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Things Fall Apart

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

—W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

It was March 13, 1993. The principals—the cabinet-level officials responsible for national security policy—gathered in the Situation Room on the ground floor of the West Wing. Having grown up with the movie *Dr. Strangelove*, I assumed the Situation Room would be a large hall covered with maps, high-tech gadgets, and phone lines connected not only to the Russians but to other key world leaders as well. In fact, the room is small and unassuming, large enough for a rectangular shiny wooden table that seats about ten people comfortably and another twenty chairs along the wood-paneled walls. The table has one chair taller than the rest, in theory reserved for the president but most often used by the chair of the meeting, usually the national security advisor. The Cabinet Room is the only other room with a taller chair reserved for the president—one of the few vestiges of British royal tradition.

This particular principals' meeting turned out to be one of the most memorable—and, at over four hours, one of the longest—of my time at the White House. Three of the many issues discussed, the Middle East, Haiti, and Bosnia, required decisions on difficult questions, especially whether and how to use ground troops. As the third-ranking official at the National Security Council, my job was to help manage the foreign policy agenda. First as staff director, then as deputy assistant to the president, I sat in on most of the National Security Council (NSC) meetings throughout Clinton's first term, and then regularly from my position at the United Nations for the second term.

That day, Clinton, who had been president less than two months, made his first decision to deploy troops—to the Golan Heights, should there be a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. The group discussed the continued threat of Saddam Hussein and briefly discussed but rejected the use of force to return Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide to power. For the first time, the group grappled with inserting U.S. ground troops into Bosnia, in this case following an agreement among the parties. In addition, the principals had their first discussion about the use of force to bring about compliance by President Slobodan Milosevic of the former Yugoslav Republic, with the demands of the international community. The meeting began the process that would eventually lead to the use of force to back up American diplomacy more than two years later. It would also begin to develop a new foreign policy for America as the lone superpower, one that deployed not only America's vast, unrivaled military power but also its economic, diplomatic, and even moral strength.

The discussion set up a personal and policy dynamic that was to last through each of the participant's tenure in the administration. National Security Advisor Anthony (Tony) Lake tried to keep the conversation moving toward a conclusion. His *very* subtle humor offered comic relief to those sophisticated enough to get his jokes. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin raised repeated questions about the advisability of drawing the military into messy situations. His bombastic manner and failure to always be fully up on his brief alienated his colleagues and many at the Pentagon. He would often, however, be the first to ask the tough questions. For instance, that day he asked the key question, "Is the United States prepared to go to war in the Balkans?"

Chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell threw cold water on plans to involve the United States in the Balkans or any other "nonstrategic" situation, opposing the use of air power to achieve political aims and, at times, holding back key bits of information. The CIA Director James Woolsey offered "doom and gloom" scenarios that often failed to take into consideration key nuances. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright repeatedly pushed for more robust uses of force. Leon Fuerth, the vice president's national security advisor, would raise seemingly arcane points but, after navigating a very circuitous route, laid down important issues for consideration and pushed, with Albright, for the use of force to back up diplomacy. Deputy National Security Advisor Samuel (Sandy) Berger was always good for a bit of needed humor and for reminding his colleagues of the overall objectives of the president. While the principals did not realize it at the time, the discussion on whether to offer U.S. troops to support a Middle East peace agreement would prove to be the easiest discussion regarding that deployment.

If I were Israeli, I'd make damn certain there were Americans up there

Sitting to Lake's right, Secretary of State Warren (Chris) Christopher brought the group up to date on his negotiations in the Middle East. The United States had long played a leading role in trying to forge peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors. In 1979, then president Jimmy Carter had brought Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat together at Camp David. Yet, progress had eluded both presidents Reagan and Bush.

Christopher saw new opportunities for peace on two tracks: between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and Syria. Reserved, courteous, disciplined, and a little stiff, Christopher always dressed in a suit and tie. Passed over for secretary of state by Carter, Christopher had kept the post in his crosshairs for twelve years. I barely knew him as he had played virtually no role in foreign policy during Clinton's campaign. To my surprise, during the transition Clinton asked him to be secretary of state.

