:** This word tantamount floats about. I haven't looked it up in a dictionary, though. I'm derelict on that. I don't know how—I guess I have a subjective view as to how to define it, but it's an intriguing word. But I'll look forward to your reply.<sup>141</sup>

Behind the scenes soon thereafter, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research (INR) Toby Gati sent Secretary Christopher classified guidance on the genocide question. Although Gati's memo left Christopher some wiggle room, its overall message was clear: Undoubtedly, the analysis stated, the Serbs had carried out many of the acts listed in the convention—killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, imposing measures to prevent births—against Bosnia's Muslims because they were Muslims. What proved challenging, as always, was determining whether the Serbs possessed the requisite intent to "destroy, in whole or in part," the Muslim group. The memo noted that proving such intent without intercepting written policies or orders was difficult, but it suggested that intention could be "inferred from the circumstances." It noted several of the circumstances present in Bosnia:

- the expressed intent of individual Serb perpetrators to eradicate the Muslims
- the publicly stated Serb political objective of creating an ethnically homogeneous state
- the wholesale purging of Muslims from Serb-held territory, with the aim of ensuring ethnic homogeneity
- the systematic fashion in which Muslims, Muslim men, or Muslim leaders are singled out for killing

The "overall factual situation," the memo said, provided "a strong basis to conclude that killings and other listed acts have been undertaken with the intent of destroying the Muslim group as such." The secretary was informed that one of the understandings the U.S. Senate attached to its ratification of the genocide convention required an intent to destroy a "substantial" part of a group. The Senate had defined "substantial" to mean a sufficient number to "cause the destruction of the group as a viable entity." In Bosnia, the memo concluded, the "numbers of Muslims subjected to killings and other listed acts . . . can readily be considered substantial."<sup>142</sup>

Responding to the widespread perception that a finding of genocide would carry severe consequences for U.S. policymakers, the INR analysis observed that the convention's enforcement requirements were in fact weak. It relayed the legal adviser's judgment that a genocide finding would carry no "particular legal benefits (or, for that matter, legally adverse consequences)":

Some have argued that . . . the United States is obligated to take further measures in order to "prevent" genocide in Bosnia, once and if it is determined to be genocide. In our view, however, this general undertaking . . . cannot be read as imposing an obligation on outside states to take all measures whatsoever as may prove necessary—including the use of armed force—in order to "prevent" genocide.<sup>143</sup>

The United States was already meeting its obligations under the convention: "The United States and other parties are attempting to 'prevent and punish' such actions," the memo said, adding sheepishly, "even though such measures may not be immediately wholly effective."<sup>144</sup>

On October 13, 1993, a year and a half after the conflict began, Christopher finally approved the drafting of a letter by the assistant secretary for congressional relations acknowledging "acts of genocide." But Christopher pulled his approval several days later when Congressman McCloskey published an editorial in the *New York Times* calling for his resignation.<sup>145</sup> Upon reading the editorial, Christopher reportedly picked up the memo authorizing a finding of genocide and wrote in large letters "O.B.E.," for "overtaken by events." In the culmination of a series of exchanges, the pair traded bitter words in a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing the following month.<sup>146</sup> With the behind-the-scenes help of his new staffer, Marshall Harris, who had been uncorked to vent his frustration, McCloskey prepared a statement summing up the collapse of the administration's Balkan policy:

On February 10th, three weeks after President Clinton took office, Secretary Christopher stated that this administration had to address the circumstances as it found them in Bosnia. He further stated that the administration was resolved to do so. Just last month, however, he stated that the administration "inherited" the problem. Also on February 10th, Secretary Christopher stated that the United States [had] "direct strategic concerns in Bosnia." . . . When I heard those



remarks, I was proud of my president, proud of this administration, proud and grateful to Mr. Christopher and proud of my country. Unfortunately, the administration began an about-face soon after that was . . . abysmally shameful.

. . . It acquiesced to European objections to allowing the Bosnians to defend themselves, it signed on to . . . a meaningless plan which called for safe areas that we all know—we all know—and two weeks ago I was in Sarajevo—we all know that Sarajevo and the other so-called safe enclaves to this day are still not safe. In fact, 50 years after Buchenwald and Auschwitz, there are giant concentration camps in the heart of Europe.

