

International Decision Making in the Age of Genocide: Srebrenica 1993-1995
June 28 – July 1, 2015
The Hague
Edited Transcript

Public Session



From left: David Rohde, Yasushi Akashi, Carl Bildt, Muhamed Duraković, Zlatko Lagumdžija, Rupert Smith, Joris Voorhoeve

ABIODUN WILLIAMS: Welcome to The Hague Institute for this public panel on “International Decision Making in the Age of Genocide: Srebrenica 1993-1995.” Over the past two days, we have hosted an extraordinary group of people to discuss the events that led to the Srebrenica genocide in July 1995. For the first time, we brought together the key decision-makers from that period, including the leaders of the civilian and military branches of the UN mission in Bosnia, senior officials from UN Headquarters, and political leaders and officials from key governments, including the Netherlands, US, France, UK and Bosnia itself. We were particularly honored to have with us a Srebrenica survivor. Our goal was to better understand the chain of events that led to the genocide, with the aim of preventing such calamities in the future.

Our public panel this morning includes Muhamed Duraković, a Srebrenica survivor who survived the genocide by making a 37-day trek through Bosnian Serb Army controlled territory, Yasushi Akashi, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in the former Yugoslavia from 1993 to 1997, Joris Voorhoeve, Minister of Defense of the Netherlands from 1994 to 1998, General Sir Rupert Smith, the UNPROFOR Commander in Bosnia from 1995, Assistant Chief of Defense Operations from 1992 to 1994, Carl Bildt,

European Union Special Envoy to the former Yugoslavia 1995, and Zlatko Lagumdžija, former Deputy Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1994.

Our moderator for the morning session is David Rohde, an award winning author and investigative reporter who won the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting in 1996 for his work on Srebrenica. He later wrote *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica* and is now an investigative journalist for *Thomson Reuters*. I am delighted that David has agreed to moderate our panel this morning and give him the floor. Thank you.

DAVID ROHDE: Thank you all for coming this morning. It has been an extraordinary two days. We agreed that each of the panelists will first talk about lessons and insights from the last two days. After that, we are going to open it up for questions. Let us begin with Mr. Akashi.



Yasushi Akashi, center, with Abiodun Williams and Zeid Al-Hussein (in private session)

YASUSHI AKASHI: Thank you David. The last two days were indeed soul searching and revived many vivid memories. On the 20th anniversary of the unspeakable tragedy of Srebrenica, I offer my most sincere remorse as a former Special Representative of the UN

Secretary-General for the sufferings of so many people. UNPROFOR was the largest peacekeeping operation in history but it had to operate in most inhospitable circumstances. It had to muddle through, when one of the parties to the conflict [the Bosnian government] wanted peace enforcement rather than peacekeeping. The other party [the Bosnian Serbs] did not want any kind of UN operation.

UNPROFOR was not given the necessary means or resources for the implementation of the very complex and ambitious mandate. Philosophically speaking, a perfect solution is an enemy of a good solution. We all wanted a durable peace. Our highest priority at the time, however, was to provide humanitarian assistance and achieve ceasefires to stop the bloodshed, even if we knew that they would soon be violated. European governments had pressured the United Nations to dispatch a peacekeeping force in the absence of a peace to keep. The group of European wise men, headed by the French Minister of Justice, Robert Badinter, had earlier cautioned against the premature recognition of the former Yugoslav republics [as independent states] until some kind of constitutional agreement had been achieved with ethnic minorities within these countries.¹

I would like to emphasize that UNPROFOR had to operate under the mandate given by the UN Security Council. The Security Council issued innumerable numbers of high sounding resolutions and statements that were difficult to implement. I presume they were acting under pressure from governments who wanted to show public opinion and the media that the UN was doing something. We read these resolutions ten, fifty, sometimes one hundred times without making sense of them. Having two headquarters also made it hard for us to operate. (UNPROFOR was established initially in Sarajevo, but moved to Zagreb, which was more peaceful.) Ensuring cooperation between civilians and the military was not easy but not impossible. There was also a high degree of professional cooperation between the UN and NATO.

We did not want to repeat the mistakes of past operations. Prior to our involvement in Yugoslavia, we had the debacle of Somalia and the tragedy of Rwanda. We told ourselves,

¹ Robert Badinter headed the five-member Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia, established by the European Council of Ministers in August 1991. The Commission issued a series of opinions on legal issues resulting from the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

[“Let’s not cross the Mogadishu line.”](#)² We remembered that the United States lost 18 soldiers in Somalia. Pakistan lost 24. We cautioned ourselves against the UN getting involved in peace enforcement. Maybe some of us learned the lessons too much.

The Dutch peacekeepers in Srebrenica were given an almost impossible task. The Canadians did not want to continue their mission and Sweden refused. How can you fight a war when you have only 150 troops left in the face of more than 2,000 invading troops? And you are short on food, medicine, water and fuel? [Dutchbat] had to operate on foot. I admit that there was some confusion over the use of air power [to protect Dutchbat], and [an unclear] distinction between close air support which is a limited action of self-defense, and full scale air strikes. I would like to urge the Dutch people not to blame their troops or themselves too much. UN work is always difficult and sometimes even dangerous, but that does not mean that the UN is not doing necessary work.

The so-called “safe areas” were a misnomer. They were not safe. The UN Secretary-General issued three or four reports arguing against the creation of safe areas without requisite conditions. Troop contributing nations were, of course, concerned about the safety of their troops. What the UN could accomplish in the six safe areas, including Srebrenica, was limited, in hindsight, even impossible.

The UN is constantly looking for ways to improve its peacekeeping operations. One such example was the Brahimi report issued in 2000.³ Another report came out just last week, stressing the need for military action to be accompanied by a political peace process.⁴ I subscribe to these conclusions. We cannot blame the soldiers for not being able to keep the peace. I think political leaders have to assume their responsibilities. We must balance the need for justice with the need for reconciliation. We have to accept that the UN is imperfect and in a constant state of evolution. We need a more robust type of peacekeeping.

² Akashi expressed this viewpoint on multiple occasions, including a [June 9, 1995 meeting](#) with Generals Janvier and Smith in Split.

³ United Nations, [“Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations,”](#) A/55/305-S/2000/809, August 21, 2000.

⁴ United Nations, [“Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on uniting our strengths for peace,”](#) A/70/95-S/2015/446, June 17, 2015.

DAVID ROHDE: Thank you Mr. Akashi. Speaking of political leaders and diplomats, let us turn to Mr. Bildt. What did you learn over the last two days that was new?

CARL BILDT: I learned more about what we did not know. We have been going through the sequence of events, day by day, document by document. But there are still things we do not know. For me, one of the big unknowns concerns the events of July 9, 1995. We know that the Bosnian Serb Army had launched an operation against Srebrenica. The war crimes tribunal found the original order [dated July 2, from the commander of the Drina Corps, Major-General Živanović] calling for the enclaves of Žepa and Srebrenica to be “split apart” and [reduced to “their urban area.”](#) On July 9, that direction was changed. They decided to [capture the whole Srebrenica safe area.](#) That was a momentous decision. Why was it taken? We still don’t really know.

The second, even more momentous decision, according to the tribunal, was the decision that was taken in the evening of July 11. Srebrenica had been captured, they had thousands of people who could have been regarded as prisoners of war and they decided on a mass execution.⁵ This was not the first time, unfortunately, there had been many atrocities previously, particularly in the Drina valley in 1992. But the machine-like execution of thousands of men in an organized way was different. That decision was taken in the evening of July 11. Why was it taken? We don’t really know.

On the bigger picture, we need to examine why the war started and why we were unable to prevent it. The war started in the spring of 1992. The political process collapsed in the spring of 1993. Up until that time, you can argue that it was not a peacekeeping operation. It was a humanitarian assistance operation combined with a determined political attempt to settle the conflict. The Vance-Owen plan collapsed in the spring of 1993, largely because of disagreements across the Atlantic. There were disagreements in the region, by definition, but the transatlantic disagreements caused the Vance-Owen peace plan to collapse. We did not have a credible political process between the spring of 1993 and the late summer/early autumn of 1995.

⁵ The evidence for this decision is circumstantial. Mladić [began mobilizing transportation assets](#) for the deportation of Srebrenica residents on the evening of July 11. A former Bosnian Serb intelligence officer, Momir Nikolić, has testified that he was informed on the morning of the July 12 that [military-age men were to be killed.](#) The [separation of men and boys](#) from other refugees began shortly afterwards.

In the meantime, a lot of other things are done. One of them the “safe areas.” Here we must be self-critical. As Mr. Akashi said, the “safe areas” were not safe. The UN Secretariat repeatedly told the member states of the Security Council, “We don’t have enough forces there. It’s not going to work.” The Security Council told the UN Secretariat, “We don’t really care. We need to do something.” We then had “pretend” safe areas that were not safe. The combination of these two things—a collapsed political process and unserious, pretend policy—was a recipe for future disaster. The disaster came in Srebrenica in July 1995. It could have come elsewhere, but it came there. I would go back to the collapse of the political process in the spring of 1993 and, in the particular case of Srebrenica, a decision to create safe areas without making the safe areas safe.

The lessons coming out of the horrible experience of Srebrenica are obvious:

- Always have a political process. The political process is paramount. Needless to say, you also need a humanitarian operation and military operations as appropriate to advance certain political goals.
- Be honest as an international community about what you can and cannot do.
- Do not write Security Council resolutions because you want to have a nice press conference. Write Security Council resolutions that you believe can be implemented.
- Put the necessary resources at the disposal of the people down in the field. Make it realistic for them to achieve what the diplomats are deciding in New York.

DAVID ROHDE: Of all the panelists here, Muhamed Duraković deserves the most answers. Do you feel you were given adequate answers, or at least more answers, in the last two days?



Muhamed Duraković

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: Thank you David. When we first met [in 1995] a few months after Srebrenica was occupied, while you were doing your research on your book [*Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica, Europe's Worst Massacre Since World War II*], I told you many questions to which I wanted answers. Twenty years have passed since then. It has been a privilege for me, as it would have been for any other Srebrenica survivor, to join the other members of our panel in searching for answers to these questions. I think we were able to find some answers.

This conference provided us access to many of the documents that support the arguments and discussions we have been having. In Bosnia, we live in a society with three ethnically divided groups, each with its own “truth.” If you talk to people from the Bosniak side, they will tell you what “really” happened. You then go over to the Serb side, and they will tell you what “really” happened. I always insist that we Bosnians must talk about facts. We’re not ready to talk about truth. Maybe the next generation will accept a truth that everyone will recognize. Before that happens, however, we have to talk about facts. What

was really important for me at this conference was the documentation of every single fact that came up in our discussion.

As someone who experienced everything at the local level, it was very important for me to meet the people from the policy-making level. The decisions that were taken at these higher levels had a tremendous impact on people living in Srebrenica. If a decision was made to halt food convoys, that had an immediate effect on people in Srebrenica. If a decision was made not to stop [Serb] shelling and sniping that had an immediate effect on everyone living in Srebrenica. I wanted to know why the mandate given to the international community [by the Security Council] was not implemented? International officials greatly underestimated [the Serb threat] to Srebrenica. This resulted in the failure of the international community to save the civilian population of Srebrenica.

I saw this conference as a kind of truth commission. Twenty years on, we cannot bring back the dead, but we can learn from what went wrong in Srebrenica. I think it would be humane to recognize the mistakes that were made. Not to apologize to the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, not to apologize to me personally, but to apologize to the kids who grew up without a father, or a brother, or an uncle, or grandfather. There are thousands of Srebrenica children who will never know what it means to have a male family member. These people are still suffering today. The effects of Srebrenica live on.

Although the policy makers are unable to understand decisions taken on July 9 or July 11, for the people who were in Srebrenica on those days, it is all very clear. We knew that Srebrenica would fall and, as a result, everyone in Srebrenica would be killed. When I left Srebrenica, and said goodbye to my mother who was walking towards Potočari while being shelled, I did not think I would ever see her again. I thought that I had a much greater chance of survival than she did.

Srebrenica was the final stage in the larger policy of ethnic cleansing that took place throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. You could say that the people of Srebrenica were lucky. Even though some women were killed and many raped, at least some women and children did survive. Other communities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina were not so lucky.

The claim that we did not know what would happen is unfair to Srebrenica victims. It was important for me to say that. It was important also for international politicians to

know that genocide happened throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the genocide scholar, Greg Stanton, the final step in genocide is denial. You can see a very strong movement of denial of genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, implemented by the politicians. This is not only an insult to the victims who are forced to relive these memories again. As Dr. Stanton says, genocide denial is “the surest indicator of further genocidal massacres.”⁶ What this means is that if we are not able to go through the process of fact-finding, truth and reconciliation, we may be creating problems for future generations. This is why this conference was very important for me. It represents another tool to break the cycle of violence and help the communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighboring countries heal and move forward and maybe, one day, become a member of the European family.

DAVID ROHDE: Dr. Lagumdžija, you were a senior Bosnian government official throughout the war. Muhamed mentioned “truth.” Did you feel you got more truth here than you did during the conflict?

ZLATKO LAGUMDŽIJA: First I want to thank all the people who participated in, and organized, our very fruitful discussions. I thought I knew a lot as someone who was both inside the box and someone who spent years trying to find out what had happened from files and discussions. I came here with a few questions:

- *First question.* Are safe areas and rapid reaction forces a valid concept regardless of the fact that they failed in Bosnia-Herzegovina?
- *Second question.* Was the bankruptcy of the international community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Srebrenica in particular, the result of a failure or mismanagement by particular stakeholders?
- *Third question.* Was it possible to prevent what happened? Can we learn lessons from what happened so we can prevent it someplace else?

⁶ A paper by the genocide expert Greg Stanton, [“The 8 Stages of Genocide.”](#) describes denial as the final stage of the genocide process. Stanton writes that “Every genocide is followed by denial,” and that denial is “among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres.”

- *Fourth question.* Do we really know who is guilty or responsible, or at least circumstantially responsible, for what happened?
- *Fifth question.* Was there a legally clear mandate [from the UN Security Council] to deter attacks [on the Safe Areas] that was altered for political reasons?
- *Sixth question.* As someone said during our discussions, should we "redefine the notion of being neutral?" The notion of neutrality, as it was applied to Bosnia [by the UN], was very wrong. I used the analogy of a wolf and a lamb ready to have dinner, and someone trying to define neutrality by geometrically measuring the mid-point between them. Obviously, we need to redefine the notion of neutrality to mean standing up for our values, including all those UN resolutions.
- *Seventh, and perhaps key, question for me.* Was what happened [in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Srebrenica] part of a strategically planned, organized, and brutally executed mass murder that ended in genocide? There is a theory that I call the "four M Model": the mad men, Milošević and Mladić, were responsible. Just now, Carl Bildt talked about the decisions that were taken by Mladić on July 9 and July 11, based on what he was thinking or not thinking and his mental profile. There is a theory that he was obsessed with the past, and was driven to exact revenge by 500 years of Serbian myth. Or that everything happened because he suddenly became crazy. This is a very dangerous theory.

I do not have enough time to go into detail but my answer to all those seven questions is the same: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes.

The genocide was planned and conceived from the very beginning. It started in the Tomašica, Prijedor area, with white ribbons on people's sleeves.⁷ The Muslim inhabitants of Prijedor were forced to wear white ribbons on their sleeves. Mass graves were recently discovered with nearly 400 bodies in one spot, and more than 200 in another, dating back to June 1992. Then there was the murder of the Prime Minister in the APC vehicle [in

⁷ In August 2013, Bosnian authorities discovered a mass grave in Tomašica village, near Prijedor in northwest Bosnia, dating back to the first phase of the Bosnia war. ICTY investigators later identified the remains of 600 victims, many of whom had disappeared from their homes in the Prijedor area in June-July 1992. The Serb authorities in Prijedor had issued an order, on May 31, 1992, for the non-Serb population of the town to wear white ribbons on their arms when they went outside their homes, which were identified by white sheets.

Sarajevo in January 1993], then the massacres in the Markale market [in February 1994 and August 1995], in Tuzla [in May 1995], and so on. As Ambassador Arria reported, following his visit to Srebrenica in April 1993 with a UN Security Council delegation, this was “[a slow-motion genocide](#).”

As Carl said, we did not get a political solution until the end of 1995, until the people who were brutally executing [the genocide] plan were stopped by force. After Srebrenica, from August 30 to September 20, there were real air strikes in accordance with the same United Nations mandates that existed before. This was what brought everybody to the table to talk about peace. We discussed what two or three or four planes were able to do on July 9 or 10 or 11 (during the fall of Srebrenica), but 400 planes were required to actually do the job in August and September.

Our discussions have been very valuable for me. I was afraid that we would come to the conclusion that [former US defense secretary Robert] McNamara reached in his book about the Vietnam War, that he made good decisions which led to the wrong outcome. I thought that would be the conclusion here, that everybody made the right decisions but the outcome was wrong. No! We discovered that these were bad decisions, terrible decisions, wrong decisions.

At our opening dinner, Tom Blanton quoted Karl Marx. I was shocked! You do not expect an American to quote Karl Marx in his welcoming remarks. Let me reply to Tom with another Karl Marx quote, “*Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point is to change it.*” That is how I viewed this exercise. We have a Srebrenica survivor with us, a true survivor, a representative of the other survivors. To a certain extent, we are all survivors. We all survived these events, and we have survived again, over the last two three days. I saw our role as survivors not in explaining what happened, but changing the world so this does not happen again. I think we have enough elements to do this.

DAVID ROHDE: I have the same broad question for General Smith on what you have learned from this conference. But I also wanted to ask you specifically, based on our discussions over the last couple days and based on your experience in Bosnia, was there

enough military force on the ground to save Srebrenica? Or was that force not applied as it could have been, in your view?

RUPERT SMITH: Let me come back to that. First I would like to echo the thanks to the organizers of this conversation. For me, it was a deep reminder of those cataclysmic, catastrophic, and very difficult times for everybody here, each in their own way. It was much worse for the victims than for the likes of me, of course. I have four particular lessons that echo some of what has been said, and then I will answer your specific question.

- *The first lesson.* Do not get involved in other people's wars unless you are prepared to fight one or all of the parties. And I mean both prepared up here [*points to his head*] and prepared with whatever you hold in your hand. Before you march in, decide, who are you going to fight? All of them? Or one of them? Make up your mind before you start.
- *Second lesson.* Do not have two operations in, and over, the same place (I am talking about NATO and the UN) conducted simultaneously and answering to different political directions. We will probably get a question about the “dual key.” That is why we had a dual key. If you conceive of two operations in and over the same place answering to different political directions, you will get the muddle that we have been discussing.
- *Third lesson.* Clarify the political/military debate before you go in. There is an awful tendency to view this as a debate in which you compromise your positions in order to arrive at a solution. But you cannot compromise a military position. A military position is measured against the opponent, not your political master. If your political master is part of the negotiation, his political position is not measured against you. It is measured against the person with whom he is negotiating. In the debate between soldiers and politicians, each party must arrive at a result that accommodates their position, and does not compromise them away with some comfortable phrases, as in a Security Council Resolution, for example. It is a savage, iterative, hard argument, and basic to the relationship between a military

commander and his political masters. You do not compromise. If it comes to compromise, you ought to go.

- *The last lesson.* People matter, whether they are decision-makers or victims. In the end, these humanitarian operations are about people. The people make up the objective. Those who decide to intervene may do so for relatively narrow national interests but the commanders they send to achieve these humanitarian objectives must be empowered to represent the interests of the people as a whole, the objective, not their narrow national interest.

To answer David Rohde's question, in light of what I have just said, I do not think that military force applied by the UN or NATO, or any combination of the two, would have prevented something like the collapse of Srebrenica. It might have delayed it, it might have made it slightly different, but I do not think it would have changed the outcome of the defense of the enclave to any great degree.

DAVID ROHDE: Mr. Voorhoeve, obviously we're in the Netherlands, and obviously this tragedy has had a huge impact here as well. Were any of your questions answered in the last two days? You have recently written a book about your experiences.⁸ What are your present views on safe areas? Should there be peacekeeping? Is it possible to do it successfully?

JORIS VOORHOEVE: The very candid exchanges that we have had over the last two days have helped us better understand how to avoid such disastrous developments in the future. That is ultimately the goal of the exercise. The mass murder that took place after the fall of Srebrenica was not the last mass murder. We live in a world with a poisonous mix of arms spreading to every corner of the world, enormous groups of unemployed young men, collapsing, poorly designed states in many areas of the world, and religion-driven politics and ideologies that are used as justifications to commit crimes. That is why an analysis of past Holocausts is so important. If we do not apply the lessons well in the future, they will be repeated again and again in different spots on earth.

⁸ See June 30, 2015 [book summary](#) of Yoris Voorhoeve, *Safe Areas? Failures and Successes in Protecting Civilians in War*.

One of the most important lessons I learned in these meetings was that looking for a single scapegoat is the wrong approach. Once you have pointed your finger at a particular official, institution, or country, you stop thinking. You have a sense of relief: he or she or this is guilty. Actually, in cases like this, there is a collective failure. The disastrous end is the sum of many individual and institutional failures and an underestimation of the power of evil, to use an old-fashioned word. An early 19th century English philosopher, Edmund Burke, said that “all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” We can amend that by saying that “evil prevails if there is a collection of inadequate decisions based on underestimating the power of evil.” We saw evil in the former Yugoslavia in the form of ethnic hatred mobilizing people to gain power. Once a country or ideology declines, mobilizing people based on group differences is poisonous. We see that same process taking place in many countries. This is why I hope that the conference organizers will continue to analyze past events to draw lessons of prevention.

DAVID ROHDE: Thank you. Let us open it up now to questions from the audience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: At the end of 1994, the Bosnian Serb government offered to create a safe passage to Bosnian territory from the enclaves. Bosnian President Izetbegović did not accept that offer. Did the UN pressure Izetbegović to accept the offer? Also, after the buildup of Serbian troops around the enclave, why did the UN not take any counter-measures to reinforce the enclaves.

DAVID ROHDE: Dr. Lagumdžija, do you remember receiving such an offer and what did the Bosnian government decide?

ZLATKO LAGUMDŽIJA: From the very beginning, there were some people arguing that we could prevent the war if we accepted Karadžić's offer of a population exchange. Two million people would go in one direction and two million people would go in the other direction. It was called "ethnic cleansing by agreement."



Zlatko Lagumdžija, left, with Hasan Muratović (in private session)

This was not a war of civilizations, this was a war against civilization. Srebrenica is a clear example of a war against civilization. This was not a fight between religious or ethnic groups. It was a fight between two concepts of the future of the country, a shared society or a segregated society. It was fighting between exclusive societies and inclusive societies. That was the fight between good and evil, as far as I am concerned. A representative of the international community told me, "Mr. Lagumdžija, you are promoting the idea of people living together. You have a constitution that promotes the idea of people separating. We should peacefully finish what was left unfinished by the war." He told me that it was not the fault of the international community that "some people in your country are wrongly parked." That was when I realized how far things can go if you allow that way of thinking.

The question is not why we did not do a peaceful ethnic cleansing in 1994. The question is why we did not do it in 1992? We could have said to the Bosnians then: "you are in the wrong country. For 500 years, when you were in the Ottoman Empire and then the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Kingdom of South Slavs, under fascism, and Yugoslavia

under Tito, you all lived together in a shared society. Then democracy came and they decided that you cannot live in a shared society because we have democracy.” In 1992, we were told to go back to safe areas, to areas where only Muslims live, where only Christians live, where only Jews live, and so on.

I have always been a strong promoter of a shared society. Some people in my country think that I am evil. People who deny genocide. So yes, there was an idea to move people around but, wait a second, there were other safe areas. Were we supposed to remove people from Žepa, from Srebrenica, from Goražde, from Bihać? I asked one international representative if we should leave people in the Bihać area and only withdraw those people in Žepa and Srebrenica. He said, “Maybe Bihać can stay.” What does that mean? We would have one group of Bosnian Muslims around Sarajevo and the Bosnian River, and another group in Bihać? Why don't you call it West Bank and Gaza? Western Bosnia could become the West Bank, and Sarajevo could be the Gaza strip.

I salute the people who risked their lives to be part of the UN peacekeeping mission in our country. But, forgive me, we have to stand up for certain values. If I was the one who had to decide whether to accept such an offer [of safe passage], I would say, “no, we have to keep on fighting for the values of the UN and the European Union. If democracy and shared society cannot co-exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I do not know where they can. Other European countries, including Holland, are facing the same problem.

DAVID ROHDE: Mr. Akashi, you repeatedly pointed out that there were not adequate troops to implement the safe haven concept. Did you bring that up when you were serving as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in 1993, 1994 and 1995?

YASUSHI AKASHI: Yes, on the advice of our military experts, the Secretary-General argued [in June 1993] that we would need [34,000 additional troops](#) to implement the safe area mandate that was given to him by the UN Security Council, especially under Resolution 836.⁹ The Secretary-General may have erred in saying that we would need 34,000 extra troops but we could agree to a “light option” with 7,600 extra troops. The Security Council picked up on the “light option” of 7,600, who only arrived in theater about one year later. In

⁹ UNSC, [“Resolution 836 \(1993\),”](#) S/RES/836, June 4, 1993.

hindsight, the Secretary-General should have said that the only choice is the heavy option of 34,000. This option assumed full cooperation between NATO and the United Nations on the basis of so-called dual key system.

Dual key was a cumbersome system, but I think it was necessary to ensure a marriage of political and military considerations. Most of the time in the theater there was full sharing of information and frank discussion between the UN and NATO. Within UNPROFOR, there was a committee of civilian and military experts with a civilian majority on the use of air power. We viewed “close air support” as an act of self-defense for the safety of our personnel. We approved these requests without qualifications or reservations since it was the question of life or death of our soldiers and our personnel. On the other hand, an “air strike” was the political action that required full examination of relevant factors from all possible angles. We could have done a much better job with full resources had we been given the 34,000 troops requested by the Secretary-General [in June 1993]. I cannot say for sure, however, that it would have been a panacea.

DAVID ROHDE: I have a question for Mr. Voorhoeve. The Dutch government has a certain responsibility for the number of Dutch soldiers that were in the enclave. I know you were not involved in [the original deployment decision] in 1994, but do you think it was a mistake that the troop levels got so low, particularly for Dutchbat III, that rotations were happening and the soldiers were not able to come back from leave. Looking back, do you think you made a mistake in terms of the size of the force?

JORIS VOORHOEVE: That was not the major problem. The fall of the enclave has very little to do with Dutchbat, although it looks as if it did. There were a number of causes for the fall. The primary cause was the wrong design of the peace operation. It should have been a green helmet peace operation rather than a blue helmet operation. The eastern enclaves, which were extremely vulnerable, should have been under the protection of NATO. NATO should have given a warning to the Bosnian Serbs and should have applied deterrence. If you do it well, deterrence is the most humane form of applying military power, because there are no casualties. Deterrence means telling the enemy, “if you touch these people, we will take out your command centers, your air fields, your arsenals, you will suffer much

more damage than you can gain by overrunning these enclaves.” The principle of deterrence was forgotten, brushed aside by many politicians after the Cold War. The word “deterrence” was linked to “nuclear deterrence,” but it is an age-old principle of applying power. It is basically playing poker against your enemy. Your enemy has to know you can call his bluff because you have escalation dominance. NATO has escalation dominance.

The fact that Dutchbat went down to a much smaller number of people than were required has nothing to do with this. Dutchbat could not be rotated with fresh new personnel, because of the convoy terror from the side of the Bosnian Serbs who blocked this. Dutchbat did not get fuel and had to eat emergency rations for months. By the beginning of June, Dutchbat was no longer militarily operational. Karremans [warned us \[on June 4\]](#) that Dutchbat could no longer carry out its mission.¹⁰ But the horrible fate of Srebrenica is not caused these problems. It is related to [Mladić’s] decision to overrun the enclave, with a relatively overwhelming force, and the later decision to execute the prisoners, as Carl Bildt mentioned. Those are the origins of the horror that we have been discussing.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Mr. Voorhoeve, you spoke about Colonel Karremans. He raised a glass with the butcher of Srebrenica, but did not order his soldiers to fight against that butcher. The Blue Berets were well trained but were unwilling to fight.

JORIS VOORHOEVE: You can see the entire conversation between Karremans and Mladić [on July 11] on Youtube.¹¹ If you take the trouble to look at it, you will notice first of all that Karremans asks nine times for Mladić’s cooperation in evacuating the population together with Dutchbat. He was concerned about what would happen to the 20,000/27,000 refugees around the Dutchbat compound.

¹⁰ Karremans to BH Command, [“Deteriorating situation in Srebrenica,”](#) Dutchbat Compound Potočari, TK9588, June 4, 1995.

¹¹ A [transcript of the Karremans-Mladić session on July 11-12](#) is available through ICTY. Video of the [first](#), [second](#), and [third](#) Mladić-Karremans sessions on July 11-12 is available on Youtube.



Mladić and Karremans in Bratunac, July 11, 1995, Serb video

You raise the question of the glass. That is also a misconception. It shows us the power of a video cut. What went across all the channels in the world was this glass and not these nine requests to cooperate in taking care of the refugees and agree to a joint evacuation of the refugees and Dutchbat. Mr. Karremans refused the glass three times. At the end of the conversation, Mladić wanted to have a picture with glasses raised. Karremans refused it. He said, "my soldiers don't drink beer, so in my opinion, I shouldn't drink beer."¹² A glass was then put in his hand. He did not at all congratulate Mladić with a victory, as was claimed later on. It was a false image.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am an intern with the ICTY. I have a question for Mr. Bildt. This happened in the backyard of the European Union, but we did not really do anything about it. European decision making was very confused until finally America assumed a leadership role and made Dayton happen. This has become a widely accepted narrative. I would like to hear what your experience was back then.