Building on his predecessor's policy, Christopher had been working to get an interim agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis that would give the Palestinians some form of increased self-rule and would mandate an incremental withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories. It now looked as though progress were possible. On the peace process with Syria, the Israelis were showing new flexibility and appeared willing to consider returning the Golan Heights, taken in the 1967 war. That meant the possibility of peace between Israel and Syria.

Christopher explained that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin was prepared to take "significant steps" before April 28 that might help induce the other Arabs to come around. The Israelis were looking at Palestinian elections to "choose someone there and give some legitimacy," as well as land "usage and management, but not sovereignty during the interim stages." As negotiations went forward, there could be some improvement in human rights conditions. Christopher also said Rabin had put dual citizenship on the table. While the proposal needed to be further developed, Christopher described it as "very encouraging."[1]

Those in the room nodded in agreement. "The two main tracks are mutually reinforcing," said Lake, referring to the Syrian and Palestinian tracks. He then asked about the politically sensitive issue of the status of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which in 1993 remained on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. "I don't envision dealing with the PLO," replied Christopher. "They know what they have to do. The Brits and the Belgians have started negotiations with the PLO. . . . I wouldn't close the door forever. If we could find a way to deal with them, it would be simpler.

But we can't do so until it is OK with the Israelis." Little did he know that in six months—to the day—PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat would walk into the White House.

On the Syrian track, Christopher was continuing discussions regarding peace between Israel and Syria in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Christopher explained cautiously that he thought there was a chance to get Syrian president Bashir al-Assad to agree to peace with Israel "in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan." Christopher laid out the U.S. approach, "full withdrawal for full peace." He was seeking an umbrella agreement that would set out these guidelines, followed by sequential steps to achieve the peace. But there was a catch, noted Christopher. "Assad understands the apex of full withdrawal for full peace. Therefore, it is necessary to tell him we're prepared to guarantee security through the UN—where the United States will play a major role for providing security on the Golan Heights. The *sine qua non* is a U.S. general in charge." That meant thousands of U.S. troops on the Israeli-Syrian border. Christopher wanted the authority to make Assad just such an offer.

President Clinton and Vice President Gore had joined the group to discuss the deployment of U.S. troops in the Golan. Listening carefully to Christopher's explanation, both Clinton and Gore agreed that Christopher should make the offer to Assad. Clinton was concerned about the congressional reaction, knowing how little support existed for the deployment of U.S. troops abroad. "If I tell him [Assad] I'll enforce security on the Golan Heights," Clinton asked the group, "do I need to have talked to Congress?" The principals decided they did not have to inform Congress further, as the Hill had already been briefed on letters of assurance on border security "according to U.S. Constitutional practices." While perhaps a stretch, no one wanted to risk a leak on an issue of this magnitude. A nasty debate in Congress over the deployment of troops to the Golan could have scuttled the deal.

Describing Rabin as a "flinty, taciturn man," Christopher said that Rabin really wanted "answers, especially regarding security arrangements on the Golan." Clinton also understood the troops had to be "real combat troops, not blue helmets," referring to UN peacekeepers. "If I were Israeli, I'd make damn certain there were Americans up there."

Offering to put U.S. troops on the Golan to guarantee security on the border between Israel and Syria was the first decision Clinton made to deploy troops abroad. It was the simplest decision he would face regarding U.S. troops—and also one that would not be implemented, as Assad ultimately never made the deal. There was no disagreement on the benefits to the United States of an Syrian-Israeli peace, long considered a strategic U.S. goal. No one winced when Powell later came back with an estimate of a U.S. battalion[2] in the Golan for twelve years at the cost of "a couple of mil-

lion" a year. The president's response to Powell's estimate was, "I think it is worth it."

