

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Madeleine Albright, Ambassador to the UN
Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of
State for European and Canadian Affairs
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for
European Affairs, NSC (Notetaker)

President Alija Izetbegovic
Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic
Defense Minister Jadranko Prlic
Sven Alkalaj, Ambassador to the U.S.
Muhammed Sacirbey, Ambassador to the UN
(also serving as interpreter)
Dr. Begic, Political Adviser to the President

DATE, TIME, September 25, 1994, 4:35-5:10 p.m.,
and PLACE: Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York

The President: Congratulations on getting out of Sarajevo. I've been following events closely and have been very disturbed by developments -- especially by events in Sarajevo. I understand Prime Minister Silajdzic and Secretary Christopher spoke a couple of days ago about your idea for going to the Security Council for a postponement of lifting the arms embargo by four to six months. I believe it's a good idea. I'm not sure what the British, French and Russians will say. But I would like to discuss the details of how to do it and what else we can do to help. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: They have no reason for leaving because of the coming of weapons. But I must tell you that a major motive behind our proposal is the maintenance of UNPROFOR within the country. If they will not stay, then there is no reason to proceed with a delay measure. It seems to us that we should await their response before I express our support publicly. We would expect them to support the UN Security Council resolution. We are making a

concession to gain their acceptance so we would not be satisfied with opposition or even abstention. We need to get nine votes for the resolution. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Silajdzic: This is a very important issue. We must be very clear about terminology. This is not a postponement of lift, but only of the operational side. The embargo would technically be lifted, with the operational side pushed down the road. There should be a commitment by your allies to lift the embargo through a Security Council resolution passed two weeks after October 15. The embargo would be technically lifted, with the effective date delayed. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: We believe that the formal lifting of the arms embargo and the actual delivery of arms or the implementation of lift could be separated by four to six months. Just to make things clear: the arms embargo needs to be lifted today. But in fact, implementation can be six months off. This is our idea. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: Now that we've heard from President Izetbegovic, I will contact Hurd and Juppe promptly to work out an understanding with them. What President Izetbegovic has said today is consistent with what I discussed with Prime Minister Silajdzic on Friday. ~~(C)~~

The President: Can we get an answer from Hurd and Juppe today? ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: Maybe by early tomorrow morning. ~~(C)~~

Assistant Secretary Holbrooke: We can definitely get a commitment that they will stay in UNPROFOR. It is less clear cut whether we can get a commitment to vote for a UN Security Council resolution whose words have not yet been worked out. At a minimum, the Secretary can get a commitment not to oppose. Then we'll have to move forward from there. On the key point -- will they stay -- the Secretary will be able to get this before close of business tomorrow, and we can then make it public after your speech. If we don't get this commitment, then what you have suggested falls apart. So a public commitment to stay is achievable; the other point is going to be harder. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: We will start working on the wording of the resolution promptly. The British and French will be relieved and view your proposal positively. I don't think they want to withdraw their forces -- they feel an

obligation to stay. But they see lifting o the arms embargo as providing them no choice in the matter. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: I would like to remind you of the other measures that the Contact Group committed to. There was the issue of enforcing and extending the exclusion zones, but in fact nothing has happened on this. Can we expect more active behavior by the United States on this?

~~(C)~~

There is also the question of Sarajevo. In fact, a point in NATO's February 9 decision seems to have been forgotten. Point four spoke of the need to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo and declared that NATO was ready to use air strikes to prevent strangulation. Radical measures are needed to open the roads and free the city from the siege. In a few days people will be dying. The situation is the worst ever in Sarajevo. Of course, we have the basis for action in the NATO communiqué -- there was a consensus on this point. So we are just asking why NATO has not acted. ~~(C)~~

One of the ways the strangulation can be relieved would be to open an access road to Sarajevo. A five-kilometer demilitarized area could be established. We would be prepared to pull back our forces if the Serbs also pulled back. In fact, discussions have been going on for a long time about the demilitarization of the whole of Sarajevo, but these have gone slowly and without any results. Now we are focusing on the idea of a belt, five kilometers wide, to facilitate supplies. In this way, the situation can be eased. Of course, this is not a final solution or the salvation of Sarajevo, but it would allow some time for the situation to be improved. We need your support. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: When I contact the French and British foreign ministers regarding your plan regarding the arms embargo, I am going to ask for their commitment to enforce the exclusion zones -- which they haven't done so far. I will also be in touch with the Germans. The President just met with Boutros-Ghali and pressed him very hard for firmer enforcement. ~~(C)~~

