

TESTIMONY ON THE BALKAN CONFLICT
Given by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter
before the Senate Armed Services Committee

June 14, 1995

Although I have been invited on a number of occasions since leaving the White House, this is the first time I have come to Washington to testify before a Congressional committee. I agreed to do so only after consulting with General John Galvin, whose unique experience and interest in the Balkan region is strongly complementary to my own and whose views seem to be basically compatible. We feel that our joint testimony might be helpful in finding a way to bring peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We are here as private citizens, with no authority to speak for others and with no desire to be critical of our own government or others who are attempting to prevent violence in the area and to protect innocent people.

We also want to make it clear that we do not excuse or condone any of the human rights abuses, violations of cease-fires, taking of hostages, or failure to comply with United Nations resolutions by any of the combatants in the area.

I have been asked to speak first, and will outline briefly my own recent involvement in the region, since this is the basis for my later recommendations.

At The Carter Center we monitor regularly the world's conflicts, attempting to understand their history, the primary participants, issues that are currently in dispute, and efforts that are being made to resolve them. We receive many requests from active or potential combatants for assistance, but our policy is to encourage mediation by others, and not to duplicate their efforts or compete with them.

When we believe it is advisable to accept one of these mediation requests in a sensitive political arena, we first assure that we have the approval of the President of the United States and, when appropriate, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. When our proposal to be mediators is not accepted, we do not act. We have received such approval in a number of cases, including Nicaragua, Somalia, Liberia, North Korea, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Haiti, and the Sudan.

We constantly face one of two basic questions that make mediation very difficult and sometimes unpopular:

First: How to correlate the inviolability of a nation's sovereignty with self-determination for minority groups within that country.

Second: How to deal with leaders who are condemned by our government if they are the only ones who can resolve a crisis and prevent further human suffering.

In our work we are always very careful to comply with U.S. policy and with any pertinent resolutions of the United Nations. We do not ask for official status or authority, and always submit any potential agreements to our government for final approval and further action.

We have followed these guidelines meticulously in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Last year, on December 7, I was asked by the Bosnian Serb leader, Dr. Radovan Karadzic, to receive a delectation from him. He said that many demands were being made of the Serbs and he had not been able to discuss his responses with anyone in authority.

After calling President Bill Clinton and obtaining his approval, on December 14 I received a three-person delegation at my home in Plains. After extensive discussions, a tentative agreement was reached that I would go to Bosnia-Herzegovina provided the Serbs would a) first release unilaterally all prisoners of war who were less than 19 years old and mutually exchange all other POWs with the government officials in Sarajevo, b) permit United Nations convoys to deliver relief supplies to Sarajevo and other safe havens, c) impose a cease-fire around Sarajevo, d) open the airport there to United Nations flights, and e) guarantee respect for human rights and let human rights representatives come into the area.

By telephone, I confirmed this commitment with Dr. Karadzic and also shared the information with President Clinton, who approved the agreement. Dr. Karadzic then offered to confirm his promises publicly and asked that CNN permit him to do so through a televised live interview.

Following briefings from State Department and White House officials and after being informed by them that the Serb promises to me were "substantially fulfilled," my wife Rosalynn and I traveled to the area, arriving first in Zagreb on December 18. There we met with Croatian President Tudjman and U.N. officials and then proceeded to Sarajevo.

That evening we met with President Alija Izetbegovic and other officials of the Bosnia-Herzegovina government. Although at first skeptical of our mission, they seemed reassured when we explained that our goal was not to initiate a new peace agenda, but to promote negotiations on the basis of the Contact Group plan. Approving this effort, they made it clear that they would accept a cease-fire for not more than three months.

Later that night I drafted what I considered to be a comprehensive cease-fire proposal, based on the discussions with the Serb delegation in my home, my talks in Zagreb and Sarajevo, and briefings from U.S. and U.N. officials.

Before going to Pale, I requested of the Serbs that both Dr. Karadzic and the military commander, General Ratko Mladic, meet with me, to assure that whatever we evolved would have both political and military backing. Our negotiations in Pale included them and a number of other top Serb officials. We had some difficult moments, but finally concluded an agreement with some modifications of my original draft. Its terms included:

- a) An immediate cease-fire and cessation of hostility for at least four months, to be enforced by the interposition of United Nations forces.
- b) The prevention of the firing of any guns or weapons that might damage people or property.
- c) A comprehensive peace agreement to be negotiated during this period, under the auspices of the Contact Group using mediators proposed by the Contact Group and mutually agreed by the parties.
- d) In all respects, both sides to be given equal treatment.
- e) During this period, unrestricted movement of relief convoys, use of the airport at Sarajevo, and the delivery of humanitarian services, with U.N. forces helping to assure that no armaments or weapons of war are in the cargoes to be delivered.
- f) Each side to be responsible within its controlled areas for the protection of human rights in accordance with international standards. Special rapporteurs are to have unimpeded access to insure compliance.
- g) All people, regardless of age, sex, or ethnic origin, to have the right to live in a location of their choice.
- h) An early exchange of all detainees.

