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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Charles Redman, Special Envoy to the Former Yugoslavia
Jenonne Walker, NSC Staff, Notetaker

Alija Izetbegovic, President
Ejup Ganic, Vice-President
Muhammed Sacirbey, Permanent Representative to the United Nations
Dr. Nedzib Sacirbey, Personal Representative to the President
Ivan Mistic, Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN
Sabina Berberovic, Interpreter

DATE, TIME September 8, 1993, 5:00-5:30pm
AND PLACE: Oval Office

President Izetbegovic: (beginning translation indistinct). . . important that the U.S. be ready to participate in guaranteeing an agreement if we ask with an international force. Our people believe in the United States. Unfortunately our people do not trust the Europeans and we know you cannot act without them and that (Congressional?) support is a problem. But we hope we can count on the participation of the U.S. in implementing an agreement. ~~(S)~~

As to the agreement, during the last round we defined our minimum of minimums and we cannot give that up. The problem is, if this minimum of minimums is not accepted, what happens next. We have made major concessions in agreeing to the division of Bosnia into three republics. We hoped that after that, the others would give us a fair map. We thought that the areas of the Serb republic would be made up from Serb-majority territory. But the map shows that the Serb republic would include Serb-majority territory and Muslim-majority territory that had been subject to ethnic cleansing and genocide. The Serbs are trying to keep territory taken from Muslims, around the Drina River, which were 65-70% Muslim before they were ethnically cleansed and the people killed or driven out. ~~(S)~~

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This is unacceptable morally and politically. Morally because rewarding ethnic cleansing and genocide would set a dangerous precedent for the future; practically because people waiting to return to their homes -- half a million Bosnian Muslims now are scattered in Austria, Canada, Germany, even the U.S., Australia, and elsewhere, refugees waiting to go back -- they cannot return to their homes if the territory remains controlled by Serbs. This is why Geneva broke down. (S)

It would be useful if the U.S. in the meantime put pressure on Serbia on these issues and on the Croats on an exit to the Adriatic. This is our second demand. Bosnia-Herzegovina has an exit to the sea; it has been reduced year by year to 29 kilometers. We are asking for 10-14 kilometers. Without that, the Republic of Bosnia cannot function. So we need pressure on the Croats. (S)

The people negotiating with us who are responsible for the war crimes must be brought to justice. I am not making judgments. People are innocent until proven guilty; that is for the Courts to decide. But if they are guilty they should not be redeemed by accepting negotiations. This is very important. As important as it was after World War II to punish Nazi war criminals. It is very important to prevent further events of this sort because war crimes continue and many hope that because they are negotiating with us they will not be judged and punished. This is one reason we refused to negotiate at the same table with them. It must be clear that those responsible for war crimes will be punished, even if they are Bosnian Muslims. I do not doubt that the U.S. will support us in asking for this because American politics still has retained certain morals. (S)

I have discussed with the U.S. Secretary of State about protected zones. Sarajevo is one. It is still under siege. We would be very grateful if the U.S. would consider measures to stop the siege. I do not expect an answer, but please consider what could be done. One way would be for the Security Council to make decisions on how to implement Resolution 836. It was passed five months ago but nothing has been done. It is just a proclamation, a piece of paper, while Sarajevo remains under siege. The U.S. would do a lot to help if it could contribute to lifting the siege. I understand that the U.S. cannot do it alone but can you contribute to solving this? (S)

The President: As I told you early this year, I believe the U.S. should participate in helping keep the peace if you reach an agreement that is fair, do it willingly, and if you want us to do it. For me there are two conditions. It must be done by NATO rather than the UN because I never want to be in a position like before, when we wanted to lift the arms embargo and the Russians, British, and French objected. The British and French also are in NATO but the U.S. can lead NATO. Second, I cannot do it unless Congress will support it and provide the money. It was very important for you to say publicly that you want us to, because so many in Congress do not want us to. Those who never wanted us to do anything in Bosnia, and now those who supported lift and

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strike but because that was not possible now fear that no agreement will be enforceable, will bring peace. So what you said is very important. ~~(S)~~

As to territory, we believe you should have some access to the Adriatic and the largest possible territory. We have done what we could to push the Serbs and Croats. But I do not believe there will be any military intervention to secure more. So the most leverage we have is now, when they worry whether I will be able to persuade others if they resume fighting. They know that we have a slightly better position with NATO rather than with the UN in this. ~~(S)~~

But I am very worried about the winter because I never can be certain what the UK, France, and Russia will do. So I do not believe there will be any use of force from outside to change the situation at the negotiating table. So my strong recommendation is to get the best agreement you can, knowing that the U.S. will do what it can to push the Serbs and Croats. ~~(S)~~

As to war crimes, we support your proposal. ~~(S)~~

About airpower to lift the siege of Sarajevo. We will continue what we said, but you should remember that even under the NATO agreement our allies worry about their soldiers on the ground. I know we can trigger airpower if the Serbs resume what they were doing, but we are unlikely to be able to respond to what they are doing now. ~~(S)~~

This whole business is difficult for me. I never understood why they would not vote to lift the arms embargo. That was when John Major told me his government would fall. I thought that was just crazy. ~~(S)~~

But the best thing I can do for you and to be your friend is to tell you I have no reason to believe we can lift the arms embargo or offer you more on air strikes than NATO's present position. The best thing would be to get Congress to let me help implement an agreement. I will do all I can. I will be there for you.