. . . On July 21st, Secretary Christopher said this administration was doing all it could in Bosnia consistent with our national interests. The very next day, consistent with that statement, the Serbs launched one of their largest attacks ever in the 17-month-old siege of Sarajevo. Last month, the Serbs resumed their shelling of Sarajevo and killed dozens more innocent civilians. Bosnian Serb terrorist leaders . . . were quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that they renewed their bloody attacks because they knew after American fiascoes in Haiti and Somalia the Clinton administration would not respond. They were right. Our only response was another warning to Milosevic.

We've been warning these people, Mr. Secretary, for nearly two years, and I guess I appreciate your warnings, but I'd like to see some effect at some point. Unlike the shells raining down on innocent men, women and children in the Bosnian capital, these warnings ring absolutely hollow. Even now, we won't lift the sieges [of the safe areas], and I think this is very important.

. . . All these things happened or are happening on the Secretary's watch. The situation in Bosnia stopped being an inherited problem in January '93. Since then, several hundred thousand Bosnians have been driven out of the country or into internal exile, thousands of innocent civilians have been murdered, tens of thousands of ill-equipped Bosnian soldiers have been killed because we won't arm them, thousands more women have been raped as a systematic campaign by the Bosnian Serbs.

The administration continues to profess . . . that it wants a negotiated solution to this war of aggression even if it means dismembering

the sovereign U.N.-member state of Bosnia. It also says this is a tragic, complex situation with no easy answers. We all want a negotiated solution. We all know perfectly well that it's tragic and that nothing will come easily in addressing the crisis, but these are empty posturings in the administration's grievously inadequate foreign policy. Hundreds of thousands of lives hang in the balance as we say we support the enlargement of democracies and do little more.

Genocide is taking place in Bosnia, and I think it's very important—Mr. Christopher knows this, but Secretary Christopher won't say so. On at least two occasions of which I am aware, State Department lawyers and representatives of other relevant bureaus have recommended that he state this publicly, but we still do not have an answer. That request was first made publicly and in writing about 200 days ago.

Mr. Chairman, I won't go on. I appreciate the time. But when the history books are written, we cannot say that we allowed genocide because health care was a priority. We cannot say that we allowed genocide because the American people were more concerned with domestic issues. History will record, Mr. Secretary, that this happened on our watch, on your watch, that you and the administration could and should have done more. I plead to you, there are hundreds of thousands of people that still can die. . . . I plead for you and the administration to make a more aggressive—to take a more aggressive interest in this.

Secretary Christopher responded to McCloskey's assault with a rare burst of anger. He faulted McCloskey for proposing a massive U.S. ground invasion, which in fact the congressman had never recommended. Christopher said:

At rock bottom, you would be willing to put hundreds of thousands of American troops into Bosnia to compel a settlement satisfactory to the Bosnian government. I would not do so. I don't think our vital interests are sufficiently involved to do so. I don't see any point in our debating this subject further. You and I have discussed it several times in this forum. We have got fundamental differences of opinion. I do not believe that we should put hundreds of thousands of troops into Bosnia in order to compel a settlement. I'd go on to say, Mr.

McCloskey, that it seems to me that your very strong feelings on this subject have affected adversely your judgment.<sup>147</sup>

McCloskey's concerns about the wars in the Balkans, sparked in 1991, had only deepened with time. Indeed, the congressman was so haunted by the carnage that in at least fifteen hearings he raised questions about U.S. policy in Bosnia.<sup>148</sup> To some, McCloskey's hawkish Bosnia fervor seemed at odds with his leftist politics, his outspoken opposition to the war in Vietnam in the early 1970s, and his vote in Congress against the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Others were surprised to see him take on fellow Democrats. Indeed, he voted for Clinton's programs 86 percent of the time, the highest rating within the Indiana congressional delegation. But during the Bosnian war, the man the *Almanac of American Politics* described as "a man of earnest, plodding demeanor" metamorphosed into the unlikely conscience of the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>149</sup>

The Clinton team had been much more forceful than the Bush team about condemning the Serbs as aggressors. When sixty-eight Muslim shoppers and vendors were killed in a Sarajevo marketplace massacre in February 1994, for instance, Clinton denounced the "murder of innocents." In a transient interlude, Clinton even took the lead in issuing a NATO ultimatum that banned Serb heavy weapons from around the capital. "The United States," he said, "will not stand idly by in the face of a conflict that affects our interests, offends our consciences, and disrupts the peace." The risks entailed in NATO bombing, he assured the American people, were "minimal." "If we can stop the slaughter of civilians," Clinton said, "we ought to try it."<sup>150</sup>

Because Clinton warned, "No one should doubt NATO's resolve," initially nobody did. For several months, Sarajevans lived free of artillery and sniper fire. But when the Serbs resumed shelling the safe areas, the president's attention had drifted elsewhere and NATO did not bomb.