The Serbs agreed to negotiate in good faith on the basis of the Contact Group plan that requires a division of territory, with the Serbs to control 49% and the Muslim/Croat federation 51%. Mutually agreed modifications to the plans would be negotiated during the peace talks.

By telephone, I read this document to representatives the State Department and White House and, with their approval, I signed the document as a witness to the signatures of Doctor Karadzic and General Mladic. (Enclosure A)

Back in Sarajevo the next morning, we obtained a closely parallel agreement with President Izetbegovic, with only one difference: a demand "that the Serbs accept the 51/49% map as a prerequisite to peace talks. (Enclosure B)

In order to clarify some issues and make implementation dates earlier and more specific, we returned then to Pale and concluded an additional agreement (Enclosure C). Back in Sarajevo, President Izetbegovic accepted the additions.

Now we had common agreement for a temporary period of peace during the holidays, Christmas and New Years, a 4-month cease-fire through the month of April, a cessation of hostilities between military forces of both sides with UNPROFOR to interpose its units between them, the withdrawal of government forces from the demilitarized zone on Mount Igman near the Sarajevo airport, an early exchange of all detainees, and an opportunity for the Contact Group to work with both sides to resolve any remaining issues.

I pointed out to the news media on my departure the only unresolved issue was that Muslim/Croat officials were insisting that, as a prerequisite to peace talks, the Serbs would have to "accept" the 51/49% plan; the Serbs, on the other hand, were willing to negotiate "on the basis of" the same plan.

Since that time we have received reports from U.S. and UN officials and, with their approval, have maintained contact with leaders in the region.

The Bosnian Serbs have presented to us their own territorial proposal, reducing their controlled area from 70% to 53% and professing their willingness to negotiate the remaining differences. I understand that the Bosnian Serb proposal was provided to members of the Contact Group in March.

On one occasion in January, the full Contact Group did have one meeting with the Bosnian Serbs and the U.S. member visited Pale once or twice, but since then the Contact Group has isolated the Bosnian Serbs and maintained a policy of communicating only with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic on matters involving the Bosnian Serbs.

The end of the cease-fire period came at the end of April with no negotiations having been undertaken. Since then, as is well known by members of this committee, government forces have attacked from within the safe zones, the Serbs have responded with shelling, travel through the relief supply routes and the Sarajevo

airport has been restricted, NATO planes have bombed Serb positions, hostages have been taken, and a higher level of conflict is now threatened.

The question is, where can we go from here? Although no one can guarantee ultimate results, there are two basic alternatives: the escalation of military conflict or a determined attempt to negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement.

The United Nations is facing an almost impossible dilemma, serving as a peace enforcer when there is no peace agreement. However, the United Nations Protective Force (UNPROFOR) has performed well, I believe, both with its humanitarian mission and also in reducing the level of fighting and the resulting casualties. If you compare the past year with previous times, there has been a dramatic reduction.

Some have called for a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo by the U.S. to permit the Muslim-Croat federation to obtain weapons. Under these circumstances, the United Nations military commander--both the one now and before--has stated that his forces could not fulfill their mission, and both France and Great Britain have stated that their forces will be withdrawn. This would likely result in a much greater involvement of the United States in both military training and support, and an escalation in bloodshed in Bosnia. The war could also widen to Croatia, Serbia, or southward to Kosovo and Macedonia. I hope not, but that is a possibility.

With an almost hopeless prospect for ending the crisis through military means, it is time to reassess the possibilities for a mediated settlement of basic issues. What should be the prerequisites for such negotiations?

If comprehensive peace talks without preconditions are not acceptable to the Contact Group, I believe a clear demonstration of good faith by both sides should be adequate. Proven performance of a practical nature can be required, such as those negotiated in December:

- a) a total cessation of hostilities and disengagement of armed forces,
- b) freedom of movement of U.N. peacekeepers,
- c) unrestricted movement of United Nations convoys to deliver relief supplies to Sarajevo and other safe havens,
- d) the Sarajevo airport open to United Nations flights,
- e) the release of all detainees,
- f) human rights guarantees, including unrestricted return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

As earlier agreed by the Bosnian Serbs and Muslim-Croat federation officials in Sarajevo when we were there, there would be balanced and equal treatment of the two sides.

This period of peace might also include the lifting of United Nations trade sanctions against the Serbs as long as Serbia and the Bosnian groups act in good faith. This would be a powerful incentive for compliance.

Peace talks would best be held in a neutral place under the auspices of the United Nations or the Contact Group, and with an agenda that might include such constitutional issues as the degree of autonomy of the Muslim/Croatian and Serbian groups within a united Bosnia, mutually agreeable territorial divisions based on the 51/49% proposal of the Contact Group, and the right of special relationships with Serbia and Croatia.

Both sides, the Bosnian government and the Bosnian Serbs, must be at the negotiating table. All those interested in peace, including the government of the United States, should urge both sides to seek a peaceful resolution of this continuing crisis.

Obviously, we cannot speak for any parties to the dispute or for those involved in peacekeeping, but there is every reason for exploring these ideas as a reasonable alternative to the existing deadlock and the strong possibility of another surge in bloodshed.

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ENCLOSURE A
Bosnian Serb Agreement Comprehensive Peace Agreement
December 19, 1994

We the undersigned agree that we and those under our authority will:

1. Commence negotiations on an agreement for cessation of hostilities on December 27, 1994, with the intent to conclude the agreement by January 15, 1995. This agreement would be implemented immediately by instituting a cease-fire by interposition of U.N. forces along the line of confrontation, by cessation of all military activities and the exchange of prisoners, etc. This cessation of hostilities will last for four months or for a longer period if mutually agreed by both parties.
2. We agree that, while the cessation of hostilities is in effect, we shall negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement, with the proposal of the Contact Group as the basis for negotiation of all points. This will be done at a mutually acceptable site, under the auspices of the Contact Group, using mediators proposed by the Contact Group and mutually agreed by the parties. All issues are to be resolved in full cooperation with the Contact Group. In all respects, both sides will be given equal treatment.
3. During this period there will be unrestricted movement of relief convoys, use of the airport at Sarajevo in accordance with existing agreements, and the delivery of humanitarian services by official institutions and nongovernmental organizations. Each side may join with UNPROFOR inspectors to assure that no armaments or weapons of war are included in the cargoes to be delivered.
4. Each side will be responsible within its controlled areas for the total elimination and prevention of the firing of any guns or weapons of any kind that might be damaging to people or property.
5. Each side will be responsible within its controlled areas for the protection of human rights in accordance with international standards. All people, regardless of age, sex, or ethnic origin, shall have the right to live in a location of their choice. International observers, including the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, will be free to observe compliance with this agreement.

ENCLOSURE B

Comprehensive Peace Agreement

We the undersigned agree that we and those under our authority will:

1. Immediately implement a cease-fire, monitored by U.N forces along all lines of confrontation, by cessation of all military activities and the exchange of prisoners, etc., as described below.
2. Commence negotiations on an agreement for a total cessation of hostilities on December 27, 1994, with the intent to conclude this agreement by January 5, 1995. This cessation of hostilities will last for four months, or for a longer period if mutually agreed by both parties.
3. While the cessation of hostilities is in effect, negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement on the basis of the acceptance of the peace plan of the Contact Group as a starting point. This will be done at a mutually acceptable site, under the auspices of the Contact group, using mediators proposed by the Contact Group and mutually agreed by the parties. All issues are to be resolved in full cooperation with the Contact Group.

It is understood that there will be unrestricted movement of relief convoys, us of the airport at Sarajevo in accordance with existing agreements, and the delivery of humanitarian services by official institutions and nongovernmental organizations. Each side may join with UNPROFOR inspectors to assure that no armaments or weapons of war are included in the cargoes to be delivered.

Each side will be responsible within its controlled areas for the total elimination and prevention of the firing of any guns or weapons of any kind that might be damaging to people or property.

Each side will be responsible with its controlled areas for the protection of human rights in accordance with international standards. All people, regardless of age, sex, or ethnic origin, shall have the right to live in a location of their choice. International observers, including the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, will be free to observe compliance with this agreement.

There will be an early exchange of all detainees, under the auspices of the International Red Cross. In accordance with the Geneva Convention, the ICRC will have unimpeded access to all detainees to ensure that the provisions of this agreement are fulfilled.

In a final agreement, all has to be agreed; otherwise, nothing is agreed.

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It is realized that other difficult issues and unresolved questions will have to be resolved. This will be done peacefully, utilizing the services of UNPROFOR and the Contact Group as appropriate.

Signed December 20, 1994

Alija Izetbegovic
President

Jimmy Carter
Witness

ENCLOSURE C
Additional agreement to that of December 19, 1994
December 20, 1994

- 1) It is agreed that the negotiations to establish a total cessation of hostilities will commence on 23 December 1994, with the intent to conclude the agreement by 1 January 1995.
- 2) A complete cease-fire, throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, will be implemented at noon, 23 December, 1994, to be monitored by U.N. forces along all lines of confrontation, by cessation of. all military activities.
- 3) Based on assurances that convoys and humanitarian services will pass freely, the Bosnian forces will withdraw from the Igman demilitarized zone in accordance with the existing agreement, prior to commencement of the negotiations described in item (1) above.

Radovan Karadzic

Witnessed: Jimmy Carter

[Note: Since we concluded this agreement during the last few minutes of our stay in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I received approval of all three of these items from President Izetbegovic by telephone from the airport before announcing them and departing.]