The use of American troops to help implement peace in the Middle East was far less controversial than whether to deploy troops in the nonstrategic areas in conflict in 1993. These tougher decisions, ones that, unlike Syria, would ultimately be implemented, involved the use of force to back up American diplomacy in what *New York Times* columnist Leslie Gelb termed "teacup wars," those areas deemed during the cold war as not worthy of U.S. involvement, such as Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. Yet, as a superpower now free from the burden of containing the Soviet Union, the United States was increasingly called upon to *do something* to stem these conflicts. Clinton understood the need for U.S. leadership in such crises and during the campaign had challenged President George H. W. Bush to restore democracy to Haiti and end the war in the Balkans. He now struggled to find a way to do so as the new president.

Not your father's Democrat

In developing his foreign policy positions, Clinton had to redefine not only America's role in the post–cold war era but also Democratic foreign policy after nearly a quarter century of Republican presidents. The only hiatus had been Jimmy Carter's four-year presidency that, in foreign policy, was largely remembered for the success of the Camp David peace accords, but also for a perceived weakness because the Soviets had in 1979 invaded Afghanistan on his watch and because of his unsuccessful efforts to free the American hostages in Iran. The Democratic Party was perceived as weak on defense and unwilling to use force. On the other hand, Nixon's recognition of China, Reagan's increase in defense spending, tough Central American anticommunist policies, and invasion of Grenada created an image of toughness, and President George H. W. Bush's 1989 invasion of Panama and 1991 ouster of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, together with the recent collapse of the Soviet Union, had all helped to shape the image of a successful Republican foreign policy. In fact, Republicans seemed invincible.

During the campaign, Clinton trailed President Bush 15 percent to 63 percent in perceived ability to conduct foreign policy.[3] Clinton sought to neutralize that deficit by taking many centrist positions, not only because he believed them appropriate but also because he hoped to win back the so-called Reagan Democrats who had abandoned the Democratic Party for more than a decade. Clinton called for "the world's strongest defense, ready and willing to use force, when necessary." Recognizing the concern of conservatives that the United States not overextend its forces, he advocated the selective use of U.S. influence, saying that "America's challenge in this era is not to bear every burden, but to tip the balance." Although he did propose

modest cuts in defense spending to "plow those savings back into jobs right here at home," Clinton endorsed force modernization and increased support for soldiers and their families. He supported many of Bush's positions such as aid to the former Soviet Union, engagement in the Middle East peace process, and arms sales to Saudi Arabia.[4]

Clinton aggressively and successfully challenged the Republican foreign policy on a range of issues, especially its failure to adapt to the new international relations wrought by the end of the cold war. He likened the Republican claim of having won the cold war to the "rooster taking credit for the dawn." He pressed for "an America that will never coddle tyrants, from Baghdad to Beijing, an America that champions the cause of freedom and democracy, from Eastern Europe to Southern Africa, and in our own hemisphere in Haiti and Cuba." On Haiti, he had pledged to reverse Bush's policy of returning Haitian refugees and to work for the restoration of the deposed President Aristide. On Bosnia, he had challenged his predecessor's unwillingness to use America's economic and military strength to pressure the Serbs to end their aggression against the Muslim population. Both positions would take years to implement—and although we did not yet realize it—U.S. ground troops. First, the new team had to find its footing.

The team

Clinton's foreign policy team drew largely from the ranks of Carter's team—the only Democratic president since 1968. Thus, the newly appointed officials had been out of power, and in many cases out of Washington, for twelve years. They were not attuned to the rigors of the new twenty-four-hour news cycle or the harsh partisan politics that pervaded the Congress. The team had the right instincts but faced a steep learning curve in the new ways of Washington. Most importantly, they faced the daunting task of charting a new American foreign policy in the post–cold war era.

The ultimate reserved Protestant New Englander, Tony Lake brought to the campaign an intense intellectual rigor and a centrist approach to the use of force, which was appreciated by Clinton. Slight of build, with wispy graying brown hair, and large academic glasses, Lake was a well-liked and respected professor of international affairs at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. A self-described neo-Wilsonian, Lake believed that the United States should use its moral, military, economic, and political strength to engage and promote a more just, stable world. As a young Foreign Service officer, Lake had requested to go to Vietnam. He rose quickly through the ranks and served as head of Policy Planning at the State Department under Carter. Lake had been given the plum task of serving as Henry Kissinger's special assistant in the early 1970s but had resigned over the Cambodian invasion and other issues. Kissinger subsequently tapped his phone. Lake's slightly stern way put

off some people, yet his intellect and loyalty to his staff and colleagues earned him respect and support.

Having met Clinton two decades earlier, Sandy Berger was one of his closest advisors during the campaign and throughout their eight years at the White House, first as deputy national security advisor and, in the second term as national security advisor. A New Yorker with a quick wit, Berger had a strong sense of the political realities of foreign policy. Berger shared Lake's belief in the need for U.S. engagement abroad, a strong U.S. military, and support for human rights. He and Lake complemented each other well, as Berger brought a less academic and more political approach to the table. A Washington trade lawyer, Berger had served as Lake's deputy at policy planning in the Carter State Department and had been a speechwriter for George McGovern during his 1972 presidential campaign. During that campaign Berger met Clinton, and the two had kept in touch over the years. It was Berger who asked his friend Lake to join the campaign.

I joined the Clinton campaign with a decade of experience in foreign affairs, including the Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis presidential campaigns and six years as a Congressional staffer. I had studied for a graduate degree in international relations at Georgetown University, where I met Professor Madeleine Albright, who would become the Clinton administration's ambassador to the United Nations and the first woman to serve as secretary of state. A refugee from the former Czechoslovakia, Albright was the hawk of the administration, always pressing for stronger U.S. action against repression, especially in Europe. Albright helped me get an internship on Mondale's 1984 campaign. I started as a delegate counter in Mondale's tight battle for the nomination with Senator Gary Hart. I never left politics.

After Mondale suffered his devastating electoral loss, I joined the foreign policy staff of Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts for six years, with a brief break for the Dukakis campaign in 1988. Perhaps the most influential senator in U.S. history, Kennedy was an effective leader on every key issue of the day. That's where I found a place in the "issue network" of foreign policy that gave me invaluable contacts that served as a counterweight to the bureaucracy once I got to the White House. Such activists are closer to events on the ground than are government officials. A champion of human rights causes, Kennedy and his staff had access to dissidents around the world, many of whom later came to power, including activists in the Soviet block, democracy advocates in Asia, Solidarity leaders, including Lech Walesa in Poland, the Kurds in northern Iraq, and human rights activists in Central America. He negotiated with Soviet leaders to secure the release of political prisoners and Soviet Jews and met with the world's best-known living political prisoner, Nelson Mandela, shortly after his release from prison. Thus, I had a front-row seat during much of the world's transition from dictatorship to democracy.

When I was offered the job as director of foreign policy for the campaign, Kennedy urged me to take it, proclaiming, "Clinton's going to win." I responded that he was dreaming, a hopelessly romantic Democrat. Kennedy shook his head. "I may be a romantic, but Clinton's going to win. Bush's numbers are inflated and the economy will be the issue, not the Gulf War." Kennedy said that Clinton understood the need to move the party to the center. He predicted that Clinton would co-opt the Republicans on their toughest issues—crime, health and education, and especially the economy. "Clinton's going to do it," he said. "I'm running for reelection and won't be doing much on foreign policy. Take the job." Ten months later I became the third-ranking official on the National Security Council, with an office in the West Wing.

Isn't there supposed to be a honeymoon?

By any standard, Bill Clinton's first few months in office were not good ones. Much of the problem was of his own making, certainly, but he was also right in claiming that it originated with the ambitious agenda of change—in health care, in welfare, in taxes, and in the deficit—that he and his wife sought to implement. Washington's large federal bureaucracy and the Congress did not want to change and the administration underestimated the resistance its agenda would meet. Right on substance but naive about Washington, Clinton's team was a combination of Arkansas outsiders, senior people who were out of touch with the new Washington, and eager thirtysomethings who brought the passion of the campaign to the halls of government but not the experience of governing. The clash of agendas was combustible.

The first hundred days of a presidency are supposed to include a long honeymoon during which Congress supports the new president as he assembles his team, lays down a broad agenda, and begins to set in motion his own priorities. Yet, in President Clinton's case, the honeymoon evaporated within weeks of his taking office. Two of his nominees for attorney general were embroiled in scandal and withdrew, and he was forced to drop the middle-class tax cut. White House meetings went on for hours, and the president was always running late. He seemed to have abandoned his foreign policy campaign positions on everything from Bosnia, to Haiti, to Northern Ireland. Clinton's campaign promise to lift the Pentagon's ban on gays in the military exploded in the press, in Congress, and in the Pentagon. The controversy eroded much of the goodwill of the honeymoon and severely damaged Clinton's early relations with the Pentagon. In contrast to most presidents, who enjoy approval ratings of over 50 percent during their first four months in office,[5] Clinton's overall job approval rating dropped 10 percent from April to May, from 55 to 45 percent. On foreign policy, it plummeted from 63 percent in February to only 38 percent in June.[6]

There was trouble on many fronts. Congressional Democrats and Republicans were building a coalition to block the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). A resurgent old-guard communist network increasingly threatened Clinton's budding ally, Russian president Boris Yeltsin. In Iraq, president Saddam Hussein was again making worrisome moves against Kuwait. Only on the Arab-Israeli conflict were things looking up, with renewed hope for progress on both the Palestinian and Syrian tracks. It didn't help matters that Clinton's political advisors were telling the press that Clinton was only paying sporadic attention to foreign policy and that he had conceded that his campaign positions had been "naive." Clinton's younger, more media-savvy domestic advisors wanted to keep the focus on the economy and paid little attention to foreign policy. The administration thus failed to lay the groundwork with the press and Congress that it would take time—and a lot of work—to implement the new agenda.

What we encountered in January 1993 was a changed world. The new team was slow to realize that implementing a new agenda in foreign policy would require rewriting the fifty-year-old rules of the game. Struggling with the dueling forces of isolationism and pressures to be the world's policeman, Clinton tried in his first two years to define America's proper role as the lone superpower. Conflicts that for years and even decades had been suppressed by superpower standoffs could no longer be ignored. Humanitarian catastrophes that might previously have failed to garner much attention now made the nightly news. With satellites, cheap airfares, the Internet and the global financial market, events in Colombia, Rwanda, or Cambodia were no longer so far away.

The 1991 Gulf War had changed Americans' perception of war as no longer requiring significant casualties. But it had not increased public or Congressional enthusiasm for the United States serving as the world's policeman. Nor had it entirely erased the legacy of Vietnam from U.S. thinking about the use of force. Yet, the victory of our troops in Iraq in 1991, and even more importantly, the resurgence of our institutions and values across formerly communist Eastern Europe, raised global expectations that we would police the world.

The new team in the White House was slow to realize that, behind public expectations of a peace dividend and global calls for U.S. leadership, behind the isolationists' eagerness to declare victory and come home, and the hegemons' desire to continue the old fight, lay a need to rewrite the rules on the use of force and diplomacy. Gone were the overwhelming threats of the Soviet Union and communism, Adolf Hitler and fascism. The Gulf War had been won. Calls increased for America to engage in the myriad new post–cold war conflicts emerging, particularly in the Balkans. Yet, Americans saw no reason for, and certainly didn't support, going to battle

over the "teacup" wars. Yet, because America had the power to intervene in such conflicts, much of the world looked to the remaining superpower for leadership and for such intervention. In this new era, the new president would have to expand the arena in which he would contemplate the use of force. It would also take time and a strong public campaign to win the support of an isolationist Congress and a skeptical American public.

In his early years as president, Clinton seemed paralyzed, unable to realize his high-minded rhetoric. Meanwhile in Bosnia, the UN–led efforts seemed only to be rewarding Serb aggression, rather than protecting the rights of the besieged Muslims. The Yugoslav leader Milosevic was on a rampage, committing the worst crimes in Europe since World War II, yet no one moved seriously to stop him. The nightly news showed horrific pictures of Bosnian women and children running for cover in "Snipers' Alley" in Sarajevo as Serbs picked them off like rabbits.

Clinton had been forced to reverse his campaign pledge not to return Haitian refugees when more than a hundred thousand Haitians prepared to come to the United States following his inauguration. Graphic pictures of U.S. Coast Guard ships returning wet, bedraggled Haitian refugees provided real-life images of presidential flip-flopping. The UN–led negotiations seeking the return of Aristide were failing, and Aristide remained in Washington as black America rallied to his cause.

Resolution of the Bosnia and Haiti crises would ultimately require the use of force to back up Clinton's more robust policies. While the American people and Congress disagreed at the time, Clinton understood early on that restoring democracy in Haiti and ending another war in Europe were in America's interest. Yet, in 1992, the use of force in these "nonstrategic" internal conflicts, especially the deployment of U.S. ground troops, had no support—not in Congress, not in the Pentagon, and not among the American public. Changing that attitude would prove to be Clinton's toughest foreign policy challenge during his first two years.

Yes, Minister

Any new president struggles with Washington's bureaucratic behemoth to implement his foreign policy and to realize his campaign positions. Clinton's difficulties in changing long-standing policies after twelve years of Republican rule quickly became apparent. Much of policy is run on autopilot—because "it's always been done that way." For instance, late one night in the early days of the administration, I was sitting in my new office reviewing a routine cable meant to instruct our delegation to a UN human-rights committee in Geneva on how to vote on a resolution criticizing Indonesia's human rights violations. The only problem was that it instructed our government to support the repressive Indonesian regime, not the human rights

initiative. Although it was 11 P.M., I called the NSC staff person in charge of human rights, Eric Schwartz, who had not seen the cable. It appeared that no one had thought to check whether the new administration supported Bush's policy. We changed the instructions and told our delegation to support the human rights resolution. I wondered how many other "old" policies were still being carried out without the new team's knowledge.

In other instances, we faced outright resistance from the bureaucracy. For example, the president had decided to recognize Angola, on Tony Lake's recommendation. For the prior seventeen years, Washington had supported the rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi, in his fight to topple the Marxist government, which had stayed in power with Soviet and Cuban support. With the Soviet Union gone and the Cuban troops out of Angola, the policy no longer made sense, especially after the government of Angola signed a new peace agreement with the rebels, even though Savimbi had refused to sign it. In one of the more blatant diplomatic stalling efforts, despite the president's decision to recognize Angola, the State Department steadfastly refused to do so.

Our inquiries concerning a plan to implement the president's decision were met with collective mumbles. The situation reminded me of the constant stalling of a fictitious British minister's civil servant in the comedy, *Yes, Minister*. Each time Lake inquired at the State Department as to when the diplomatic announcement of the new policy could be expected, officials would simply reply, "We are working on it, sir." Eventually, the president, tiring of the delay, simply announced the decision during a meeting on May 19 with South African antiapartheid leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu, leaving the State Department to pick up the pieces. "Today," the president said simply, "I am pleased to announce the United States' recognition of the Government of Angola. This decision reflects the high priority that our administration places on democracy."

Realigning a superpower

For two generations, American foreign policy had been defined by the balance of power between the two cold war superpowers. For the prior four generations, it had been defined by the fight to protect our allies in Europe and Asia. Conflicts fit neatly into these two frameworks or were ignored. Absent the Soviet threat, Americans saw little reason to engage abroad. Isolationism is a strong force in the United States. With the luxury of two large oceans to the east and west, and two good neighbors to the north and south, absent a direct threat, Americans prefer to keep to themselves. Overall, the pre–September 11 myth of America's invincibility persisted, fostering an alarming disinterest in what transpired overseas.

Certainly, when threatened, Americans have always risen to the challenge and fought for their interests. But it took an attack on Pearl Harbor

that killed twenty-four hundred and wounded another twelve hundred Americans to generate the public support necessary for President Franklin D. Roosevelt to enter World War II. The attacks of September 11, 2001, shook the public out of its post–cold war isolationist shell and destroyed the myth that America was not vulnerable and need not engage abroad. However, in 1993, there was no such call to battle. Americans were more concerned about their jobs and mortgages than any conflict thousands of miles away. In the glow of having won the cold war, Americans felt they could rest on the assurance of the security its superpower status provided.

