

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Presidential Telephone Call with Bosnian President Izetbegovic

PARTICIPANTS: President Clinton
Bosnian President Izetbegovic

NOTETAKERS: Kenneth Baldwin, Katherine O'Loughlin, John Schmidt and Matt Miller

DATE, TIME July 20, 1995, 1:47 p.m. - 2:02 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

President Clinton: Hello? (U)

President Izetbegovic: Hello, Mr. President. Thank you for calling, and thank you for your time. I have a lady with me who will help me continue in my language if that is all right with you. (U)

President Clinton: Yes, that is fine with me. (U)

President Izetbegovic: Mr. Clinton, the situation in Bosnia is a very difficult one because of the latest attacks on the safe areas, especially in Zepa. Right now in Zepa 6,000 women and children are in grave danger. We have offered direct negotiations to the Serbs to save the women and children, but we do not have an answer from them and now have asked the UN to mediate. We have also offered that the civilian population, that the women and children, should leave Zepa. However, without your pressure and help of the U.S. and the international community, we will not be able to do that. Therefore, we ask that you see what can be done for these people, bearing in mind the recent tragedy that occurred in Srebrenica. According to UNPROFOR, at least 3,000 people have been killed in the past several days. We fear that the figure is bigger. ~~(C)~~

We feel the U.S. should now lead the initiative to save the safe areas, especially those people in Zepa. Otherwise, there will be a growing feeling both in Europe and Bosnia of a lack of American leadership that will further damage the situation. So I plead to you, in the interests of the U.S. and the world, that the U.S. be more active in resolving this situation. Please do not give up

on the use of force in protecting these safe areas and the civilians. I refer to more robust airstrikes against the attackers who have shown inhumanity in Srebrenica. Please do not allow the UN to paralyze us by continuing to use the dual key. Also, when talking of relations with Serbia, please do not give up too cheaply on the lifting of sanctions. We are not interested in just any recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We are being offered recognition of a phantom Bosnia -- a Bosnia that does not exist. I fear that the Contact Group states are ready to pay a very cheap price for such recognition. Mr. President, the sanctions are the only weapon we can use against Serbia. If we give them up, we will have none. And in the end, I would like to convince you that we are devoted to the principle of a multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina. ~~(C)~~

Thank you very much for calling me, Mr. President. I have another favor to ask -- if you could pass on my views to the meeting in London tomorrow and do all you can to influence the participants. ~~(C)~~

President Clinton: Thank you, Mr. President. Let me say that we will do what we can for the people of Zepa as you have asked. We certainly will not bargain away the sanctions against Milosevic and Serbia cheaply, and I will not allow the lifting of the embargo for weak recognition. Most importantly, I have told our allies, and we will say the same thing in London, that the UN operation cannot continue unless we are prepared to use strong air power -- by that I mean disproportionate air strikes without the dual key, so that the Serbs know we mean business. I understand why the UN forces fear being taken hostage, but as a practical matter, it seems to me that often UNPROFOR troops, while delivering humanitarian aid, also help the Serbs in their larger designs because of their fear of being taken hostage, which keeps us from using air power for the larger objectives. ~~(C)~~

Now as you know, the French believe it is a mistake just to use stronger air power. They want us to airlift an additional 1,000 soldiers into Goradze. The problem is that 1,000 more soldiers may not make a difference in helping you hold the town. But if the Serbs know the damage we can do with strong airstrikes, that might stop them, just as our threat did last February when we first established the safe areas and collection points, but which the UN has since kept from working. ~~(C)~~

As you know, I would hate to see the UN mission collapse, but if it's going to stay, it must be more effective. That is where we are and what we're working for. It's all I'm working on right now. I am glad we had a chance to talk. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to point out again the importance of air power against the violations of the safe areas established by the UN. The relative peace which we had last year, for about six months in Sarajevo, is proof we can maintain some kind of peace under a threat of airstrikes. We in Bosnia are interested in peace, not in war, and, therefore, we are interested in a political settlement. We have accepted the Contact Group plan and before that the Vance/Owen plan. I assure you we want peace. This is our option; not war. ~~(C)~~

President Clinton: Thank you. Let me say you did accept the Contact Group and Vance-Owen plan, and if I can prevail in the next few days with the allies and get a serious air threat up there, I think we can stabilize the situation. But we still need serious peace negotiations. This matter has to be settled. Thank you very much. ~~(C)~~

President Izetbegovic: Thank you, Mr. President. Good bye. (U)

President Clinton: Good bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --