

U.S. Department of State
Press Conference Following the Initialing Of The Balkan Proximity Peace Talks
Agreement

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: Good afternoon again. Today's event, obviously, marks the culmination of a diplomatic process that's gone on for several weeks -- indeed, several months. I marked the beginning of it about the time of the London Conference.

We pursued that diplomatic initiative very aggressively after that. Tony Lake's trip to the capitals of Europe, followed by NATO action to determine that there would be decisive air action if there were further attacks on safe areas; the attack on Sarajevo responded to by very strong air campaign; shuttle diplomacy then commenced by Ambassador Holbrooke and the American team, aided by the Contact Group and others. That's what has brought us to today.

Throughout this period, we followed a series of principles, and I think you will find them reflected in the agreement -- throughout the agreement -- when you have an opportunity to study it more fully.

First, there should be a single Bosnian state, with a single international personality, and a commitment to its internationally-recognized borders; a federal government representing all the people of Bosnia with foreign policy powers and other national government powers; democratic elections to be held next year; strong guarantees of human rights.

Finally, let me say that diplomacy is about more than technicalities and paper. Diplomacy is about people. We ought to concentrate on the fact that there will be a different kind of winter in Sarajevo this winter; different kind of winter in Bosnia. The starving and suffering, the hunger, the cold, the freezing -- those, we hope, are things of the past. This agreement determines that that can be made a thing of the past.

There will be considerable national debate commencing in the United States. It's important that the people of America remember the stark, terrible images of the last four years of people dying and freezing, people hungry, people in camps. Those are the things that we should have in our mind when we engage on this national debate which will determine whether the United States continues to play its leadership role in the world.

I'll take a few questions, and then turn the events over.

Ralph.

QUESTION: (Ralph Begleiter, CNN) You mentioned other national powers among the powers that would be attributed to the central government of Bosnia. From what we've seen, and we haven't read the documents as thoroughly as you have, is there evidence that the central government of having the military power that any nation on earth needs to defend itself.

How have you reconciled the absence of a single military command in Bosnia as creating a single unified nation?

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: The government will have foreign policy powers. It will have a parliament. It will have a police force. I think that will turn out to provide for a unified nation.

We spent a good deal of time talking about a central bank for the country, and there will be a single national bank for the country. So there are many national powers consistent with a federal government.

We also have quite detailed military annex and detailed provisions with respect to arms control. So, overall, I think when you examine the agreement, you'll find that my statement about it being consistent with a national or federal government is borne out by the documents.

David.

QUESTION: (David Martin, CBS): You say here you settled definitively the territorial issues. And then down at the bottom of the page it says, "The status of Brcko will be determined by arbitration within one year." Has the whole Posavina corridor issue just been put off for a year, and is that how you managed to get an agreement here?

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: The Posavina corridor issue was a serious one that was negotiated up to the very end. But the status quo will remain there.

The present lines of confrontation will be controlled by IFOR during the course of the next year. There will be arbitration to be followed after that. The parties resolved this issue by deciding on that, but it's a relatively small portion of the country as a whole.

Because the issue will be under the control of IFOR, because there is no immediate change in the status of the issue, I think it will not be a destabilizing factor. That was, as I say, one of, say, perhaps a hundred issues that were debated. The parties finally decided they would maintain the status quo during the period of IFOR, but there would be an arbitration to consider the matter as to what its future would be.

QUESTION: (Dave Marrich, ABC News, Nightline) Already members of the Bosnian Serb negotiating team here are being quoted as calling this agreement invalid and a great mistake. Whom do you hold responsible for the implementation of this agreement inside the Serb entity in Bosnia? And what are the mechanisms to assure that implementation?

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: This agreement today was the result of agreements between three parties -- Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia. The Serbian delegation was led by President Milosevic. He came to the negotiation authorized by the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, a signed authorization for him to negotiate and commit them. So we, hence, find a fixing of responsibility in President Milosevic.

We will, over time, look to him to assure the assent of the Bosnian Serbs to this agreement.

The most powerful force, of course, in that situation will be the fact that the people of Sarajevo, the people of Bosnia as a whole, are going to see the benefits of peace. I think President Milosevic feels that those will strongly outweigh statements made by members of the Bosnian Serbs, or perhaps making statements for their effect at the present time.

This is a situation that we'll have to watch as it moves forward. The next several weeks will be very important ones as we move through this situation.

The implementation force will go in at a time that it is safe for it to do so. I believe that we can expect the forces seeking peace here will be stronger and that President Milosevic will, with the determination that he has shown and the authority that he had for this agreement, the commitment they have made to cooperate with the IFOR forces, that that situation will be resolved. But I must say, it will be something that we need to watch very carefully as we go through the very difficult implementation period ahead.

QUESTION: Do you feel comfortable sending IFOR troops into Bosnia if the views of the Bosnian parliament and -- sorry, the Bosnian Serb parliament and the Bosnian Serb people are identical to views that some of the delegates have been quoted here?