The President: I told Boutros-Ghali that we are very upset about the situation, especially in Sarajevo. Every day our pilots are ready to go. It's terrible that we haven't been more aggressive so far. Boutros-Ghali said the French and British always stop him. I believe their troops are in more danger when we don't retaliate. So I agree entirely. Secretary Christopher will talk to the other foreign ministers. Boutros-Ghali said he won't object to being more

aggressive if we can bring the others around. In the next few days, we will exert a considerable effort. I will raise this with Yeltsin as well. So far the Russians have been less of a problem than the British and French. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: I would suggest that you propose to them the idea of the demilitarization of Sarajevo. They may be harder to convince on the use of force than on demilitarization. The Serbs will more easily accept an idea when we have to make concessions too. We are prepared to make concessions to get this demilitarized area. ~~(C)~~

The President: Okay. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: Of course, when talking of exclusion zones and Sarajevo, it is essential that the safe areas be expanded in accordance with the Contact Group communiqué. That was point six of the Contact Group plan [Note: reference is to the July 30 Geneva Contact Group communiqué]. I believe I have mentioned this point in the context of asking for greater U.S. involvement. ~~(C)~~

There is also the question of sanctions against Serbia. We regard the last stage as a clear victory for Milosevic. He received two benefits: first he avoided tighter sanctions, which the Contact Group had indicated would be imposed if the Serbs rejected the map; in fact, Milosevic didn't get a tightening, but a lightening of sanctions. But that's over with. The question is whether you have real control over the border. If you do, then the concession may have been worthwhile. We would have voted for it if the border were truly closed. But if the border is, in fact, not closed, then it will be a disaster for Bosnia-Herzegovina and for the image of this country for the international community. I hope and expect you can firmly monitor the border. 100-plus people will not be enough to do the job. ~~(C)~~

The President: When are our people going to join the monitors? ~~(C)~~

Anthony Lake: Very soon. They should have been there already, but I think they will be there in a couple of days. ~~(C)~~

Ambassador Albright: The Security Council resolution has a series of break points that allow us to pull the plug on the whole operation. If there is any breach in the border closure, the suspension of sanctions can be ended within five days. The whole thing is subject to review every 30 days, and the suspension is in effect for only 90 days in

total. The United States worked hard to include these control mechanisms so that we would not have to trust Milosevic. We assumed you would want this. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: You should not allow any other easing of sanctions until Serbia recognizes the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and also Croatia. This will be the only real proof that Milosevic has changed, and that it's not just a tactic. I want to clearly appeal to you not to do more without recognition. ~~(C)~~

The President: I agree with that. We have supported the effort you have made with Croatia. They should have the same position. We will work with you on that. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: Finally, I want you to know that we are trying to do everything we can to implement the Federation. You have provided some financial aid, and I want to thank you very much for that. In this context, I would like to propose that a Commission be established that would include one Bosniac, one Croat, one American and one German to help implement the Federation idea. ~~(C)~~

The President: What do you think of that, Chris? ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: I think it has merit. We'll work on it. Filling out the Federation is very important. It needs content. If we can help, we would like to do that. ~~(C)~~

Anthony Lake: We want to help support the Federation especially at the local level. ~~(C)~~

The President: We'll work on the idea; give us some time. Regarding aid, we have come up with a total of 30 million dollars, including 10 million more for refugees. I hope we're doing all we can for your people. I'm very worried about the children, about the human dimension of the situation. ~~(C)~~

We will go to the British and French. We want to clear up the lift question. We will tell them that we need their forces there, but that if Sarajevo is destroyed, then their purpose for being there has been destroyed too. The political and psychological impact on the world would be devastating. We need to get them to take a more aggressive posture. We want to be sure that our aid and NATO's actions are doing the most to help your people. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: I couldn't travel from Sarajevo airport yesterday. I had to leave through the tunnel and go

over the mountains. The road I took is always under Serb fire. The airport is closed. The roads are closed. There is no gas, electricity or water. Things are the worst since the beginning of the war. The Serbs have decided to suffocate the city. Something needs to be done. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: Regarding the aid, what the President described is 10 million dollars more than when Prime Minister Silajdzic and I spoke on Friday. There is 10 million dollars from fiscal year 1994, and 30 million dollars in fiscal year 1995. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Silajdzic: Good. Let me mention one small detail with respect to Sarajevo. We can provide immediate help by putting in an electrical cable through the tunnel. This would run 20 or 30 kilometers, so that Sarajevo could get electricity from the outside. We will work to get you the details. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: Let us know. ~~(C)~~

The President: Please give us a proposal. Let's look at the situation in the worst possible light, if we do everything we have discussed: We pass the lift resolution, with four-to-six months until the embargo is lifted. Then we somehow make conditions better in Sarajevo in the short run either by the proposal you made for demilitarization or by the willingness of the UK and France to be stronger in enforcing the exclusion zones. Even then, we still have to assume the worst -- that the Serbs won't accept the Contact Group plan and that you will have to fight on. In those circumstances, we should think about an independent electrical system that will give you more control over the situation. So please identify what the international community needs to do to speed up the mechanics to guard against the day when we, God forbid might fail. I would think it would take six months to lay the cable. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Silajdzic: We could do it in two months. ~~(C)~~

The President: Give us a proposal. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: The journalists are waiting to hear about the meeting. What should we say we have agreed? ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: We can announce the 30 million dollars in additional aid. If you like, we can out forward your proposal regarding lifting the arms embargo with a

deferred date -- although I understand you would like to hear about the British and French attitude first.

President Izetbegovic: That's right. ~~(c)~~

Secretary Christopher: We will work on that between now and tomorrow. ~~(c)~~

The President: We can say we have discussed the conditions around Sarajevo, and that you made a suggestion that I've agreed to raise with the other Contact Group members, and that we will get back to you in 24 hours. ~~(c)~~

Secretary Christopher: We can say we are asking Boutros-Ghali and the British and French for firmer enforcement of the exclusion zones. ~~(c)~~

President Izetbegovic: I will say I suggested the demilitarization of a five-kilometer zone and that you supported the idea. ~~(c)~~

The President: Yes, anything you want to say on those lines. ~~(c)~~

Prime Minister Silajdzic: We can say that there will be no further suspension of sanctions unless Belgrade recognizes Bosnia and Croatia. ~~(c)~~

Anthony Lake: Let us first pursue that diplomatically with other Contact Group members. ~~(c)~~

The President: Yes, please wait. If you announce that, I'll spend the first 30 minutes of my next conversation with John Major explaining it. ~~(c)~~

Secretary Christopher: We're not thinking about any other sanctions relief in any case. ~~(c)~~

Assistant Secretary Holbrooke: I would add the President's strong statement of support for enforcing existing mandates. We have spent all of the last two weeks on NATO air strikes. We only got one. If we had our way, there would have been a strike every day. We are the Contact Group member that is trying the hardest. So you can mention this, plus the 30 million, plus your own positions. Tomorrow's story will be that there will be a lift resolution after October 15 per the President's letter to Senator Nunn, but with activation in the spring. ~~(c)~~

One last point, if I might, Mr. President. It is important that the U.S. public and Congress understand that the proposal for deferral originated with your government and is supported by ours. ~~(e)~~

President Izetbegovic: I think, going back, that we should say that we recommended to the U.S. that there be no further easing of sanctions unless Serbia recognizes Bosnia and Croatia. Can we also say that both sides recalled the fourth point in NATO's February 9 decision regarding air strikes to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo? ~~(c)~~

The President: I hope you will do that. We will have to have discussions with the UK and France, even regarding the nature of their UNPROFOR deployments in order to enforce the existing resolutions. Things have gotten absurd around Sarajevo, in the fact that there have not been several air strikes. The others have people there, but there has to be a solution that allows us to be more aggressive. We'll take this up with them. Your language is fine. ~~(c)~~

Ambassador Albright: You should also say that we will be watching the border very carefully and we will be sending people there. ~~(c)~~

The President: Yes, we want to send people there. ~~(c)~~

Anthony Lake: We have done a press release on the aid for the Federation. I would be careful about pinning things on the UK and France in public right now. Just say we are pressing for stronger enforcement. ~~(c)~~

The President: We want them to vote with us on the UN Security Council resolution, so don't hit them too hard today. ~~(c)~~

Ambassador Sacirbey: Can I raise another point regarding the training of Bosnian forces in the context of a lifting the arms embargo. ~~(c)~~

Secretary Christopher: That's down the road a bit. Let's not complicate the situation now. ~~(c)~~

The President: Thank you for coming. ~~(c)~~

-- End of Conversation --