

wanted to get heavy. Milosevic was not a fan of his, describing him as 'a scoundrel and a nouveau riche'.

Marija says: 'Hi there, there is this guy threatening Kosava, says he will buy us all, that we can all go to hell, that he has the court, the police and the SPS [Socialist Party] and that he will fuck us all. Says he [the advertiser] will buy us all. I mean he might have a lot of money, he came from Bosnia, a crook. Says we can suck his dick because he's got everything.'

Milosevic gave his daughter some financial advice but was not very supportive. 'Next time don't play commercials for someone who hasn't paid up front. Huge debts are a problem of every company in Yugoslavia. OK let's not talk further, I can tell you are very busy.' He advised his daughter to file a lawsuit. 'OK Marija, don't spread this further, it might end up looking like someone is threatening to kill us, for Christ's sake. He won't pay? Big deal. Sue him. Everything's OK.'²³

Milosevic sounded rattled. Earlier that year a hand grenade had exploded not far from the Serbian presidency building. The vacuum left by his destruction of state institutions was being filled by forces over which he had no control. During the next few years some of the Milosevic family's closest associates would be picked off, one by one, in professional assassinations.

I 8

WEATHERING OPERATION
STORM

NATO Bombs the Bosnian Serbs

1994-5

Hrvoje, what is this? What did we waste all these hours for? You shouldn't have done this. The shelling has to stop.

Slobodan Milosevic on the telephone to President Tudjman's secret envoy Hrvoje Sarinic in May 1995, as Croat forces attack Serb-held Krajina.'

After a few visits to Belgrade, Hrvoje Sarinic was getting the measure of Slobodan Milosevic. 'When you spend thirty-eight hours with someone tête-à-tête, you start to know the person, whatever his mode of presenting things is. You know what he is hiding.'² The two men fenced verbally, but Milosevic just ducked and weaved. Sarinic challenged Milosevic: 'I said to him once, "President Milosevic, you have said wherever a Serb is, that is Serbia." He said, "I never stated that, who told you that?" But it was generally known that it was his policy.'

So widespread was the belief that this was Milosevic's policy, it spawned this mordant joke: in a last-ditch attempt to save the old federal Yugoslavia, a team of astronauts is sent to the moon: a Bosnian Muslim, a Croat and two Serbs. When the rocket lands, the astronauts get out and immediately start squabbling over which republic's flag to raise. The Croat says: 'Look at all the mountains and rocks, it's just like Croatia.' The Bosnian says: 'No, no, look at us, a Muslim, a Croat and Serbs all together, it's just like Bosnia.' Then one Serb takes out a gun and shoots the other. He says: 'A Serb has died here. This is Serbia.'

Beneath the word games, Milosevic's objectives were far more realistic. At this time the Serbian leader had two main objectives: in the long term, to get sanctions lifted, and in the short term to acquire

as much oil as possible. Sarinic noted how cold it was in Belgrade, and the lines of bedraggled vendors hawking bottles of petrol or logs for firewood. When he accused Milosevic of taking the Serbs back to the Middle Ages, he merely said, 'I know'.³

Milosevic saw that sanctions were substantially eroding his support. Factories were closing for lack of oil. The parlous state of the economy, a massive increase in crime and poverty, and hundreds of thousands of refugees from Bosnia and Croatia were threatening Serbia's social stability. And while Milosevic outmanoeuvred the international community on a day-to-day basis, he knew that to stay in power some kind of settlement would have to be reached eventually.

Milosevic was thinking of recognising Croatia and normalising relations, as a step to easing Serbia's economic and diplomatic isolation. He was in any case losing patience with the Krajina Serb leadership. The Napoleonic policeman Milan Martić and the baby-faced dentist Milan Babić refused to consider the proposals put forward by international mediators that would offer some kind of autonomy, within the borders of Croatia. Martić and Babić insisted on 'independence' for their quasi-state. The Krajina Serbs were becoming a financial millstone, and an obstacle to Milosevic's efforts to present himself as a peacemaker.

In addition, the Serbs in Knin were allying themselves not with Belgrade but with Karadžić's increasingly hard-line Bosnian Serbs in their mountain stronghold of Pale. Karadžić was also refusing to follow orders. Milosevic had not one but two monsters on his hands, who were ganging up on their Frankensteinian creator. Meanwhile the military intelligence reports landing on Milosevic's desk reported that the Croatian army had become a powerful military force, while the creaking JNA was demoralised. The UN arms embargo had done nothing to prevent Croatia acquiring a plentiful supply of weapons, while western powers turned a blind eye. The question was, what should he do about it?

Milosevic and Tudjman had temporarily settled the Croatian question in January 1992 by agreeing to the Vance plan, named after Cyrus Vance, the American mediator appointed by the UN. By the end of 1991 rebel Serbs held over a quarter of Croatia. The fighting and the front lines had more or less stabilised. At that time Milosevic knew that the war in Croatia was deeply unpopular at home. The JNA had been wracked by desertions, and many officers were unhappy about the Serbianisation of the once multi-national

institution. Milosevic understood that for now at least, it was time to call a halt.

The Vance plan institutionalised Serb gains in Croatia. The Serb-occupied areas were designated UNPAS, UN Protected Areas, divided into sectors: north, south, east and west. Sectors North, South and West were roughly contiguous, a crescent of occupied territory nudging the coast near the Adriatic port city of Zadar, and stretching along the Bosnian border. Sector East was separate: an area around Vukovar overlooking the Danube, which was the border with Serbia. The Vance plan called for the JNA and the paramilitaries to withdraw, a ceasefire to be implemented, and the return of refugees. It was a clear victory for Milosevic. The government of the Republic of Serb Krajina remained in place. The paramilitaries were not disarmed, and there was no realistic right of return for Croatian refugees who wanted to go home. Milosevic had finessed the UN into enforcing the division of the country, and ensuring that the Serb rebels kept control of the territories they had seized. There were no open transport or communication links between the UNPAS and the rest of Croatia. UN troops sat at heavily guarded checkpoints, controlling all access into the UNPAS. Crucially, the UN would not actually administer the areas, merely monitor their administration.

The international community presented this as a diplomatic triumph. Perhaps it was, considering the diplomats' response to the situation so far. Admittedly, on 12 November 1991 the European Community had resolutely 'condemned the further escalation of attacks on Vukovar, Dubrovnik and other towns in Croatia', but even the most resolute condemnation was poor defence against a barrage of 155 mm artillery shells. In Sector East Arkan's Tigers remained in place, murdering those who questioned their actions.⁴ The JNA did withdraw, which anyway suited Milosevic as he had other plans for the Yugoslav troops, in Bosnia.

Milosevic – and Tudjman – understood the significance of the Vance plan. There was no political will in the international community to enforce a military solution to the Yugoslav conflict. The way Milosevic saw it, Belgrade could take as much territory as it wanted, stop fighting when it needed, and then sit down at the negotiating table and present itself as a peacemaker. At which point a grateful international community, spared the problem of taking difficult decisions, would send in UN troops to consolidate the Serbs' gains. Milosevic was correct.

UN aid-workers would engage in relief work for refugees, and UN troops would help enforce an already agreed peace, but they would never impose one by force of arms. Tudjman realised that the Vance plan in effect gave him the green light to go ahead with his planned annexation of southern Bosnia. If Milosevic could get away with it in Croatia, then why shouldn't he in Herzegovina?

By the end of 1994 it was clear that the UNPAS were not a viable long-term solution. Sarinic's secret missions to Milosevic were increasingly focused on one question: how would he react if Croatia attacked the rebel Serbs? Everything hinged on this, said Sarinic. 'We wanted to know would Milosevic be involved, would he defend his Serbs, because he pushed them to revolution. We knew the ratio of forces, and if the Serbian army intervened it would be a different story.'

The diplomatic dance began. First, Milosevic asked Sarinic for support in lifting the economic blockade. Maybe, said Sarinic, for a price: Belgrade should recognise Croatia, within its internationally recognised borders. Sarinic pushed harder. If not, Croatia would attack Knin, the headquarters of the rebel Serbs, and anyway take back its territories by force. Milosevic tried to stall. But he specifically warned Sarinic off attacking eastern Slavonia, known as Sector East, which was under the control of Russian UN troops who made no secret of their sympathy for their Orthodox brothers, the Serbs.

Sector East was notoriously corrupt. It was the centre of a flourishing black market in smuggled petrol. Sarinic recalled: 'Milosevic told me not to touch eastern Slavonia, because it was on the border with Serbia. I told him, "Be careful, Mr President, because if the battle starts for eastern Slavonia, then war could come to Serbia, which did not happen before." I saw that Milosevic's situation was not as easy and comfortable as it had been two or three years before. I told him that time was not working in his favour any more.' When Sarinic quipped that Milosevic would have to put the SANU Memorandum – that many saw as the blueprint for Greater Serbia – in a drawer, Milosevic replied, 'Well everyone thinks about better times.' Sarinic reported all this back to Tudjman. His own assessment was that Milosevic would not step in to save the Krajina Serbs. The Croat military stepped up its preparations to attack.

Milosevic enjoyed his meetings with Sarinic. One took place at Milosevic's remote mountain holiday home near the Romanian border. Sarinic travelled there by helicopter with Thorvald Stoltenberg, a former

Norwegian foreign minister who was now the UN's special envoy to Yugoslavia. Together with his European Community counterpart, Lord Owen, Stoltenberg co-chaired the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY), which had been founded after the London conference, where Milan Panic had told Milosevic to 'shut up'.

The flight took an hour and a half. As the helicopter landed Milosevic came forward to greet his visitors. He was accompanied by a large dog, recalled Sarinic. 'He was very polite and gentlemanly. Milosevic said the dog used to be wild, but now he fed him, so the dog was his dog.' Ushered inside, Sarinic and Stoltenberg were directed to a reception room to wait for Milosevic. The UN's envoy was left alone to kick his heels while Milosevic consulted with Sarinic. 'Stoltenberg wanted to come as well, and after the meeting he was very curious as to what we had discussed,' Sarinic recalled.

Yet at times it appeared that Milosevic's grip was slipping. His consumption of pear brandy was rising. He usually took no notes of what was agreed, or said. He wanted to go on holiday. In one conversation with Sarinic, in January 1995, he seemed to try and convince himself that the wars were not his fault. Milosevic's words provide a rare glimpse into his inner thoughts, and the mass of contradictions therein. There is even a hint that he felt guilty. 'When all this was happening I was on vacation in Dubrovnik and I realised straight away what this was all about. I can't wait for all this to end so I can go to Dubrovnik again. I will do everything I can from my side to make this happen this year already. Some idiots were saying Dubrovnik was also a Serbian town. Serbia has no territorial pretensions, if you insist, not even towards Baranja.'⁵

Mira too was also a great fan of the jewel of the Adriatic. It was Dubrovnik which had 'stolen her heart for ever', she had written, reminiscing about a holiday the family had taken there in 1984, driving from Belgrade to the coast in their small Volkswagen. 'Towards evening, down below the highway, the lights of Dubrovnik came into view. Dubrovnik – sparkling, boisterous, all in flowers.'⁶ Mira had written a poem on her seventeenth birthday for the city, and there seen *Hamlet* for the first time. Battered by a rain of JNA shell and mortar fire during the Croatian war of independence, it would be a long time before Dubrovnik welcomed the Milosevics.

Milosevic and Tudjman communicated through shells and infantry attacks, as well as envoys. In January 1993 thousands of Croat troops

attacked and captured the Serb-held area around the Croatian port of Zadar, a strip of land that allowed the rebel Serbs to virtually cut Croatia in two. The Croat offensive was condemned by the UN Security Council. Two French UN peacekeepers were killed. None of which stopped the Croat tanks from rolling across the UN lines. Tudjman had learnt the lesson taught so well by Milosevic. The international community had neither the will nor the ability to stop the warring sides using force. Milosevic's message to Tudjman was unspoken but no less clear for it. Belgrade did nothing.

Tudjman's next probe was far messier. In September Croat forces launched an attack on rebel Serbs occupying an area known as the 'Medak pocket', and captured several villages. At least twenty-nine Serb civilians were murdered by Croat troops, and five wounded or captured Serb troops were executed. Many of the victims were elderly, women and some were also handicapped. The operation was commanded by Major General Rahim Ademi, a Kosovo Albanian who had graduated from the JNA military academy and eventually joined the Croatian army. Ademi was later indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at the Hague (ICTY). The attack on the Medak pocket caused outrage, and Croatia withdrew under UN orders, to allow the return of UN peacekeepers.

These events, and the revelations about the Bosnian Croat concentration camps, caused a substantial shift in world and diplomatic opinion. Now Croatia was seen as an aggressor, and was threatened with sanctions. That prospect, and growing domestic unease about Tudjman's policies, caused a sea-change in Croatian public opinion that he could not ignore.

Enter the United States. Unlike George Bush's administration, President Clinton's believed that the US did have a 'dog in this fight', even if only to win a moral victory. The US supported a policy of 'Lift and Strike', meaning lift the arms embargo against Bosnia and strike the Bosnian Serbs. They delivered a clear message to Tudjman: stop the war in Bosnia, close the concentration camps and forget about annexing Herceg-Bosna. Otherwise Croatia would face international isolation. It worked.

American diplomats saw that Tudjman was just as hypocritical as Milosevic. Milosevic demanded self-determination for the Krajina Serbs within Croatia's borders, but denied the same for the Kosovo Albanians within Serbia's borders. Tudjman demanded that the borders of Croatia

be sacrosanct, and refused to consider some form of self-determination for the Serbs in Krajina. He backed the Croats of Herzegovina, financing their para-state and arming their militia, and called for the dismemberment of Bosnia. But Tudjman saw himself as a great Croatian leader, who would take his place in history. And Croatia, he boasted, was not an eastern Balkan state, with all that implied, but a modern western democracy. His version of democracy was pretty much what could be expected from a former general in a Communist army turned nationalist dissident. Still he understood that for his state to survive, it needed good relations with the West, especially with the United States, which was positioning itself as a Balkan power broker, to the annoyance of Europe.

In March 1994, Croatia agreed to form a Bosnian-Croat federation in the parts of Bosnia not under Serb control. The Croat statelet of Herzeg-Bosna was partially dismantled. The Bosnian Croat army once again joined forces with the Muslim-led Bosnian government army. The two sides had been allies, enemies, and now they were allies again. Too much blood had been spilt for it to be anything but a grudging and bitter alliance, but it held. Tudjman made it clear to the US there was a price for giving up his ambitions in Bosnia. He wanted a clear run to recapture the one-third of Croatia that had been occupied by the rebel Serbs in Krajina. He got it.

Watching the US court Tudjman, Milosevic understood that everything had changed, with serious implications. First, the fighting between Bosnian Croats and Muslims had stopped. The old principle of 'divide and rule' no longer applied. Bosnian Serbs would not be able to rent out their tanks for a day to either side, or accept commissions to fire their artillery to order. The United States had boldly gone where Europe had feared to tread.

European diplomacy had always been a stitched-together compromise. In Britain the Foreign Office was resolutely opposed to taking military action against Serbia. Its argument was that it would endanger the substantial number of British troops on the ground, to which cynics responded that the British UN troops – whose officers in fact took a vigorous approach to peace-keeping that often dismayed the Foreign Office grandees – had been deployed for that very reason. The Germans took a tougher line, but were hampered by memories of the Nazi era. The French, like the Greeks, were seen as being traditionally pro-Serb. All of this had provided Milosevic with much room for mischief and manoeuvre.

Courted by a procession of world statesmen and diplomats, Milosevic positively bloomed under the world's spotlight. There was a strong argument that European diplomats, such as Lord Owen, somehow legitimised his regime. As the European envoy of the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia, Owen was an influential figure in Balkan diplomacy, who seemed to spend vast amounts of time sitting on Milosevic's sofa nodding sagely. At one meeting in Serbia Owen had delivered a clear message to Sarinic, Tudjman's envoy recalled. 'I remember very well, it remains with me to this day. Stoltenberg and Owen were there with their teams. We discussed how to solve the problem of Krajina and occupied Croatia. Owen told me, "Don't think you are going to get on the green table what you lost on the battlefield." You can imagine such a statement from an important representative of the international community, it encouraged Milosevic.'⁷

Neither Owen nor Milosevic lacked self-belief. The good lord had, as one of his domestic critics pointed out, 'Balkanised' a few political parties himself. Sarinic had once asked Milosevic if it was true that Lord Owen had written the introduction to Mira's book, which had recently been published in Russia. Milosevic said: 'Owen is our good friend, Mira's and mine, but he did not write the introduction, although he did make some suggestions. The Russian edition alone brought Mira 340,000 Deutschmarks.' Sarinic replied: 'You married well.' Milosevic could only agree: 'I can't complain.'⁸

Tibor Varady, Yugoslav Minister of Justice in the short-lived pro-western government of Milan Panic, recalled: 'For many years we implored western leaders not to negotiate with Milosevic. In order to create the impression that legality matters, I said why don't you negotiate with the man who is entitled to speak, the Yugoslav prime minister, Radoje Kontic. He would have called Milosevic every five minutes on the telephone, but it would have been something.'⁹ Varady believes that negotiating with Milosevic became a kind of badge of pride for many politicians. 'I am not entitled to guess their motives, but for western diplomats speaking with Milosevic was some kind of achievement. It was very important for their careers, to have negotiated with this mighty, ruthless ruler. To say, "I was there with Kontic", well, who on earth is Kontic? But Milosevic, that was more manly as well. Diplomats are also human.'

Varady recalled how in August 1992, he and Milan Panic had dined with Lord Owen, after the envoy had lunched with Milosevic. 'Owen

said, much to my surprise, "Now it is clear that Milosevic really wants peace." That is what he came up with after his lunch with Milosevic. I could not be rude, so I told him he was not the first person to come to this conclusion.'¹⁰

Mira was certainly taken with Lord Owen when she and Milosevic had a double-date for lunch with Lord Owen and his wife Debbie in March 1994. 'He left an impression of a civilised and very cultured person, close to me in many things regarding the wars in Yugoslavia itself, and in general questions of civilisation. It was an easy conversation. He was absolutely close to my stance.'¹¹ But Mira was piqued to discover Lord Owen's recollection of their lunch in his book *Balkan Odyssey*. 'I was astonished to see what he wrote, that I in our conversation had been against the market economy, when I was not. Secondly, we did not speak about that. He is a doctor and he does not know the first thing about economics.'¹²

Lord Owen, and arguably the whole panoply of European diplomacy, were anyway about to become irrelevant. The US government had engineered the Croat-Muslim Federation agreement. Now it was going to re-organise its armies. The future of the former Yugoslavia would be decided on the battlefield, not at the dining tables of diplomats. Like its post-Communist neighbours, Croatia wanted to join Partnership for Peace, the entry-salon for eventual NATO membership. All PfP members were required to bring their Warsaw Pact era forces up to NATO standards. This was a massive undertaking, requiring extensive re-training in current western military techniques, familiarisation with NATO weapons and a total re-organisation of the defence ministry.

This called for US military assistance, much of it channelled through private contractors. US military aid was almost certainly Croatia's reward for forming the Croat-Bosnian Federation in April that year. There were reports that Croatia also agreed to the building of a CIA base on the island of Krk to operate unmanned 'Predator' drones, and supported air-drops of weapons to the Bosnian army.¹³

The balance of power in the Balkans was about to change for good. At the beginning of May 1995 Operation Flash was launched. Over three thousand Croatian troops, backed by twenty tanks, recaptured Serb-occupied Sector West in less than two days. The Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, did nothing to help his brothers in arms. Nor did Belgrade. Analysts noted that Operation Flash was based on current

western military doctrine, far in advance of the lumbering Soviet-era tactics used by the JNA. The Croatian armour and infantry were well co-ordinated, aided by good use of modern communication techniques and equipment.¹⁴

Although Milosevic had indicated that he would not deploy the JNA to aid the Krajina Serbs, he was still enraged when the attack started. He immediately called Hrvoje Sarinic demanding a ceasefire. When Sarinic asked him to sack the Krajina Serb leader, Milan Martić, Milosevic responded furiously, if disingenuously: 'How can I sack him. I never appointed him there, so I can't sack him,' he shouted, before slamming down the telephone. But, crucially, the JNA troops stayed in their barracks. The rebel Serbs fired Orkan rockets fitted with cluster bombs into downtown Zagreb, killing eleven civilians, a cowardly act that made no difference to the military outcome, for which Milan Martić was indicted by the Hague Tribunal for war crimes.

Faced with the capture of Sector West, the international community proposed a plan known as Z4. Considering the future events of that summer of 1995, Z4 offered unimaginable benefits to the rebel Serbs, including self-determination, their own flag, police, parliament and a president. Milosevic supported the plan, as did Tudjman although with reservations. In a decision of quite remarkable stupidity, the Krajina Serb leaders, Milan Martić and Milan Babić, rejected Z4 outright. Instead they despatched troops to join the Bosnian Serb army's attack on the Bosnian-government-held city of Bihać.

Bihać, cut off by besieging Serbs, had been declared a UN safe area, like Srebrenica. When Srebrenica fell in July, the Bosnian Serb military leader, General Ratko Mladić, launched an attack on Bihać. Unlike Srebrenica, Bihać had been fairly quiet for years, thanks to the region's massive black market from which all three sides profited. So quiet, in fact, that the Bosnian Serb army sold considerable amounts of weapons to their supposed enemies, believing they would never be used. The Bosnian Serbs were wrong. The Croat and Bosnian Croat army attacked the besieging Serbs from behind, while the Bosnian Croat and government forces inside Bihać broke out. The Serbs were caught in the middle. 'Welcome to Bihać,' said the Bosnian army commander Atif Dedaković, when the Croat forces broke through. 'We have been waiting for you.'¹⁵

The liberation of Bihać marked the end of the Republic of Serb Krajina. At dawn on 4 August, Operation Storm commenced. With

200,000 troops, the Croat forces outnumbered the Krajina Serb army five to one as it advanced on the rebel stronghold of Knin. Many Serb soldiers, and their political leaders, simply fled. Few were willing to risk their lives for a 'republic' that had offered almost nothing to its citizens except the chance to live under Serb rule. The economy barely functioned, there was little work and no investment.

Ethnic cleansing turned out to be a poor foundation for a state. The Republic of Serb Krajina collapsed overnight. By 10.00 a.m. on 5 August, the Croatian flag was flying over Knin castle. Between 150,000 and 200,000 Serbs ran from the Croat onslaught, often escaping only with what they could carry by hand, leaving meals half-eaten on the table and a trail of dropped possessions that littered the roads into Bosnia. It was the end of a historic European community that had stretched back centuries. As Hrvoje Sarinic had predicted, Milosevic did nothing to aid the rebel Serb statelet he had helped found.

How effective was US military assistance? Operation Storm was a brutal exercise in ethnic cleansing. Civilians and civilian buildings were shelled. But in the grim arithmetic of Balkan warfare, the level of atrocity was comparatively low compared to, for example, the Serb assault on eastern Bosnia. The aim seemed to be to expel the Serbs and prevent their return, rather than wholesale slaughter. None the less, at least 150 Serb civilians, many of them elderly, were executed. And if Serbs did want to return there was nowhere to go. For weeks afterwards Croat troops burnt down houses and farm buildings owned by Serbs, according to the war crimes indictment of the man in charge of Operation Storm, Major-General Ante Gotovina. Graham Blewitt, deputy prosecutor at the ICTY, said: 'Operation Storm is not being indicted, only the crimes committed within it. We have seen no evidence of indictment to war crimes from the US.'

The Krajina refugees poured into Belgrade on tractors, and on foot. Whole families were jammed into tiny cars. At best they found a grudging reception from mother Serbia: most Serbs were too wrapped in their own problems of trying to put food on the table to care about their brothers from the rocky hinterlands of Krajina. Many felt that the refugees from Krajina – and the increasing numbers from Bosnia – should have stayed and fought. Writing in *Duga* magazine Mira Marković noted:

The patriots from Bosnia and Krajina living in Belgrade are not satisfied with the results of the war, and they express their dissatisfaction

aggressively. They are angry with the poor in Bosnia's and Krajina's rugged hills for not being more efficient . . . It simply does not occur to them that they must take part themselves in the war which they have launched with so much propaganda.¹⁶

Few had been more responsible for war propaganda than Milosevic's tame journalists, yet in Belgrade there was no media campaign demanding the defence of the Krajina. Belgrade Television showed a circus festival in Monte Carlo. *Politika* newspaper reported the next day: 'Serbs Withdraw: Military Command Moved to Reserve Positions.' Milosevic's abandonment of the Krajina was cynical, but also supremely realistic. By 1995 few young Serb men wanted to risk their lives for the opportunity to shell Croatia's Adriatic coast.

At the same time, there was no longer any dispute about Croatia's status as a former Yugoslav republic. If Serbia defended the Krajina Serbs it would be declaring war on an internationally recognised sovereign state. An all-out war with Croatia would certainly have triggered a furious diplomatic backlash. Milosevic wanted sanctions lifted, not tightened. He also understood that his regime was highly unlikely to survive a new conflict. And, ultimately, the Serbs in Krajina did not matter that much. As Borisav Jovic had told the Croatian politician Stipe Mesic back in 1990: 'We are not interested in the Serbs in Croatia. They are your citizens, you can do what you like with them, you can impale them for all we care. We are exclusively interested in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was, and will be, Serbian.'¹⁷

More than this, Milosevic understood the importance of the entrance of the United States, both in diplomatical terms – with the Washington agreement on the Croat-Muslim Federation – and in military terms. For not just in Belgrade, but also in Washington, D.C., *realpolitik* triumphed over morality. The biggest single act yet of ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia¹⁸ had been carried out by an army trained – to whatever extent – by US military advisers and almost certainly aided by US intelligence. 'There is a lot of proof that the Americans cooperated with Croatia. The CIA was here all the time with General Gotovina, they knew everything, they sent special equipment for controlling intelligence and eavesdropping,' said Hrvoje Sarinic.

On the ground, the balance of power had been altered for good. It was time for Milosevic to forge his own Pax Americana.

19

AMERICA TO THE RESCUE

Sarajevo Relieved, Eventually

Summer 1995

Our army is very, very responsible. People, civilians as well as UN personnel, are completely safe and secure.

Radovan Karadzic, Bosnian Serb leader.¹

Outgunned and outnumbered by the besieging Bosnian Serbs, the inhabitants of Sarajevo hit back with humour. One of the favourite themes of Sarajevo radio's Surrealist Hit Parade show was the increasing disobedience of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic. Not only was the wild-haired psychiatrist-poet one of the most accomplished liars in the Balkans, but he was also disobeying Milosevic's orders. He and the Bosnian Serb leaders repeatedly refused to sign up for peace plans that would end sanctions against Serbia. In a bedtime-story voice, the Hit Parade presenter narrates a very Balkan children's tale: 'Far, far away, in a tiny land, in a tiny village, in a tiny workshop, Slobetto the Toymaker has carved a disobedient puppet named Radovanocchio.' But Radovanocchio keeps getting his maker into trouble, and simply won't do what he is told. 'I'm going to make an orthopaedic brace out of you!' yells Slobetto at his wayward creation.²

Milosevic couldn't do that. But he could, and did, stand by as the Croats destroyed the rebel Serb statelet in Knin. A side benefit of which was the weakening of Radovan Karadzic. In Knin and Pale, the leaders of the rebel Serb statelets had succumbed to delusions of grandeur, believing they could survive without Belgrade's support. Their armies engaged in joint operations together, and their politicians preferred to consult each other rather than Milosevic. They issued grand communiqués about uniting their armies under one joint command, but forgot who supplied the bullets and guns to fire them: Belgrade.

Even by Balkan standards, Milosevic's tactic of using an enemy army to bring uppity satrapies under control was a masterstroke. His plan was to boost an alternative, supposedly 'moderate' (by Bosnian Serb standards) leadership, based in the northern city of Banja Luka, which he could use to break Karadzic's power base in the town of Pale, just outside Sarajevo. Milosevic told Sarinic: 'The Serbs cannot get more than fifty per cent of Bosnia, and Sarajevo cannot be a Serb city. A majority in the Pale parliament comes from the Banja Luka region and it is through them that I will topple Karadzic, but in return I will have to strengthen this part territorially.'³

Milosevic realised that he had to take control of Pale after the Bosnian Serbs had rejected first the Vance-Owen peace plan, and then its main successor, known as the Contact Group plan. The 1993 plan devised by Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen claimed to support the idea that Bosnia should be a single state, and refugees would have the right to return. Bizarrely, this was to be achieved through dividing the country into ten semi-autonomous provinces, each of which would be 'predominantly' either Serb, Croat or Muslim. There would be a weak central government with no army, and no means of enforcing the right of return for refugees. Which are just a few of the reasons why Milosevic and Tudjman welcomed the Vance-Owen plan. Ironically, the maps delineating the cantons triggered a fresh outbreak of fighting in central Bosnia, as the Bosnian Croats attempted to grab the lands marked as Croat cantons. The Bosnian Croats joked that the initials of their army, HVO, now stood for 'Hvala Vance Owen', meaning 'Thank you, Vance Owen'.

The plan was to be considered by the Bosnian Serb assembly. To make sure they got the message, Milosevic summoned Montenegro's leader, Momir Bulatovic, and the president of Serbia, Dobrica Cosic, to help draft a letter to the Bosnian Serbs. Among its many haughty paragraphs was one which said:

Now is not the time for us to compete in patriotism. It is the right time for a courageous, considered and far-reaching decision. You have no right to expose ten million citizens of Yugoslavia to danger and international sanctions merely because of the remaining open issues which are of far less importance than the results achieved so far.⁴

The Yugoslav foreign minister, Vladislav Jovanovic, was woken up

and despatched by helicopter to read the letter out to the Bosnian Serb assembly. He was not welcome. Biljana Plavsic, the hard-line vice-president, responded: 'Who is this Milosevic, this Bulatovic, this Cosic? Did this nation elect them? No it did not.'⁵ The Bosnian Serbs voted against the Vance-Owen plan.

Milosevic then attempted to exploit Greece's traditional pro-Serb sympathies. The Greek prime minister, Constantin Mitsotakis, hosted a two-day summit in Athens at the beginning of May to discuss Vance-Owen. There, under intense pressure from Milosevic and the international community, Karadzic signed the plan, although he had no intention of sticking to it. The whole circus then moved from Athens to Pale, where Milosevic planned to speak to the Bosnian Serb assembly and persuade them to ratify Karadzic's decision. But Karadzic had not survived years at the top of the Bosnian Serb leadership without knowing a few tricks himself. Like Milosevic, he used the media to get his message across. Risto Djogo, the newsreader on Pale Television, pretended to commit suicide on television by shooting himself in the head. He announced: 'The Serbs of Bosnia are not about to commit suicide.'⁶

When Milosevic arrived, Biljana Plavsic refused to shake his hand. Milosevic, Mitsotakis and Cosic all called for the Bosnian Serbs to accept the plan. Karadzic prevaricated, and played his trump card, General Mladic, who produced two maps, one showing current Serb-controlled territory, and the other illustrating how much would have to be given up. This time the assembly voted 51-2 against acceptance, with twelve abstentions. Biljana Plavsic earned Milosevic's eternal loathing for her acute observation: 'He was not normal. This could be seen on his face and on his hands . . . He did not know how to behave himself in parliament, because he never attended parliamentary sessions.'⁷ The Pale performance was one of the worst setbacks of Milosevic's career. He was tired, angry, and perhaps uncomprehending. Even worse, Milosevic's defeat had been observed by diplomats, foreign ministers and the world's media.

He prepared a slow revenge. Over the next few months Radovan Karadzic was no longer lauded by the pliant Belgrade media as a national hero. Instead there were repeated allusions to black marketeering and war-profiteering, and the Serb statelets in Bosnia and Croatia were portrayed as obstacles to peace. On 7 June 1994 the Yugoslav President, Zoran Lilic, announced in an interview: 'Ten million citizens of

Yugoslavia cannot be held hostage to any leader who came from the territory of Yugoslavia, neither Republika Srpska, nor Republika Srpska Krajina.⁸ The warning to the Serb leaderships in Knin and Pale could not have been clearer.

The Contact Group, whose plan followed Vance-Owen, was composed of representatives from Britain, France, Russia, Germany and the United States. Their plan split Bosnia into two: 51 per cent for the Croat-Muslim federation, and 49 per cent for the Serbs. This was fine for Milosevic, for whom the only thing that mattered was the lifting of the sanctions. The Sarajevo government agreed grudgingly, knowing that they would be blamed for prolonging the war if they refused, and gambling that it didn't really matter because the Bosnian Serbs would reject the plan. Which they did, for the third time, on the night of 3 August 1994.

Milosevic immediately blockaded the border between Yugoslavia and Bosnia. Even telephone lines were cut off. Biljana Plavsic spoke for many when she said: 'No one would have expected such a dagger in the back.'⁹ Milosevic's media machine went into overdrive. Even by Milosevic-era standards, Yugoslav President Zoran Lilic's attack on Pale was a tour de force. 'How many times have they promised that they would not shell Sarajevo, and perpetuate the agony of civilians in this city? How many times have they promised to arrest the bands and paramilitary units which are terrorising civilians and besmirching the honour of the Serbs?'¹⁰ Lilic, of course, did not mention who had supplied the shells landing on Sarajevo and armed the paramilitary units now revealed to be 'terrorising civilians and besmirching the honour of the Serbs'.¹¹

A terrible few days in July 1995 changed everything. On 11 July General Mladic announced that he would give Srebrenica as a 'present to the Serb nation'. The town had been designated by the UN as a 'Safe Area'¹² since French UN General Philippe Morillon had barged his way through the Serb lines in March 1993, and raised the blue UN flag, declaring Srebrenica to be under UN protection. His brave, quixotic gesture sent UN diplomats in New York into fits of anguish as they struggled to find a formula that would prevent any genuine commitment to defend the enclaves. The proposal by the non-aligned countries that Srebrenica be declared a 'Safe Haven' – obliging the UN to defend the town – was rejected after opposition from Britain, France and Russia.

Instead the term 'Safe Area' was agreed on, meaning that none of the warring parties should operate militarily within the enclaves. But while the Bosnian government troops inside Srebrenica surrendered many of their weapons, the Bosnian Serbs did not. There was neither the international will, nor the necessary UN mandate, to ensure that the enclaves were secure from attack. The 'Safe Areas' were some of the most dangerous places in the world.

Srebrenica was supervised by 110 lightly-armed Dutch peacekeepers, known as 'Dutchbat', who offered no resistance when General Mladic stormed in. Demands for air-strikes were somehow lost or delayed in the UN bureaucracy. Instead the Dutch troops – indeed the whole world – stood by and watched as the Bosnian Serbs separated men from women and children, and took the men off to their deaths. Srebrenica was indeed a bloody gift. Over the next few days, the fields and woods around the city became the site of the biggest single atrocity of the Bosnian war as Mladic's men killed more than 7,000 Muslim men and boys. Many died as they tried to trek through to Bosnian-government-controlled Tuzla in the north. The massacre triggered a worldwide wave of revulsion. Graphic accounts by survivors of how the Bosnian Serbs had lined up men before the machine guns evoked scenes of the Second World War, when Nazi *Einsatzkommandos* on the eastern front had shot rows of Jews into trenches.

Even now many questions remained unanswered about this darkest episode of the Bosnian war. Without air-support or proper reinforcements, Dutchbat certainly could not have held off General Mladic's men for long.¹³ However, the question remains: if Dutchbat had resisted, would General Mladic have been prepared to kill 110 UN soldiers?¹⁴

The commander of the Muslim forces defending Srebrenica was Nasir Oric, who had once been one of Milosevic's bodyguards. Through the long years of siege, he had led night raiding parties through Serb lines to attack local villages and steal food. Many Bosnian Serbs were killed in these attacks, including civilians and the elderly, and their houses destroyed. The peculiar squalor of the conflict in and around Srebrenica was a throwback to the Thirty Years War. In the wake of Oric's fighters, a ragged wave of starving Muslims known as '*torbari*', or 'bag-carriers', would swoop down on the charred houses and pick over the remains for food or other valuables.

Before Srebrenica fell, Oric and his commanders had been pulled out under orders from Sarajevo, and forbidden to return. For the Bosnian

leadership, Srebrenica was no longer a political priority. Many believed that Sarajevo was coming under increasing pressure from the West, especially Washington, D.C., to cut a deal with Milosevic and thought that a cynical pact had been made to exchange Srebrenica for Bosnian-Serb-held land around Sarajevo. Certainly, the fall of Srebrenica – or perhaps its removal as an obstacle to the new maps being drawn up in Washington – fitted in with US policy at this time. Sandy Vershbow, an advisor to President Clinton said: 'Well, already in June [1995], the fate of Srebrenica seemed pretty gloomy. We already then were considering some kind of swap for at least the smaller of the eastern enclaves for more territory in central Bosnia might be one of the things that would be wise.'¹⁵ Milosevic doubtless would have seen this policy option as a *de facto* green light to capture the enclave.

But there is a difference between capturing territory and slaughtering every male inhabitant. The grim leitmotif of the Bosnian war was 'ethnic cleansing', that is, population displacement, not extermination. Even by the bloody standards of the Bosnian war, the Srebrenica massacre was unprecedented. Milosevic's precise relationship to the details of the fall of Srebrenica – and many other war crimes in Bosnia – remains unclear. The issue will be closely examined during the course of his trial at the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague under the terms of his indictment for genocide and war crimes in Bosnia. As one senior US official said: 'What remains unknown to me, and to everybody, is how direct a role he played at Srebrenica and the capture of the enclaves, and in the shelling of Sarajevo. Did he order it, did he approve it, what was his role?'¹⁶

Yet even through the fog of war, some contours of the command and control relationship can be distinguished. Two years earlier, in spring 1993, when it first appeared that Srebrenica was about to fall, Lord Owen had asked Milosevic to use his influence with the Bosnian Serb leaders to stop the attack. 'Milosevic believed it would be a great mistake for the Bosnian Serbs to take Srebrenica and promised to tell Karadzic so,' wrote Owen in his memoirs.¹⁷ The Bosnian Serbs did then eventually pull back.

Western military analysts reported that there were strong links between General Mladic and Belgrade. Writing in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Dr James Gow noted that Mladic 'communicates daily with both the defence ministry of the "Serbian Republic in Bosnia" and the Yugoslav Federal Ministry of Defence, conveniently located close to each other in the Serbian capital. It is from Belgrade that General Mladic appears to take his

orders, although these seem to give him broad control at the operational level.'¹⁸ The key phrase here is 'broad control at the operational level': Mladic exerted day-to-day command over his forces on the ground.

However the relationship between Milosevic and the Bosnian Serb leadership in July 1995 was very different from that of April 1993. After the rejection of the Vance-Owen and Contact Group Bosnian peace plans, relations had broken down between the Pale and Belgrade political leaderships. And so, when NATO launched pin-prick air-strikes against the Bosnian Serbs in May 1995, and Mladic responded by taking over 400 UN peacekeepers hostage, Milosevic despatched his trusted intelligence chief, Jovica Stanisic, to 'persuade' Radovan Karadzic to release the UN troops. Milosevic told the British ambassador Ivor Roberts, 'Stanisic will tell Karadzic that I will have him killed if he doesn't release the hostages. He knows I can do it.'¹⁹

Milosevic's main objective then was the lifting of sanctions on Serbia. There was no benefit in ordering a massacre of more than 7,000 prisoners, with all the ensuing anti-Serb backlash. The official report commissioned by the Dutch government into the massacre found no evidence of political or military liaison with Belgrade concerning the mass killings.²⁰ It seems more likely that, by this time, the Bosnian Serb military leadership was simply out of control, and General Mladic was unable to contain his blood lust.²¹ None the less, the US diplomat Louis Sell notes that: '... throughout the Srebrenica crisis, Milosevic was in direct personal contact with Mladic.'²² Sell also says that Carl Bildt observed Milosevic alternate 'between begging and giving orders to Mladic'.²³ When the author Laura Silber asked him what happened in Srebrenica, Milosevic replied: 'A moment came when you could no longer expect any kind of rational control. I don't exactly know what happened there.'²⁴

What did the West know? The US certainly knew about the Serb preparations to take Srebrenica: U-2 spy planes were patrolling the area, and a stream of satellite intelligence was also being fed back to Washington. On 9 August 1995 Madeleine Albright, the US ambassador to the UN, presented two photographs of the area around Srebrenica to the UN Security Council. The first shot, of an empty field, was taken shortly before Srebrenica fell. The second showed the same field a few days later, with mounds of freshly turned earth – the mass graves where the victims had been buried. In addition, an extensive investigation published in the *New York Review of Books* suggested the US was

aware of liaison between General Momcilo Perisic, chief of staff of the Yugoslav army, and General Mladic.

A US military intelligence source who had access to the raw data coming out of Bosnia confirmed the existence of intercepted conversations about Srebrenica between Belgrade and Mladic. 'There's about a week's worth,' the source says, 'and basically it's Belgrade asking, "Hey [Mladic] you're not going to Srebrenica, are you?" And [Mladic] says, "Of course I am. I'm not done yet, I'm hitting Gorazde and Zepa, too."' ²⁵

Certainly if there was some kind of diplomatic understanding between the West and Belgrade over Srebrenica, it went horribly wrong over the fate of the inhabitants. One witness remembered Mladic surveying the rows of Muslim prisoners with satisfaction. It is cruelly ironic that the man who had directed the destruction of Bosnia's Islamic heritage then announced a 'meze': the Arabic word for a long feast of many small dishes. 'There are so many. It is going to be a meze. There will be blood up to your knees,' he said, according to Nedzida Sadikovic, a woman survivor. He then nodded at the many young women in the crowd and told his soldiers: 'Beautiful. Keep the good ones over there. Enjoy them.' ²⁶

One cause of Mladic's hunger for a blood meze was that soldiers operating out of Srebrenica had attacked his home village of Visnice, and burnt down its houses. The suicide of Mladic's daughter Ana, a medical student in her early twenties, had certainly hardened his heart. Encouraged by their commander, the Bosnian Serb soldiers descended into a frenzy of blood lust. The basic constraints of humanitarian behaviour – never very much in evidence in Bosnia – just snapped. But even if Mladic was out of control, ultimately some degree of responsibility still rests with his political masters in Belgrade.

Emboldened by their slaughter at Srebrenica, the Bosnian Serbs resumed the shelling of Sarajevo. On 28 August 1995 thirty-seven people were killed in Sarajevo's main market by five mortar shells fired from a Bosnian Serb position, in defiance of agreements by the Bosnian Serbs to pull back their heavy weapons. This time, NATO meant business. 'Finally the decks were cleared for a real military response, not some piece of garbage,' said Richard Holbrooke, the US diplomat who was about to

become the key player in the diplomatic negotiations with Milosevic that would end the war in Bosnia. ²⁷

The shells that dropped onto Sarajevo's marketplace on 28 August were some of the many thousands that had fallen during the siege. They left the streets slippery with blood. Mangled corpses lay across the pavement or draped over the railings. Such gruesome scenes were common in Sarajevo: Serb gunners in the hills specifically targeted places at the time when they would be most crowded, such as Kosevo hospital during visiting hours, or the entrance to the tunnel that ran under Sarajevo's airport runway. But coming after the Srebrenica massacre, these were five shells too many.

Two days later, the inhabitants of Sarajevo watched in awe and wonder as the NATO jets screamed overhead, wondering why it had taken so long. Haris Silajdzic, the Bosnian prime minister, said: 'I must say that I enjoyed it. I must say that because those who killed so many people, those who aimed [at] baby hospitals, those who aimed [at] children who were playing, could finally feel what it means to be targeted, to be defenceless, and they deserved it.' ²⁸ In rolling waves of air-strikes, combined with Tomahawk cruise missiles, NATO systematically destroyed much of the Bosnian Serbs' military and communications infrastructure over the next two weeks. A barrage of more than 500 shells from the Anglo-French UN troops ensured that Bosnian Serb guns never again fired on Sarajevo. Just as the 'laptop bombardiers' – those journalists who called for air-strikes to defend Bosnia – had predicted, the Bosnian Serb military crumpled under attack from NATO.

So did Milosevic. While NATO hit the Bosnian Serbs, he hit the bottle. He arrived at a meeting with the British diplomat David Austin and Carl Bildt, Lord Owen's successor as EU envoy to Yugoslavia, almost incoherent. Austin looked on amazed as Milosevic slumped in a chair and Milan Milutinovic, the Yugoslav foreign minister, took over.

Milutinovic was a suave operator, well versed in the niceties of diplomacy, although this was a new experience. As he presented the Yugoslav position, Milosevic would occasionally interrupt to say 'You've got to stop the bombing, it's intolerable,' before drifting off again into an alcoholic haze. 'Milosevic was really shocked that NATO had actually started bombing. Maybe he thought it would never happen. It was a good job for Milosevic that Milutinovic was there, because he carried the meeting,' said Austin. ²⁹

Milosevic, Austin and Bildt had spent the previous weeks in marathon negotiating sessions that often lasted as long as nine or ten hours. Milosevic was a gracious host, and always laid on plentiful supplies of lamb, veal, wine and fruit brandy. During the negotiations he spoke in English and almost always knew exactly what he wanted to say. There was no translator, no advisors and, apart from his chief of Cabinet, Goran Milinovic, the only other people in the building were the villa's staff. Austin observed: 'Serbia was run by one man. Milosevic gave the impression that he had nothing else to do but talk to us. He had an intellectual arrogance that nobody else in the country could do it. He knew the subject intimately. He took decisions, made concessions, and he never had to consult anybody. He just did it. This was a very odd way to operate. He liked a good argument and discussion and seemed to be enjoying it. He was good at it, although quite often he would marshal facts which were not facts at all.'

Milosevic's tried to charm Austin by finding a common link. 'Several times during the negotiations he compared the Bosnian Serbs to children. He would say "That Karadzic, I can't control him. They are like children. You know what it is like Mr Austin, trying to control children." Or he would call them bastards, he would mock Karadzic and Mladic, he was pretty insulting. It was part of the game, showing us how difficult they were to control.'

Underneath the bonhomie, Milosevic was always ready to remind the envoys who was in charge. One lengthy negotiating session took place at a villa that was forty minutes' drive from Belgrade. Milosevic insisted that it was too late for Austin and Bildt to return to the city, and ensured they were comfortable in their guest rooms. He then appeared and announced: 'Goodnight, gentlemen. I am going back to Belgrade.' Austin recalled: 'He was always a genial host, but he wanted to keep you off balance.'

Milosevic also took more practical steps. He summoned Karadzic and the Bosnian Serb leadership to Belgrade and gave them an ultimatum: either the Bosnian Serbs granted him full powers to negotiate a peace for them, or Serbia would impose a total blockade on Republika Srpska. 'It's crucial to stop the war immediately,' he said. 'How we do it isn't the issue. We could discuss details forever.' Milosevic, the former Communist and atheist even press-ganged the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle into service. The spiritual leader commanded immense authority: he sat down with Karadzic, and talked things over. He

pronounced: 'Differences of opinion are inevitable. But never lose sight of the common interest.' Milosevic had won.³⁰

At this time, September 1995, Milosevic was reeling. The NATO air strikes had a profound psychological effect on the Serbs. (Even General Mladic sent a long rambling fax to the UN Commander General, Bernard Janvier, declaring the NATO bombardment worse than the Nazis' levelling of Belgrade.)³¹ The sanctions were still in place: there was no heating oil, and ragged hawkers sold watered-down petrol in milk bottles. Krajina had collapsed, and Serbia had now taken in almost 200,000 refugees from Croatia. The Croatian and Bosnian armies were pushing hard through northern Bosnia. The northern enclave of Bihac had been liberated. Well armed, highly motivated and properly equipped, the joint Croat-Bosnian force looked unstoppable.

So much so that by mid-September the two armies were within striking distance of Banja Luka, the northern Bosnian city that Milosevic was cultivating as an alternative power base. The Bosnian Serb leadership there was supposedly more 'moderate', though Banja Luka had been the epicentre of ethnic cleansing in northern Bosnia in 1992, and for Muslims and Croats it was a place of terror and murder. Now, however, it was the turn of the Bosnian Serbs to panic. The city prepared to evacuate as the advancing Croat and Bosnian forces stormed through the Bosnian Serb lines.

But Washington had decided that Banja Luka would not be allowed to fall. The city, and Milosevic, were saved by the Americans, in the bulldozer form of Richard Holbrooke. A career diplomat who had served in Vietnam, Holbrooke was appointed US special envoy to Yugoslavia in late 1994. He used his power as Clinton's man in the Balkans, and his gung-ho can-do American approach, to cut through the layers of diplomatic obfuscation. When Milosevic suggested to Holbrooke that he meet with Radovan Karadzic and General Mladic to discuss a ceasefire in Bosnia, Holbrooke agreed, but demanded there be 'no historical lectures, no bullshit'. When General Mladic had started his usual tirade about brave little Serbia, Holbrooke walked out, telling Milosevic: 'Mr President, you told us we were here to be serious. If we're not serious we have to go.'³²

Milosevic relished this tough-guy approach. He too wanted to be serious, without 'historical bullshit' in which he had anyway never been very interested. Finally, he believed, he had found someone who could, and would, cut deals without having to get every full stop and comma

authorised by the UN. Holbrooke and Milosevic enjoyed a personal chemistry that would be a significant factor in eventually bringing peace to Bosnia. Like every autocratic ruler who surrounds himself with yes-men, Milosevic was often bored. Secure in his position as the supreme ruler of Serbia, he enjoyed the chance to lock horns with an equal.

Washington believed, almost certainly correctly, that if Banja Luka fell then the whole Bosnian Serb Republic would collapse, bringing down Milosevic. According to this scenario, hundreds of thousands of Bosnian Serbs would pour across the border into Serbia. Milosevic would either be toppled in a military coup, or be forced to deploy the JNA in Bosnia to defend the Bosnian Serbs. This would trigger a full-fledged war between Yugoslavia and her successor states, which would threaten the whole Balkans. Momir Bulatovic, the Montenegrin leader, recalled Belgrade's warning: 'We told the Americans this huge exodus of refugees would radically alter politics here. Decisions would be out of our hands. We'd be forced to intervene directly.'³³

The US needed Milosevic to broker a peace deal over Bosnia. Hrvoje Sarinic explained: 'The US saw that there were no results with the previous kind of negotiations. So they decided to change the rules of the game. There is no document, but they said if we change the ratio of forces involved, negotiations could be more successful. Our army was more than successful. We solved the problem of Bihac, which had been in a catastrophic situation. We – officially the HVO [Bosnian Croat army] – were twenty kilometres from Banja Luka and the evacuation started. We could have captured Banja Luka, their forces were panicking. But then Bosnia would have been split into several parts, and it would have been much harder to organise the Dayton agreement. So the US stopped our offensive.'³⁴ In his book *To End a War* Holbrooke argued that the fall of Banja Luka would trigger a humanitarian catastrophe of 200,000 Bosnian Serb refugees. He told President Tudjman: 'Mr President, I urge you to go as far as you can, but not to take Banja Luka.'³⁵ Tudjman agreed. Banja Luka was spared.

In Sarajevo, President Izetbegovic and his generals wanted to push on and liberate more territory. Holbrooke turned up the heat. In characteristically blunt language, he told Izetbegovic he was 'shooting craps' (i.e., playing dice) with Bosnia's destiny.³⁶ Izetbegovic understood that without Croatia's military support and Washington's back-up, Bosnia's offensive would anyway likely soon stop. Izetbegovic's price was to lift

the siege of Sarajevo, and turn on the electricity, gas and water. It was paid. The siege of the Bosnian capital was over.

The US diplomatic cavalry had saved Milosevic. Less than three years later, the Kosovo Albanians would pay the price.

20

THE ONLY MAN WHO MATTERS

Dayton

November 1995

You deserve Sarajevo because you fought for it and those cowards killed you from the hills.

Slobodan Milosevic ceding the Serb-occupied areas of the Bosnian capital to Haris Silajdzic, Bosnian prime minister, at the Dayton peace conference in November 1995.¹

A month after the lights and heating went on in Sarajevo, Milosevic was at the piano, whisky in hand, regaling western diplomats with his version of 'Tenderly'. The site of this impromptu serenade was the Wright-Patterson US airbase in Dayton, Ohio. Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, Alija Izetbegovic and their advisors had arrived on 31 October to thrash out the details of the final peace settlement for Bosnia. Now Milosevic was where he most wanted to be: at the centre of attention, recognised by the world as the only man who matters, whose imprimatur could stop, finally, the Bosnian war. Best of all, Milosevic was in his second favourite country, the United States.

Despite the hundreds of journalists outside the perimeter fence, the airbase was sealed off from the media, and the three leaders were virtually locked in. The message from Washington was clear: this was their last chance. Asked how confident he was that the talks would succeed, Milosevic had said on arrival: 'Well, I am [an] optimist. I believe the talks will succeed. We attach the greatest importance to [the] peace initiative of the United States.'² Warren Christopher, the US Secretary of State, had even coaxed the three leaders into a handshake for the cameras.

Nominally, the Dayton conference, as it became known, had three

co-chairmen: Carl Bildt, the European envoy, the Russian Igor Ivanov and Richard Holbrooke. But in diplomacy it is the host country that counts, and everyone understood that this was primarily an American show, in the main run by Holbrooke. The Americans took the credit, but the Dayton conference was not conjured up out of nowhere. It was the final stage in the years of diplomatic wrangling that had marked attempts to bring peace to Bosnia, stretching back to Europe's involvement in the early 1990s when the Bush administration had taken a back seat, believing that the US did not 'have a dog in this fight'. But ultimately only America, it seemed, had the power and will to lock the Balkan leaders in an airbase – albeit a luxuriously fitted one – until they signed up for peace. The choice of venue was significant – a deliberate reminder of American air power, coming just a few weeks after NATO's air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs.

Milosevic came to Dayton ready to sign. He was weak on the military, diplomatic and home fronts. His control of Serbia's state broadcast media could not temper Serb anger about the disasters that had befallen them. Serbia was a comparatively small country, and many of its inhabitants had relatives or friends among the refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. In 1991 football fans had lauded Milosevic as a great Serb leader and defender of its people: The terraces swayed to 'Serbian Sloba, Serbia is with you'. Now they chanted 'Sloba, you have betrayed Krajina'.

Milosevic knew he could survive the fallout from operations Flash and Storm, but they still sent aftershocks through his government. When, after the fall of Krajina, the children of Yugoslav prime minister Radoje Kotic told him that they 'pissed on his premiership', Kotic had retreated to his office with a bottle of cognac. The massacre at Srebrenica had shown Milosevic that General Mladic was out of control. Who knew what horrors he might carry out next, and what the consequences might be for Serbia?

But first, it was dinner time. Holbrooke took Milosevic to the all-American on-base restaurant, Packy's All-Sports Bar.³ The walls were covered with pictures of Bob Hope. Four giant television screens showed news and sports channels. This was the America that Milosevic had so admired on his trips to Wall Street and to the IMF meetings, where he had so dazzled the world's bankers with his command of capitalism. He was entranced by the slick technology, the smooth efficiency, the sheer luxurious availability of everything. Most of all, it seemed, he was

impressed by a Tomahawk Cruise Missile, on display at the base museum. Just a few weeks before, a fusillade of the twenty-foot long projectiles had helped destroy much of the Bosnian Serb army's communications systems in western Bosnia. 'So much damage from such a little thing,' he said.⁴

At Packy's Milosevic turned on the charm. He soon had his own favourite waitress. He asked her name, and where she was from. Vicky became 'Waitress Wicky', as Milosevic pronounced her name, and always served the Serb leader. At more formal dinners at the Officers' Club restaurant, Milosevic even invited one of the waiters to come and work for him in Belgrade.

The Americans made great efforts to warm up the – unsurprisingly – glacial atmosphere between Milosevic and the Bosnian government delegation, with sometimes bizarre results. With hindsight it is clear that it may have been more tactful to stick to diplomatic rather than social business: the Bosnians were in no mood for socialising, especially with the man they saw as the killer of their country. When a dinner was organised at the Officers' Club, Holbrooke seated his wife, the Hungarian writer Kati Marton, between Milosevic and Izetbegovic. The Bosnian President could barely stand to look at Milosevic, let alone break bread with him. 'Three black women sergeants performed as the Andrews Sisters', recorded Holbrooke, 'and as they sang "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy", Milosevic sang along, while Izetbegovic sat sullenly.'⁵

Milosevic's immediate concern was the lifting of sanctions. Six days into Dayton, Milosevic asked for twenty-three thousand tons of heating oil, and for natural gas supplies to be resumed. By this time winter had set in in Belgrade. Milosevic realised that if he was to sign away much of Bosnia, he needed to deliver something concrete for the home front. He also understood that the Americans would probably be willing to make this kind of concession – which was important for him, but relatively irrelevant to the overall Dayton strategy – as a goodwill gesture. Milosevic drafted unlikely allies for his request: Izetbegovic himself and the Bosnian prime minister, Haris Silajdzic. They agreed, pointing out that the 5 October ceasefire was supposed to turn the heating on in Belgrade as well as Sarajevo. After Milosevic's request, it did.

It seemed a good omen for the broader principles being thrashed out. The Dayton conference followed a period of intense US-led

shuttle diplomacy through September 1995, after which Milosevic and Izetbegovic had agreed on a set of basic political principles to decide Bosnia's future. These were that Bosnia would remain a single, internationally-recognised state, with its borders intact. Zagreb would not annex Herzegovina, and nor would Belgrade carve off eastern Bosnia. The Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats would stay within Bosnia.

The price, for President Izetbegovic and his government, was high, and one which is still being paid. Within its international borders, Bosnia would be split into two 'entities', as they became known: the Bosnian Croat-Muslim Federation, which would get 51 per cent of its territory, and the Bosnian Serb Republic, which would take 49 per cent. Both entities would remain nominally under the authority of a multinational government in Sarajevo, and one currency would be in use, the convertible mark. But the 'Federation' – as the Croat-Muslim territory became known – and the Bosnian Serb Republic would retain their own armies, police forces, political structures and judiciaries. This was the ultimate victory of the Bosnian Serbs, that a country where all three nations had lived in mixed towns and villages would now be divided into two, on ethnic lines. The Bosnian Serb Republic would remain in existence, would even keep its name of 'Republika Srpska' and its foundations of ethnic cleansing would be legitimised.

The European diplomats worked out the details of Bosnia's future constitution. The Americans oversaw the wrangling about the map. Bosnia-Herzegovina had been ruled by the Ottoman Sultans, the Habsburg emperors, the King of Yugoslavia, and then Tito. Now it was about to become – in effect – an international protectorate, its fate decided not in Istanbul or Vienna, but on an American airbase. Over the next week the brief co-operation over heating Belgrade evaporated. By day sixteen no agreement had been reached and time was running out. A major sticking point was the city of Gorazde, in eastern Bosnia. Gorazde was a government-held town surrounded by the Bosnian Serbs. Like Srebrenica, Gorazde was a UN Safe Area. Unlike Srebrenica, despite repeated attacks by Mladic's forces, Gorazde had not fallen. The city had been kept alive by a thin lifeline of weapons and supplies that were brought in down a perilous mountain track from Sarajevo. For years government soldiers had trekked nightly into the city past Bosnian Serb frontlines that were so near they could hear the enemy talking and see the red tips of their cigarettes glowing.

The Bosnian government had paid for Gorazde in blood, and would

not surrender the city. But as Gorazde was an enclave, it needed a land-link, a safe corridor, to the capital Sarajevo. Corridor negotiations were the nightmare of any Bosnian peace plan. The length and width of the corridor were merely the starting point in the long litany of subsidiary questions. How many metres from the edge of the actual road would the territory of the corridor stretch? Would the road itself be dirt or metal? Would the corridor be supervised by UN troops? Would there be crossing points or junctions, and who would administer them, and so on, and so forth.

Holbrooke told Haris Silajdzic that Milosevic wanted to come over to his table to talk to him about Gorazde. Silajdzic refused. By this time Dayton had descended into an acrimonious 'zero-sum' game. Any concession, no matter how tiny, was seen as a defeat by those making it, and a victory for those receiving it. Silajdzic recalled: 'The fact that he comes to my table, gives him, in a way, a psychological advantage, that he is doing something, that he is making a concession and so on. So I said, no, I'll go to his table. These are our small Balkan ways.'⁶

The Bosnian prime minister and Milosevic eventually reached an agreement. NATO would build a road, under international control, linking the enclave of Gorazde to the main Federation territory. With agreement reached in principle on the corridor, the next question was its width: that is, how much territory would the Bosnian Serbs need to surrender? Which was the cue for the biggest video game in the world: known as 'Power Scene', a digital imaging system which had stored the whole topography of Bosnia in a 3-D 'virtual reality machine', as Holbrooke described it. 'We had an aerial photograph of the entire country and you could fly with the joystick over any part of the country, stop, look straight down, look sideways, go up, go down.'⁷

Milosevic arrived at 11.00 p.m. and was soon entranced with his virtual reality journey through Bosnia. Fuelled by considerable amounts of Scotch, he spent hours 'flying' around Bosnia as he discussed the future shape and size of the corridor. General Wesley Clark, who in three years' time would meet Milosevic in a much less agreeable atmosphere, drew up a plan for one version of the corridor. Milosevic proposed some alterations. Eventually, agreement was found. At 2.00 a.m. Milosevic knocked back his last glass for the night, shook hands all round and exclaimed, 'We have found our road.'⁸ This was later dubbed the 'Scotch corridor'.

The personal chemistry between Milosevic and the Americans, especially

Richard Holbrooke, was a significant factor in finalising the Dayton accords. He was probably the most popular of the three leaders. Franjo Tudjman was seen as a febrile bore who lectured and hectored about Croatia's centuries of glorious history, glossing over his own tolerance of the rehabilitation of the symbolism of the Ustasha regime. Alija Izetbegovic sat dour and unforgiving. His severe countenance was a moral reproach to the western leaders who had stood by while Bosnia was being destroyed. He made people feel guilty, and uncomfortable.

Milosevic was much smarter. He was one of the guys. Milosevic knew and liked the United States and Americans, and understood how to interact with them. As one western official, present at the Dayton talks, noted: 'Milosevic was only instantly available to Richard Holbrooke. He even ate with the Americans, or on his own.' Milosevic took care to humanise himself, and behave like an ebullient, rumbustious Serb, instead of a sinister fanatic like General Mladic or Momcilo Krajisnik. This was clever, as there were some moral qualms about negotiating with the man dubbed by many the 'Butcher of the Balkans'.

His tactics were effective. 'Milosevic knew us very well as a people, he was able to play with us. He knew what our red lines and bottom lines were, maybe even more than we did. He learned this during his time in the US in dealing with us,' said one senior US official who had extensive dealings over the years with the Serbian leader. 'He had an uncanny ability to judge how serious we were, and in most cases he would be right. He was a real student of human nature. We might say ten times that he had to do X, Y and Z. He knew the one time out of ten when there would be consequences if he did not.'⁹

As Tibor Varady, once Yugoslav minister for justice, had noted, Milosevic exerted a powerful aura, which drew many diplomats into his orbit. When dozens of politicians and advisors are locked up together for weeks on end, the human factor can be decisive. Aware of the rivalry and intermittent tension between the Americans and the Europeans, Milosevic skilfully played off one side against the other. He chose a surprising but effective weapon: humour. Not only could Slobodan Milosevic seem to conjure up a whole range of impersonations as well. As ever, he picked his audience carefully, recalled David Austin. 'He took great pleasure in mimicking Carl Bildt and his Swedish accent, according to the Americans. But when he was with us, he would mock the Americans. He was playing a game with us all the time, and even then it was divide and rule.'¹⁰

The Bosnian government delegation was also weakened by 'small Balkan ways'. Its bitter internal factionalising did not help Sarajevo's cause. Izetbegovic had encouraged Silajdzic, who possessed a better sense of *realpolitik*, to negotiate alone with Milosevic over Gorazde. But he had not been pleased with the success of these negotiations, which boosted his prime minister's standing with the Americans. At the time, Holbrooke noted down that the Bosnian delegation is 'divided and confused. Silajdzic told me that he had not spoken to Izetbegovic in over twenty-four hours. They have let other opportunities for peace slip away before. It could happen again.'¹¹

The most curious feature of the Dayton negotiations was the utter contempt with which Milosevic treated the Bosnian Serbs. Milosevic had forced Karadzic to give him a mandate to negotiate for the Bosnian Serbs, but they still sent their own delegation, headed by Momcilo Krajisnik, a sinister figure whose eyebrows met in the middle. Milosevic had loathed Krajisnik ever since he supported Radovan Karadzic's rejection of the Vance-Owen peace plan in 1993.

'Milosevic behaved abominably towards the Bosnian Serbs,' David Austin remembered. 'He humiliated them. Each delegation had one fax machine. Milosevic controlled access to the Serb fax machine, but would not let them use it.' When the Bosnian Serb General Tolimir wanted to send some documents back to Pale, he had to ask Austin to use his fax machine.