Are you comfortable that the Bosnian Serb public is (inaudible) agreement invalid?

SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER: We'll not send IFOR troops or American troops into the region until it's safe to do so. That will be a core aspect of it. We expect the cooperation of the people of Bosnia, but we'll be determining that before we send American or NATO troops into the area.

Thank you very much.

AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE: We have a very limited amount of time. We'll take additional questions.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) new constitution. Could you explain how -- how do you explain that any democracy, especially if you have a constitution (inaudible).

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE: It's up to the Bosnians to decide that procedure. If they wanted it, they would have put it in.

QUESTION: In other words, they did not ask --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE: Roy, there were two kinds of aspects of these documents. The ones that we, in a sense -- the Contact Group -- were facilitating agreements. We didn't have a direct personal input, and that's one of them. Any constitution they want to work out is fine as long it's democratic, and this one is. That was a huge achievement.

And, secondly, documents which involved the United States national interests and those of our Contact Group colleagues. That included, above all, the military annexes, but also things like the

right of refugees to return because that's of immense importance to our European friends who have borne the brunt of the refugee issue. But this issue was not -- they worked it out.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) mentions Karadzic and Mladic indicted for war crimes.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE: I don't think their future is very bright.

QUESTION: What steps will the international community take, namely, IFOR, in bringing them to justice if (inaudible) --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE: The documents clearly spell out the obligation from the War Crimes Tribunal. John Shattuck is here with me, and I'd like him to comment. John, why don't you come up here.

This is the first time, in any major negotiation in diplomatic history, that an Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights has been part of a diplomatic effort. Normally, people in that job are kept away from the negotiations. But we felt that the issues here involved human rights so essentially that John made four trips to the area in the last six weeks; has been in Dayton three times during 21 days, and has been a central member of our core team. I'd like him to comment on that and make another brief comment.

John.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: Let me outline briefly the obligations of the parties to comply with the orders of the international War Crimes Tribunal.

The agreement obligates all parties, including

Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina --

(Multiple questions)

QUESTION: Minister Ivanov, a brief comment on why the Russians are reserving approval on the military annexes?

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: As you know, this plan of implementation is a plan of NATO. We're awaiting the resolution of the United Nations Security Council about the mandate of the military (inaudible); and, when we review this resolution and other information from our military people who are now studying this problem in Brussels, there will be the critical decision about our possible participation. But we have some doubts about that plan of the United Nations -- of the NATO on the military implementation. In the agreement, Annex I, you have the Article about the possibility of the participation of non-NATO states in that operation. The modalities of those states who will participate will be the subject of an agreement between such participating states and NATO.

MR. BILDT: I am sorry, sir, but we have flights leaving for Europe; and, we are the most unpopular people there are on transatlantic flights, because we've been booked on every single flight for the past five days. (Laughter) We might be thrown off.

Let me say that when we are heading back to the European Union countries and to Russia, we have a rather heavy work schedule with all of the implementation work that is ahead of us: preparing for the Paris peace conference, the London implementation conference, the Bonn disarmament thing, and there's going to be a pledging conference on the economic side in Brussels.

Those of you who think that work has been completed in Dayton are, sorry to say, mistaken. This is for us the start of another agenda.

QUESTION: Will there be any kind of a conference in Moscow? Do you see Russia as part of this --

MR. BILDT: Russia is most -- let me say that before Igor --

AUDIENCE: (Inaudible)

MR. BILDT: No, no. Let me say that -- and on

behalf of all the colleagues in the Contact Group -- that Russia has been playing an important and constructive and at times decisive role in the diplomatic footwork that is essential for a conference of this type. Due credit should be given to First Deputy Foreign Minister Ivanov. It was the commitment of Russia to the process that such a high-ranking representative of the Russian Government has spent these three weeks in Dayton, Ohio.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: We think that in Dayton the peace process is starting for some period, and during this period we will have some meetings and among those meetings, there will be a meeting in Moscow. This is the agreement among the parties. When and what will be the mandate of that meeting we shall discuss in the future.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: I am speaking in the name of Russia. We have doubts, but I cannot speak about the doubts of other participants of this meeting -- of these talks.

QUESTION: Mr. Ivanov (inaudible).

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: Our position is that with the signing of the peace agreement, the sanctions have to be lifted -- all sanctions, because after the peace agreement, all parties have to start from the same position in the application of that peace agreement.

About the lifting of the arms embargo, we have our doubts, and now we are discussing them in the Security Council of the United Nations.

QUESTION: What's the difference?

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: Because the most important thing is that if we are speaking about peace, we have to guarantee peace; and the lifting of our embargo can create a situation which may create problems for the implementation of that peace agreement.