¹² The video and transcript of the first Karremans-Mladić meeting on July 11 at Hotel Fontana show that Karremans [reluctantly accepted a glass of spritzer](#) (white wine and mineral water) that was placed in his hand after [refusing an initial offer of beer](#). He was photographed with the glass to his lips while Mladić looked on.

CARL BILDT: I agree with you, that is the popular perception. In my opinion, it does not reflect reality. The role of the European Union was limited to one of two elements of the peace process. At the London Conference, in August 1992, an International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia was established, co-headed by the European Union and by the United Nations. The co-chairmen were David Owen [appointed by the European Community] and Cy Vance [appointed by the UN Secretary-General]. They produced the Vance-Owen peace plan in the early days of 1993. That peace plan collapsed due to disagreements across the Atlantic. The Clinton administration had just come in and was effectively saying “we want to do something better.”

I would not say that the Vance-Owen peace plan was perfect (neither is Dayton, by the way), but the collapse of the Vance-Owen peace plan guaranteed two and a half more years of war, and all the deaths and displaced and suffering that went along with it. I was appointed Co-Chairman to replace David Owen [on June 5, 1995], a few weeks before Srebrenica. Eventually, with the cooperation with the Americans and Holbrooke, we managed to get something going. The key military element was the British-French Rapid Reaction Force. The French guns around Sarajevo were far more important than all of the [NATO] planes flying there. The devastating accuracy, firepower and consistency of the artillery fire around Sarajevo changed the equation in a way that people flying from Aviano air base can never do. That tends to be forgotten.

We should learn the lessons of Bosnia and Srebrenica, but we should not be afraid of trying. One of the big problems facing the United Nations is to get countries to send soldiers to do dangerous things. We [politicians] know that we will be held responsible for going to our respective parliaments and saying we want to send soldiers to Afghanistan or to Mali for a very dangerous operation. Can we guarantee that we will bring peace to Mali? No, we can't. We can easily say, “It went wrong in Bosnia, so it's better to stay home and pontificate for a while and let the UN try to find something else to do.” There has been a tendency after Srebrenica for European nations to back away from UN peacekeeping because it is dangerous for the soldiers and politically difficult for the respective governments because it might not succeed. We have to be honest and say, “This is extremely difficult.” Sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it fails, but it should not be a crime to try. The real crime is staying home and not even trying. I fear there is a certain Srebrenica effect in European public

opinion, the idea that it is better to stay home and pontificate than actually be out there, running the risk of failure.

I was Prime Minister of Sweden at the time of the Bosnian war proper and was responsible for sending five mechanized battalions of Swedish soldiers to the former Yugoslavia. Did they bring peace to the country? No, they didn't. Did they save lives? Yes, they did. Did they facilitate a lot of humanitarian assistance? Yes, they did. Would things have been better if they had not have been there? No, they wouldn't. It's the same with the Dutch. Was it perfect? No, it wasn't. Would it have been better if the Dutch government had said, "we will stay at home and issue a press release?" No, it wouldn't. For all of the soul searching we should have about the need to learn from our failures, the key failure is not to even try. There are too many governments at the moment who are not even trying to do something.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: To be fair, along with the failures that Carl has mentioned, we should remember that the population of Srebrenica was overwhelmed with joy in 1993 when the UN came to Srebrenica. We hoped that the onslaught and killing were over. Although we have been focusing on UNPROFOR, let's not forget the other international agencies in Srebrenica during that period, including the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, who did a fantastic job in helping people move out of the overpopulated downtown area and live in much better conditions. Let's not forget the courageous work of UNHCR who fought their way through the checkpoints that had been set up almost all the way from Belgrade to Zvornik, to Bratunac, eventually entering the enclave via the yellow bridge, OP Papa, as the military called it. All these people did a fantastic job and very courageous job. They were shot at; some were wounded and some died. I know people who died bringing humanitarian assistance to Srebrenica. Let's also not forget the contribution of the International Criminal Tribunal [ICTY-a UN agency] in the process of fact finding, truth and reconciliation following the fall of Srebrenica.

While we focused on the failures of the policy makers, at the tactical level and the level of the decision-makers in Zagreb, let's not forget the "unsung heroes" who saved many lives not only in Srebrenica, but throughout Bosnia. They deserve our respect. They played a very positive role.

I divide my own life between the period before Srebrenica and the period after Srebrenica. I became a human rights activist because of Srebrenica. My heart goes to the people who are currently suffering. In a written address to the UN for this anniversary, I wrote, "While we remember the fate of Srebrenica and the victims of Srebrenica, let's not forget ... there are people who are going through exactly the same kind of torture throughout the world...Let's not betray them again." The people of Srebrenica were betrayed. I am not talking now about governments, the Republika Srpska or the Bosnian government or the international community. I am talking about ordinary people of Srebrenica, the women and children. They paid a horrible price. Their lives were changed forever and there is nothing we can do to fix it.

By condemning those who promote the politics of genocide denial, we can heal the whole community. Hopefully their children will have a better life than I had. We need to learn the lessons of Srebrenica. When we go in [to a conflict situation], we must go in strong, and pick the right side. Your conscience will tell you which side to pick. You can never be on the side of the perpetrator, you have to be on the side of the victim. Sometimes you have to be only on one side, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, using the analogy of the wolf and the sheep. Sometimes you have to be on all sides because everybody committing atrocities against each other.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am from Belgrade. I am a PhD student [in the Netherlands]. Following up on the story of victim and perpetrator, I would like to pose a question to Mr. Voorhoeve. I would like to ask you about Hasan Nuhanović [a former UN interpreter in Srebrenica] who is not with us today for some reason. Do you or perhaps the Dutch state feel responsible for failing to protect his family? I am not generalizing. I am just talking about one guy and his family.¹³

¹³ Hasan Nuhanović was a UN interpreter whose father Ibro, mother Nasiha, and brother Muhamed were killed by Bosnian Serbs following the fall of Srebrenica. The family sought refuge in the Dutchbat HQ in Potočari on July 11. Dutchbat officers ordered 18-year-old Muhamed Nuhanović to leave the compound on the early evening of July 13. [A September 6, 2013 ruling by the Netherlands Supreme Court](#) concluded that Dutchbat troops knew by the afternoon of July 13 that the "[Bosnian Serbs were committing crimes against the male refugees](#)" and "[should not have caused Muhamed to leave the compound](#)." The court concluded that the Dutch state "[acted wrongfully](#)" toward both Muhamed and Ibro, who chose to accompany his younger son to his eventual death. See also Michael Dobbs, "[Who killed Muhamed Nuhanović?](#)" *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2012. For video with Hasan Nuhanović, see USHMM, [Bosnia Eyewitness Testimony](#).