Krajisnik was allowed occasional input into comparatively minor questions such as the future Bosnian constitution. But the key, the map, was reserved for Milosevic. On the rare occasions that Milosevic wanted to consult with someone on his own side, he would talk to Momir Bulatovic, the pliant president of Montenegro, the junior partner in the third Yugoslavia. Austin recalled: 'Milosevic used to walk up and down the car park, with Bulatovic. That really rubbed it in to the Bosnian Serbs as well. Who was Bulatovic in this? He was completely irrelevant. Milosevic did this in full view of the Bosnian Serbs.' Krajisnik was so out of the loop' that he wrote to Holbrooke asking what was happening. Holbrooke showed the letters to Milosevic, and Milosevic threw them in the dustbin.

Milosevic's total control of the negotiations from the Serb side was most evident in the diplomatic battle for Sarajevo. The Bosnian capital was divided into two zones: government-controlled and Serb-controlled.

These were the siege lines from behind which the Bosnian Serbs had shelled the city for three and a half years. The Bosnian government would not budge on their key demand: that the Serbs surrender all the districts of Sarajevo that they controlled, especially an area known as Grbavica. During the war Radovan Karadzic had been quite open that his aim was to split Sarajevo into two separate zones, a sort of Balkan Berlin, complete with checkpoints and border guards controlling access from one side to another.

Momcilo Krajisnik demanded that the Serbs retain control of local councils and police in Serb areas of the city. This was essentially a demand to formalise the division of the city. Richard Holbrooke said: 'Krajisnik had gone up to the maps and, slamming them with his fist, had said, "I live here" – he's pointing to a farm he had in [the Serb-controlled district of] Ilidza, "and I'm never going to give this up".'¹² Milosevic broke the deadlock with a startling and unexpected offer: he simply gave the whole of the Bosnian capital to the government side. Momcilo Krajisnik's farm was lost, although the matter soon became academic as Krajisnik was arrested by NATO troops as a war criminal in 2000, and deported to The Hague. Silajdzic recalled Milosevic's proposal: 'He said, "You deserve Sarajevo because you fought for it and those cowards killed you from the hills", meaning the Bosnian Serbs.'¹³

This was Milosevic's ultimate gesture of contempt for the Bosnian Serb leadership. It was also part of the plan that he had outlined to President Tudjman's envoy Hrvoje Sarinic earlier that year, to strengthen the supposedly 'moderate' northern city of Banja Luka, against Pale. Of course there was a price: Milosevic wanted the strategically important northern Bosnian city of Brcko because it controlled access to the northern corridor of territory in Serb-occupied Bosnia that stretched to Serbia proper. He did not get it, but neither did the Bosnian government. After much wrangling Brcko was placed directly under international administration.

The US official argued that Milosevic gave away Sarajevo not to ease the path to a settlement at Dayton, but in fact to ensure that, ultimately, Bosnia would not function as multi-ethnic country. A ceasefire would be signed, but Serbs would never live alongside Muslims again. 'A cynic would say that Milosevic ceded Sarajevo to ensure Dayton would not work. For Dayton to work you would need an integrated Sarajevo. You need the Sarajevo Serbs to be living in the capital. By giving Sarajevo away, Milosevic ensured this would not happen. This willingness to

abandon Serbs who have been on the front line fighting for Serbdom is an absolute characteristic of Milosevic. Once more, these were his protégés and then he walked away from them.¹⁴

The real victor of Dayton was President Tudjman. With his victorious US-assisted army, Tudjman was negotiating from a position of strength. He and President Izetbegovic despised each other, but Izetbegovic understood that it was the Croat and Bosnian Croat armies that had altered the balance of power sufficiently to bring Milosevic to Dayton, ready to make a deal. Tudjman was not very interested in the minutiae of the Bosnian constitution. The area of Bosnia formerly known as Herceg-Bosna remained firmly within control of the Bosnian-Croat Federation. In Mostar his allies, the hard-line Bosnian Croats, remained in place, controlling much of the local government through violence and intimidation.

Tudjman's main concern was Sector East of Serb-occupied Croatia. Operations Flash and Storm had recaptured sectors North, South and West from the rebel Serbs. But the Croat army had not attacked Sector East, the area including Vukovar, known as eastern Slavonia, that was a centre of petrol-smuggling in and out of Serbia proper. With the prospect of sanctions being lifted in reward for his co-operation at Dayton, Milosevic was prepared to cut a deal with Tudjman over eastern Slavonia. In Balkan fashion, it was conducted away from the limelight: a series of meetings were arranged at which the two leaders addressed each other as 'Franjo' and 'Slobo'.

Tudjman understood that raising the Croatian flag over Sector East was not quite as straightforward as it was in the other rebel-Serb-held areas. His forces could certainly have swept through the UN ceasefire lines and retaken the area, but Vukovar – or what was left of it – lay on the Danube, the border between Croatia and Serbia. There was a chance that Milosevic might send Yugoslav forces across the river to defend the rebel Serbs, and that would re-ignite the war, which this time would be between two sovereign international states.

Eventually, Franjo and Slobo went for a walk, just as they had done back in March 1991 when they carved up Bosnia at Tito's hunting resort of Karadjordjevo. This time they marched round and round the parking area at Dayton, battling proposals back and forth. At first they shouted and gesticulated, but after an hour, they were in step, both in the parking area, and over Sector East. They would, they announced, agree to the proposal that Sector East would return to Croatia, after a period of UN transitional

administration with guarantees of human rights for Serbs who wished to remain under Croatian rule. These were not properly implemented, but Tudjman still regained Sector East without a shot being fired.

In some ways Milosevic's presence at Dayton was an anomaly. Milosevic was the president of Serbia, one of the two constituent republics of Yugoslavia. Neither Yugoslavia, nor Serbia, was officially at war in Bosnia. Indeed Milosevic himself had repeatedly denied that Serb troops were fighting in Bosnia, although nobody believed him.

The real leaders of the Bosnian Serbs were Radovan Karadzic and General Mladic. But these two men were indicted war criminals and so could not be allowed on American soil. At a meeting in Serbia Richard Holbrooke had insulted Mladic by refusing to eat at the same table. But with hindsight it seems, Holbrooke had no qualms about dining and drinking with Milosevic, who had chosen Mladic as commander of the Bosnian Serb army, and provided the political and military means for Radovan Karadzic to build the Bosnian Serb Republic. Indeed, Milosevic's indictments for war crimes in Croatia and Bosnia describe him as a member of a 'joint criminal enterprise' along with other key figures in the Serb leadership in Belgrade, the Croatian Serb leadership in Knin and the Bosnian Serb leadership in Pale, in the drive to ethnically cleanse first Serb-occupied Croatia, and then Serb-occupied Bosnia.

So why was Milosevic feted as an international statesman in 1995, when the details of the wars between 1991 and 1995, and the extent of his role within them were thoroughly documented, not least by the American intelligence services? Because the demands of geo-politics, and American policy, meant that Milosevic was then seen as the linchpin of any deal that could bring peace to the former Yugoslavia. Statesman or war criminal: much of the difference, it seems, is in the eye of the beholder. It is also a question of timing. In the winter of 1995, Milosevic was seen not as the problem, but the solution. Flying him to Dayton was merely the logical next step after saving his regime from collapse by halting the Croat-Bosnian attack on Banja Luka.

But morality and realpolitik make a murky combination, especially when men seek to act as gods and decide the fate of nations. Mira Markovic argued: 'Now the Hague prosecution is saying that he did this in 1991 and 1992 and so on. Would they take such a man to Dayton? The West treated him as their ally, and as a factor of stability and peace in the Balkans. He was in Dayton because he knew that he could bring

the Serbs on the other side of the river Drina to their senses. He was one of the people they relied on. They should be grateful to my husband for the Dayton peace accords and they well know that.¹⁵

If Milosevic was a war criminal, then so was President Tudjman. Under Tudjman, the Bosnian Croats had also set up a network of concentration camps, and ethnically cleansed Muslims. Just three months earlier the United States had given the nod to Croatia to recapture the Krajina in an operation in which 200,000 Serb refugees fled or were expelled. Officials at the ICTY confirm that had Tudjman lived, he would have been indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁶ So at Dayton Milosevic was at least in good company.

2 I

ENTER MIRA, STAGE LEFT

Setting up JUL

1995-7

LADY MACBETH: *Only look up clear.
To alter favour ever is to fear
Leave all the rest to me.*¹

Milosevic picked up the telephone. It was 13 January 1996, and his new strategic partner was on the line. President Clinton was flying to visit US troops stationed in southern Hungary, and in Tuzla in northern Bosnia. Just one month earlier, Milosevic had signed the Dayton peace agreement in Paris. President Clinton had said to him then: 'I know this agreement would not have been possible without you. You made Dayton possible. Now you must help make it work.'²

Milosevic was the man of the moment. On the phone Clinton outlined his hopes for the region's future. 'We support normalisation of relations and I know it cannot go ahead without you. We need that, but it only takes a small thing for everything to fall through. That's why I count on [Secretary of State Warren] Christopher's trip and then we shall see his report.'³ Milosevic replied: 'That is really encouraging and I am glad to hear that. I am looking forward to receiving Mr Christopher, it can only lead to good. I am optimistic. Thank you for your optimism and your proposal.'

Greatly buoyed by his chat with Clinton, Milosevic then called the Yugoslav foreign minister, the urbane Milan Milutinovic, and told him about the conversation. Both men were somewhat in awe of Madeleine Albright, the US ambassador to the United Nations. Albright, who was of Czech Jewish descent, had spent some time in Belgrade during the Second World War. A powerful figure in the Clinton administration, with an intuitive understanding of the Balkans, she was also a classic