Beginning in April 1994, the allies did occasionally launch what became known as "pinprick" air strikes—usually a single strike against aged Serb military hardware delivered with plenty of advanced warning. But whenever the Serbs answered by intensifying attacks on Muslim civilians or rounding up UN peacekeepers as hostages (as they did in November 1994 and May and June 1995), the United States, along with its allies, caved. U.S. policymakers spent endless hours working to devise a solution for Bosnia, but they never took charge of the diplomatic process. They could not admit

either to the Muslims or to themselves the limits of what they were willing to risk on behalf of their moral commitments. And they were not prepared to barrel ahead with a strategy or to invest the political capital that would have been needed to get international support for military action. Instead, they wrung their hands. "The Europeans were waiting for American leadership," says Holbrooke, "but they didn't get it for three years."

Those who did own the issue paid a price. Any relationship Frank McCloskey maintained with the Clinton administration was severed after his highly public demand for Christopher's resignation. Although McCloskey occupied a seat in the most hotly contested district in the entire country, he seemed oblivious to the polls and the likely repercussions of his crusade. He ignored the appeals of his staff members to stop making so many visible trips to the Balkans. Ahead of the November 1994 election, he told a reporter that he didn't care if his Bosnia efforts cost him his seat in office: "This thing is beyond politics for me and beyond election or reelection." To another journalist, he said, "I would rather actively try to stop the slaughter than run and continue to win, knowing that I didn't face this."<sup>151</sup>

Back in Indiana, though, McCloskey's Republican challenger made him pay, deriding him for being "more concerned about Bosnia than Evansville." Republican National Committee chairman Haley Barbour visited Evansville, the largest city in McCloskey's district, and happily noted, "People are coming out of the woodwork to run."<sup>152</sup> McCloskey's constituents by and large opposed military intervention. Recalling constituent letters that poured into the office, Marshall Harris remembers, "They would say, 'Bosnia is far from our concern.' They always sounded a lot like Warren Christopher." In the end, after electing him to six terms in office, sour voters sent McCloskey packing in the November 1994 Republican sweep. The race was tight, 51-49, and although McCloskey, then fifty-five, says he does not regret a moment he spent lobbying for intervention in Bosnia, he does wonder if a few more trips back to his district on weekends instead of those across the Atlantic to Bosnia might have made the difference. The *Indianapolis Star* attributed his defeat to his Balkan fixation. In McCloskey's southern Indiana district, the *Star* noted, "Hoosiers were much more interested in local events than the problems of a region half a world away."

Before he was voted out of office, McCloskey had a bizarre encounter with President Clinton that taught him all he needed to know about the

president's now notorious tendency to compartmentalize. At a black-tie Democratic fund-raising dinner in Washington, McCloskey stood in a rope line to greet the president, whom he had been criticizing fiercely. Like Lemkin, McCloskey was never one to waste an opportunity. The congressman took Clinton's hand and said, "Bill, bomb the Serbs. You'll be surprised how good it'll make you feel." Unflustered, Clinton nodded thoughtfully for a few seconds and then blamed the Europeans for their hesitancy. "Frank, I understand what you're saying," the president said. "But you just don't understand what bastards those Brits are." Clinton slid along the rope line, shaking more hands and making more small talk, and McCloskey thought the exchange was over. But a few minutes later the president spun around and walked back to where McCloskey was standing. "By the way, Frank," Clinton proclaimed cheerily, "I really like what you're doing. Keep it up!" "The problem with Bill Clinton," McCloskey observes, "was that he didn't realize he was president of the United States."