QUESTION: What about --

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: But we have to find a formula -- exact formula to avoid this situation.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: I think that if we are speaking about -- you have Annex I-B where we are trying to have the balance among the parties with their armaments, but we have to find that formula to reach this thing. That's why one of the meetings that will be in Bonn to speak about the military measures --

AUDIENCE: Arms control --

DEPUTY MINISTER IVANOV: Arms control measures.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

MR. BILDT: You haven't been able to read all the different annexes, but there's an Annex called I-B, which is concerned with arms control measures in the region, and that's something that is very important from, I think, everyone, but particularly from the European perspective.

We don't it as logical to have peace and arms race. We want to have peace and arms control, and arms control to be effective has to have a regional approach. That's been the subject of quite intense discussions during the weeks here in Dayton.

There is a mechanism under the organized (inaudible) kicked off in Bonn. If that does not succeed, there is an automatic mechanism to ensure that we have a regional arms control regime in place in the former Yugoslavia, and that's very important.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

MR. BILDT: It depends on what you mean. They remain to be implemented. For example, the arms control regime -- we have not sorted everything out concerning the details, no. But we've set the parameters for it, and that's important. In that sense, it's decided. In another sense, it remains to be done.

The same goes for, say, refugee return. We have the parameters and the guiding principles. The same concerning elections where it's more specific. Economic reconstruction. I mean, we're not handing out work. We are shifting them pieces of our agenda.

AUDIENCE: One more question.

MR. BILDT: Yes, one more question.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

AUDIENCE: Three.

QUESTION: And you think that (inaudible).

MR. BILDT: There are today -- and I would expect there will be tomorrow and the day after tomorrow -- three armies, at least, operating on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. But that is not going to be changed immediately. I would expect there to be a long-term process of merger (inaudible). We have provisions in the constitution for the Presidency to exercise civilian control over these armed forces that are on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This is one of the more difficult long-term aspects of re-integration. We certainly have that goal, but we know that that's going to be problematic. We know that inside the Federation, for example, it's far from easy.

By that, I hope that you can complete the answer that we broke off, and we hope that we'll be let on the aircrafts.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: The agreement and the annexes and also the sanctions resolution contain very strong provisions on compliance with the War Crimes Tribunal and its orders -- requirements that all parties cooperate fully with investigations and prosecutions, and that they do so immediately.

The constitution contains provisions to this effect -- the Framework Agreement and, as I said, the Sanctions Resolution. In addition, there will continue to be sanctions in the so-called "outer wall," international financial institution access and membership in international organizations -- sanctions which are directed at countries which do not comply, and until they fully comply those sanctions will remain in place. Complying means complying with orders -- orders of arrest, orders of interviewing witnesses, orders regarding investigation -- and the agreement also specifies that the War Crimes Tribunal shall be given full access to all territories, all areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina where investigations need to be conducted.

This is a comprehensive mandate with respect to War Crimes Tribunal compliance.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) who is the mandate placed upon in terms of the arrest and turning over of indicted war criminal suspects and providing access to suspected sites of war crimes activities like the mass graves around Srebrenica.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: The mandate runs to all the parties, and by that I mean Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serb authority included, and also Croatia and Serbia. The mandate is full cooperation and compliance with orders of the international War Crimes Tribunal; and, as I said, those orders are comprehensive. Any kind of order that is lawful under the Security Council mandate of the War Crimes Tribunal would be subject to compliance in the way I've just described.

Take one more.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Can you give us some idea of how many (inaudible) you were talking about?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: It's very difficult to estimate precisely. Certainly, there are many prisoners and people in detention or under situations of forced labor in the Bosnian Serb held areas. The area around Banja Luka, which I recently visited, the estimate there has been something in the neighborhood of 1,000, but it's very difficult to estimate that precisely. But the most important thing here is that the mandate of this agreement requires that the International Committee for the Red Cross be given full access to all suspected site places of detention and all people, and that the authorities fully cooperate with the ICRC in its effort to locate missing persons -- that's how that information will be gathered -- and that detention centers and places of detention will be immediately closed.

Just one more question.

QUESTION: Srebrenica is (inaudible) --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: They will be in Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Serb authority -- Bosnian Serb authority.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK: It is possible to get access to Srebrenica now. President Milosevic has personally stated that access to all such areas where war crimes and issues involving human rights violations have occurred, those places are accessible. The peace agreement requires that the authorities cooperate in allowing access by the International War Crimes Tribunal and other organizations -- international organizations to Srebrenica, Zepa, Banja Luka and any other areas where suspected crimes may have occurred.

I think with respect to your second question, I think the catastrophe, the human rights enormous catastrophe, perhaps the worst single human rights catastrophe of this war in one place, was in many ways the galvanizing event in the tragedy that it was to lead toward this process which has culminated in this peace agreement. I think the international community, led by in this case the United States, has been very much having Srebrenica and Zepa and those who lost their lives in Srebrenica in mind as we move toward this full implementation of this peace agreement. The mandate of the War Crimes Tribunal have full authority to engage in its work in these areas. Thank you.

(The briefing concluded at 6:06 p.m.)