~~(S)~~

(At this point, Ambassador Sacirbey gave the President a map showing the Owen-Stoltenberg proposals and additional territory wanted by the Bosnian government.) ~~(S)~~

Vice President Ganic (pointing to the map): these are the areas that have been ethnically cleansed. ~~(S)~~

President Izetbegovic: Areas in which the heaviest genocide has taken place. ~~(S)~~

Vice President Ganic: The problem is, if they do not accept our minimum of minimums, who will support us. This (again pointing to the map) is the minimum we can sell our people. We had hoped other Muslim areas would be put under the UN. But if they do not

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accept our minimum, and just continue to take more territory, someone has to tell them to stop the offensive. ~~(S)~~

Ambassador Sacirbey: In the East some Muslim enclaves would be completely isolated; economically and socially inviable. They would have to be welfare state. I do not know who would protect them. It is not just a matter of fairness to the Bosnians but also a problem of who would keep the peace and how. ~~(S)~~

Vice President Ganic: And if we sign, we would need to know that the international community will support and implement an agreement. Because we would have given up so much. We would be a tiny country between two more powerful ones. So our signature would have value only if the international community would implement the agreement because we would have given up our national and legal identity. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Christopher: You could sign but condition your signature on whether there would be implementation. ~~(S)~~

Vice President Ganic: The ethnic cleansing, introduced by Belgrade, is like fascism in 1939, because they also achieved most of the territory by ethnic cleansing. If the international community accepts it in Bosnia, it will spread everywhere. So this is an historic moment for the international community. Perhaps I am being undiplomatic. But everyone in Bosnia sees the U.S. as friendly. We identify with another multiethnic community. But we have few exchanges with you. To have the CIA or others just to give them information. Germany is close to Croatia, Russia to Serbia, the UK and France somewhat close to Serbia. We Bosnians are alone, and as a multiethnic country we want to cooperate with the U.S. in any way that would be useful to you. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Christopher: If there is an agreement and we help implement it, it would be our intent for U.S. forces to be primarily in the Muslim areas. So that would make us very close to you. ~~(S)~~

Mr. Lake: That has been the basis of NATO planning. ~~(S)~~

The President: And beyond military implementation, there will be a big rebuilding job to do and we want to be helpful. About Germany, it is the only European country that stood by me in trying to lift the arms embargo. While Kohl feels close to the Croatian people he trusts your leadership. So I think we can put together building blocks, not only military security but rebuilding. There is a feeling among many countries that what happened to you was wrong. ~~(S)~~

Ambassador Sacirbey: It is especially important for the U.S. to administer Sarajevo. It risks being divided. U.S. leadership in the city would help ensure that there will be no more Berlins in Europe. It would be a clear signal that there is a change. The people would feel there is a new peace. ~~(S)~~

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Mr. Lake: The French also feel strongly about Sarajevo and will wish to participate in some way but we can work out something to share in some way. We want to make sure they stay engaged in some way. ~~(S)~~

The President: I understand and think we can work something out. ~~(S)~~

Ambassador Sacirbey: The siege of Sarajevo has not been lifted. The Serbs have in fact tightened their grip. It is not so visible because they are not squeezing very hard yet but when winter comes if they squeeze just a little tighter. . . .so you must be very sensitive that it is not just a matter of shelling but cutting of the gas, electricity, not enough humanitarian supplies getting in can cause slow strangulation. ~~(S)~~

Vice President Ganic: They use the slow strangulation tactic to prolong our death and avoid NATO air strikes but the end result is the same. ~~(S)~~

President Izetbegovic: They are in all the mountains around Sarajevo. I insisted to Karadjic in Geneva that they withdraw and he said they would someday but not now. If we only had some munitions we could resolve the problem because our people are ready to fight. But we have a shortage of munitions and ammunition because all the roads are cut. We have resisted for 17 months and I do not know what will happen if our Army collapses. ~~(S)~~

Vice President Ganic: And we are asking just for one grenade or rocket for each Serbian tank. For rifles. Not to make advances but just to defend ourselves. We are unable to defend ourselves in the heart of Europe. ~~(S)~~

Milosevic has created greater Serbia through ethnic cleansing. Now they are blackmailing us on this. Milosevic is telling his opposition that he got the territory they wanted. They are suffering from sanctions but things will even out in the end and they will keep the territory. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Christopher: The unfortunate reality is that a reasonable settlement is your best hope. Even if you avoid strangulation, that is not a long-term solution. I have sent cables to the Serbs, Croats, all our NATO allies. We are doing all we can but the time is now. You may not be stronger in the future. When winter comes, I am afraid that your bargaining position will be less strong. All the other things we have been talking about are past wrongs, but the issue now is the negotiating table. ~~(S)~~

The President: We will see what we can do on the map. Maybe we can influence it a little more and we will try. But negotiations are your best hope. And I will do all I can to see that the Americans are where you want them in implementation. ~~(S)~~

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Ambassador Sacirbey: Within this Bosnian republic will be over half a million non-Muslims. So 50% of the population is expected to live on 29% of the territory, which has little agriculture and its industry and cities have been destroyed. The areas that may not be put in the hands of the Bosnian government should be taken from the Serbs who conducted ethnic cleansing. Refugees would have no confidence in going home if Serbs controlled the territory. I have discussed with Ambassador Redman international control of those territories so refugees can go back to their homes and the issue of sovereignty can be resolved later. ~~(S)~~

President Izetbegovic: It is important than refugees have the confidence to return home. ~~(S)~~

Thank you for your time Mr. President. (U)

The President: Thank you and good luck. (U)

(General handshakes and goodbyes)

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