During the Bosnian war, during both a Republican and a Democratic administration, the UN Security Council passed resolutions deploring the conduct of the perpetrators. It created the UN-EU International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia as a formal negotiation channel. It called upon states and international human rights organizations to document human rights violations. It deployed UN peacekeepers (though no Americans). And it funded the longest-running humanitarian airlift since the Berlin airlift.

In addition, in its most radical affront to state sovereignty, the Security Council invoked the genocide convention and created the first international criminal tribunal since Nuremberg.<sup>153</sup> The court would sit in The Hague and try grave breaches of the Geneva conventions, violations of the law or customs of war, crimes against humanity, and, at long last, genocide. One of the most tireless supporters of the court was Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador at the UN. If her colleagues looked to Vietnam for policy guidance, Albright liked to say, "My mindset is Munich." She was the rare official in the Clinton team who lobbied relentlessly for NATO bombing and who laced her public condemnations of Serb "extermination" and expulsion with Holocaust references. When the Security Council voted to establish an international tribunal, Albright declared, "There is an echo in this Chamber today. The Nuremberg Principles have been reaffirmed. . . . This will be no victors' tribunal. The only victor that will prevail in this endeavor is the truth."<sup>154</sup>

But in the Bosnian war, the truth had never been in short supply. What was missing was U.S. willingness to risk its own soldiers on the ground or to convince the Europeans to support NATO bombing from the air. As a result, the ethnic cleansing and genocide against the country's Muslims proceeded apace, and more than 200,000 Bosnians were killed.

In June 1995 President Clinton and Vice President Gore appeared on *Larry King Live* and defended their policy. "This is a tragedy that has been unfolding for a long time, some would say for 500 years," Gore said. Clinton did him one better: "Their enmities go back 500 years, some would say almost a thousand years." He also claimed that 130,000 people were killed in 1992, whereas fewer than 3,000 were murdered in 1994. "That's still tragic," the president noted, "but I hardly think that constitutes a colossal failure."<sup>155</sup>

Jim Hooper, who had worked within both administrations and had chosen not to resign, juxtaposes the struggles:

The Bush administration did not have to be persuaded it was OK to intervene. They had done so in the Gulf. They just had to be persuaded that this was the right place to do it. With the Clinton administration we had to convince them that it was OK to intervene *and* that this was the right place to do so. Their starting point was that military intervention was never OK. This made it doubly difficult.

In the immediate aftermath of Clinton's election victory, the former British foreign secretary and European negotiator Lord David Owen had warned the Bosnians not to rely on U.S. promises. In December 1992, standing on the tarmac at Sarajevo airport, his cheeks flush with the winter cold, Owen had declared: "Don't, don't, don't live under this dream that the West is going to come in and sort this problem out. Don't dream dreams."<sup>156</sup> However cold the sentiment, Owen honestly and accurately urged Bosnians to assume they were on their own. Clinton administration officials often spoke sternly about Serb brutality and criticized European and UN peace plans that would have divided Bosnia and "rewarded aggression." But if Clinton managed to keep the dream of rescue alive, for the first two and a half years of his presidency he left the Bosnians to their own meager devices. It was not until July 1995 that Clinton would act. By then, another genocide would have killed 800,000 people in Rwanda.

## Rwanda: "Mostly in a Listening Mode"

### "I'll Never Be Tutsi Again"

On the evening of April 6, 1994, two years to the day after the beginning of the Bosnian war, Major General Romeo Dallaire was sitting on the couch in his bungalow residence in Kigali, Rwanda, watching CNN with his assistant, Brent Beardsley. Beardsley was preparing plans for a national sports day that would match Tutsi rebel soldiers against Hutu government soldiers in a soccer game. Dallaire, the commander of the UN mission, said, "You know, Brent, if the shit ever hit the fan here, none of this stuff would really matter, would it?" The next instant the phone rang. Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana's *Mystère Falcon* jet, a gift from French president François Mitterrand, had just been shot down, with Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira aboard. When Dallaire replaced the receiver, the phone rang again instantly. Indeed, the UN phones rang continually that night and the following day, averaging 100 phone calls per hour. Countless politicians, UN local staff, and ordinary Rwandans were calling out for help. The Canadian pair hopped in their UN jeep and dashed to Rwandan army headquarters, where a crisis meeting was under way. They never returned to their residence.



Rwandan bodies floating down the Kagera River.

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