JORIS VOORHOEVE: This is a question for the Netherlands courts, who should decide who is responsible for what. I should not meddle with this. I was not informed or involved in the decisions concerning Hasan. I talked to him in the fall of 1995. He came to my office and told me about the horrible things that had happened, including the loss of his father and his brother. I offered my sincere condolences. I continue to do that, but I should not now enter into a question that has been before the Netherlands courts, and is still before the European Courts. I think I should leave it up to the judges.

MUHAMED DURAKOVIĆ: Let me say a few words. Hasan Nuhanović has been a friend of mine for a long time. His brother Muhamed was a few months older than me. We had the same name. Muhamed and I were very good friends. When we were seventeen/eighteen, we considered Hasan to be very old and not someone that we should associate with. But after Muhamed died, I became one of Hasan's closest friends. We talk to each other on a daily basis.

We are often invited to talk about Srebrenica. Hasan has a very specific story to tell, as does every other Srebrenica survivor. The story of what happened in Srebrenica is not just one story, it is thousands of stories. Any Srebrenica survivor could have been here today, in my chair. I feel privileged that the organizers gave me this opportunity after numerous consultations with Hasan and everyone else, I turned down an opportunity to talk to the UN in New York because I wanted to see the people here. I have not seen some of them for more than 20 years. Talking about "unsung heroes," Larry Hollingworth of UNHCR is here. The last time I saw Larry was back in 1994. Twenty plus years later, we are sitting around the same table. It has been a privilege to be here and meet some of the people who, I thought, made a great contribution. But also, at the same time, confront some people who I felt had failed to do their job as well.

This event is not about Muhamed Duraković and it is not about Hasan Nuhanović. It is about creating a historical record. That is why it is so important for me that the organizers were able to produce so much evidence, in the form of declassified documents that allow us to finally bring some things out.

I can put my demons to rest. Back in 1996, we survivors were so angry and disappointed by our treatment by the international community [that we naturally

gravitated to] conspiracy theories. We felt that the civilized world had failed us and decided that we should no longer live. We felt that the civilized world was racist, Islamophobic. We felt we were let down because we were blue eyed, blonde Muslims in the middle of a Europe that would not allow such a state to exist.

I was able to learn, from the documentation, that some of these conspiracy theories have no basis in fact. We have to continue investigating what really happened. I will personally spend the rest of my life investigating. Reading and learning so I can hopefully help future policy makers not make the same mistakes as they made in Srebrenica.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [*Question in Dutch-not translated.*]

JORIS VOORHOEVE: There were a number of questions for me. The first one was, what did the Netherlands do to prevent this evil? The short answer is, not enough. We failed. In January 1994, the Lubbers-Kok cabinet, of which I was not a member, took the decision to make part of a battalion available to the United Nations. The Canadians wanted to leave [Srebrenica] as fast as possible. The only country willing to send troops was the Netherlands. Other countries refused because the operation seemed too dangerous. In the end, the Dutch operation failed. But it achieved significant results in terms of humanitarian aid. Had there not been blue helmets there [in July 1995] when Mladić attacked, I am afraid he would probably have killed many more than the men. I think the UN presence, whether they were Dutch or Norwegian or Belgian or French, helped to reduce the terrible disaster. I cannot prove this, but it is my understanding.

When will the Netherlands give complete openness? It has done so already. There is a very thorough [3,500-page study](#), without counting the large annexes, issued by the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation in 2002. It is of the best pieces of current history writing, drawn up by researchers who also had access to secret material. They were able to read the still top secret minutes of Netherlands cabinet meeting and also saw intelligence information. Later on, we also had a very thorough [2002-2003] [parliamentary inquiry](#), which questioned people under oath. I myself was questioned under oath for two days. There was no way for a politician or a military officer to avoid the questions of the commission. I understand very well that people continue to search for answers. This

afternoon, I will publish a book based on my own diary, but the story really is not all that different from the conclusions of the Parliamentary inquest or the NIOD report.¹⁴

On the question of what I blame myself for, I waited for NATO air power in early July. On July 9, I raised the question of close air support with General Janvier, the United Nations commander. I said to his military advisor, "It's at Janvier's discretion, he is the commander, I'm not the UN commander." I was a politician sitting in The Hague and was not responsible for the actual military operations, but I said, "Air power in the sense of close air support has been promised to the Netherlands by the United Nations Secretary-General. This is the time it should come, even though thirty Dutchbat members are in the hands of Mladić." I blame myself for not having taking a plane [to UNPF HQ in Zagreb], in early July and saying this personally to General Janvier, rather than in a telephone message. Had I been there, I could have pressed the point more strongly. I expected a lot of air power to be applied to help Dutchbat. It was promised to me on the night of July 10, but nothing had come on the morning of July 11. By the time a limited close air action took place after noon on July 11, it was too little too late.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am Robert Fox, I was the chief foreign correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* at the time of Srebrenica. Can we go back to dual key? How are you going to get a unified command in these circumstances? When General Smith ordered the guns to fire on [Bosnian Serb positions above] Sarajevo in that very spectacular fire power demonstration [in August 1995], who did you clear it with?

RUPERT SMITH: I commanded the guns, I commanded the soldiers on the ground, and I commanded the rapid reaction force. It was a unified command. I answered to the UN but, as a result of the decisions made directly after the catastrophe of Srebrenica, the authority to use air power over and above close air support had been vested in the military commanders. It was removed from the political chain of command after the London Conference on July 21.¹⁵ The keys of the two key system were subsequently held by the

¹⁴ See June 30, 2015 [book summary](#) of Yoris Voorhoeve, *Safe Areas? Failures and Successes in Protecting Civilians in War*.

¹⁵ For changes in the "dual key" arrangement, see Lake memo to Clinton, "[Your meeting with Christopher and Shalikhvili on the London Meeting on Bosnia](#)," July 22, 1995. Lake informed Clinton that authority to initiate air

NATO commander, Admiral Smith in Naples, and by General Janvier in Zagreb, the overall military commander of the UN peacekeeping forces [in Zagreb].

On this particular occasion, at the end of August, General Janvier was out of theater on leave. The key was in my hands. I talked to Admiral Smith who talked to me, General Smith and he turns his key [on August 28]. I do not turn my key precisely at that moment because I wish to extract some potential hostages from the consequences of what I was about to do. Twenty-four hours later, or thereabouts, I turn my key [on August 29 after British troops have safely left Goražde]. Srebrenica, for all its awfulness, had a catalytic effect on the political direction of the use of force. The keys were given to the commanders. That raises a profound set of questions. You should ask yourself whether you want your political leaders to hand automaticity in using force to the soldier. It was not such an easy thing to do, but it was done and that is what I did.

YASUSHI AKASHI: I would like to make a short comment on the dual key system, prior to this period. In February 1994, there was a crisis over Sarajevo [following the Markale market shelling] in which 68 civilians were killed. During that time the UN and NATO consulted together on the use of force, specifically the use of air power.¹⁶ There was an excellent coordination between NATO and the UN. We had the same assessment of the tragedy and the means to improve the situation. We met several times with the commander of NATO Southern Command, Admiral Jeremy Boorda of the United States. He was an outstanding military leader who understood both the effectiveness and the danger of the use of force. We also engaged in discussions with the Bosnian government and the Serb leadership. I also spoke a number of times with President Milošević of Serbia. Milošević had

action in Bosnia would be in the hands of the NATO air commander, Admiral Smith, and the UNPROFOR commander on the ground, General Smith. It described the new arrangement as “[a tremendous advance over previous NATO air strike decisions.](#)”

¹⁶ The Sarajevo crisis of February 1994 was triggered by the shelling of the open air Markale market on February 5 with a 120 millimeter mortar shell, killing at least 58 civilians and wounding more than 140. General Rose initially said that the shell had been fired from a Bosnian government position. The ICTY later concluded, on the basis of an exhaustive examination of possible trajectories (in [the case of Bosnian Serb General Stanislav Galić](#)), that the shell was fired from a Bosnian Serb position. The North Atlantic Council declared an “[exclusion zone](#)” around Sarajevo on February 9, 1994 following the shelling of the Markale marketplace, pursuant to UNSC resolutions 824, 836, and 844. The NATO statement set [a deadline of February 20](#) for the removal of heavy weapons from the Sarajevo exclusion zone. (See Akashi comments above.) The North Atlantic Council added an additional “[military exclusion zone](#)” around Goražde on April 22, 1994, and threatened to extend the policy to other Safe Areas, including Srebrenica, in the event of “concentration or movement of heavy weapons.”

a good understanding of the imminent threat of the use of force. We were able to extract an agreement from the two parties for a ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons twenty kilometers outside of Sarajevo. I was happy that we were able to threaten the use of air power, but did not actually have to use it. That is the best way to resolve such a situation.

In April 1994, we had a previous crisis over Goražde. On this occasion, we also had NATO air power available to us. We discussed these matters with Milošević, in the presence of Karadžić and Mladić and on the UN side, General de La Presle and myself only. Milošević was like a professor trying to convince the recalcitrant students [Karadžić and Mladić]. After twelve hours of discussion we reached an agreement that was ratified the following day ten minutes prior to the deadline for negotiations given by New York to me. Here again, we were able to extract an agreement of the Serbs without resorting to the use of air power by NATO. Unfortunately, the agreement was not respected. The NATO leadership was not very happy that we reached that agreement through negotiations but I consider that it was the duty of the United Nations to threaten force if necessary, but negotiate if possible.

As time went on it, getting NATO and the UN to agree became more and more difficult. But I agreed to Rupert Smith's request for the use of force and full scale air attack in May 1995. That led to many UN personnel being taken hostage by indignant Serbs.

[In August 1995] the UN Secretary-General deprived me of my dual key authority. I was not happy about this transfer of power. I thought my military leaders subscribed to essentially the same philosophy of negotiation and the use of force [as I did].

JORIS VOORHOEVE: It was clear that things started to work when General Smith and Admiral Smith turned the keys. Goražde was saved, and Sarajevo was saved, because of the application of strong military power. The Serb leadership understood that the time had come to sit down at the negotiating table. This led to the Dayton peace agreement. My wish of course is that the policies that helped save Goražde, including the threat and use of real military power, had been applied several weeks earlier. That might have made a difference to the 8,000 people who were killed in Srebrenica. There is an unfortunate logic in politics: things sometimes get much worse before they get better, when everybody understands that muddling through will not work anymore and something radically different is necessary. After the horror of Srebrenica, the United States understood it had to provide

leadership to the failing UN peace operation. The US Government talked to Boutros-Ghali and the UN generals and decided, "We are now going to apply strong military power." That was a message that the Bosnian Serbs and Belgrade understood. I think we owe the end of the war to a combination of British military cunning, represented here, and American and NATO air power.

DAVID ROHDE: I am the lone journalist who participated in the two days of private discussion. It is clear that a critical moment occurred on July 10, 1995. A request [by Dutchbat] for close air support went all the way to Zagreb. It was the first formal request received by General Janvier. He declines the request. General Janvier is not here but various participants reported that he had sincere doubts about using air power. He felt that ground troops would be more effective. There was a general belief that air power complicated things or might make them worse. Others thought air power would be very effective, but Janvier turns down that request.

There were mistakes by Dutchbat. There are also questions on the Bosnian government side. A key commander, Naser Orić, was outside of Srebrenica at the time. We journalists also failed in our coverage of Srebrenica. What General Smith said, about the savagery of Srebrenica creating the political will to use force, is correct. The political will, the unity, did not exist prior to this tragedy.

[END OF PUBLIC SESSION]