In addition, the perception of war was changing from one that required great sacrifice to a new immunity from the cost of war, one that did not affect most Americans' lives. While sixteen million Americans had served in the Second World War, only 468,000 soldiers had served in the first Gulf War. Nearly 300,000 Americans died in battle during World War II, compared to 148 battle deaths in the 1991 Gulf War. The ground war lasted just four days. Indeed, most Americans had watched it on television from an emotional distance and did not directly know anyone who had fought in the conflict.

Our parents and grandparents, including my own uncle and father, had jumped at their chance to fight in World War II and in Korea. The fifties generation initially volunteered to go to Vietnam, hoping for similar glory. But the new generation coming of age in the 1990s had no great enemies to fight and had understood the ultimate futility of the war in Vietnam. In the period between the end of the cold war and September 11, 2001, Americans would support only a short, relatively painless war, particularly to preserve easy access to cheap oil, or nearly cost-free interventions in Grenada and Panama, or the bombing of Libya. But they saw no reason to engage much beyond America's shores, especially with the use of ground troops. As one senior military official described the public's perspective, "If we put ourselves into operations voluntarily, or in efforts to stop war or provide humanitarian assistance in far-off lands, then casualties would be far less acceptable."[7] It took the terrorist attacks of 2001 to galvanize support for the large deployment of ground troops again. In 1993, Vietnam-style entanglements were out. Colin Powell's doctrine of overwhelming force used in the first Gulf War was in.

Yet, the world in 1993 was not that simple. The end of the cold war had brought to a head long-festering historical conflicts and created power vacuums that could not be ignored. The global technology revolution would bring with it new threats of terrorism, proliferation, and infectious disease. In 1992, Clinton and his advisors faced competing pressures. One, isolationism, argued that America was not vulnerable and need not engage. The other, that of omniresponsibility, was that the lone superpower, freed from the constraints of the cold war, could now solve all the world's con-

flicts, that it was omniscient and omnipotent. Yet, as Clinton said many times, the United States cannot be the world's police. Not only could it not deploy troops to solve every problem but also there was no public support for such engagement abroad. Clinton, unlike his predecessor, rejected these myths, developing a realistic foreign policy that rejected both the isolationists and calls to act everywhere.

Clinton faced strong resistance to his efforts. Officials in the Pentagon and in the Congress—as well as in much of the administration—viewed the "lesser" conflicts as someone else's problem, or not really much of a problem at all. In 1993, deploying troops into such "nonstrategic" areas as Bosnia or Haiti, particularly absent a political agreement, remained off-limits. At the time, Clinton and his team honestly thought negotiations and sanctions would restore Aristide to power in Haiti and force a change in Serbian behavior in Bosnia. The result was a failed cocktail: American diplomacy *not* backed up by force. It would be nearly two years before Clinton and his principals began to get the balance of force and diplomacy right. The superpower would finally use its full range of military, political, economic, and moral strengths to meet the new challenges.

We don't have a dog in this fight

The toughest challenge in early 1993 was how to use America's vast powers to end the war in Bosnia. Yugoslavia's president, Marshal Tito, had held the country together by promoting a brand of socialism with more freedom than its Soviet neighbors, buoyed by economic support from the West following Tito's break with Stalin. As the cold war ended, Yugoslavia disintegrated into five entities, triggering violence in all but Macedonia. Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, and the former Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo) all suffered violence. In Bosnia, the three constituent nations of the multiethnic state, including Muslims, Croats, and Serbs, failed to agree on creating an independent, unified Bosnia. The Serbs refused to take part in a referendum supporting independence and instead declared a Serb republic within Bosnia. As the fighting spread, the Serb leader, Slobodan Milosevic, sought to create ethnically pure areas by expelling and murdering the Croats and Muslims who lived there. He unleashed a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing against Bosnia, seeking to carve out Serb-only enclaves that would join his own Serb state. Bosnia struggled to remain a multiethnic single state. The more powerful Serbs were succeeding.

At the time, the UN, U.S., and European leaders failed to grasp the need to stand up to the Serbs, believing all parties shared some of the blame for the war. The UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali later admitted that he had felt that "no party in Bosnia was free of at least some of the blame for the cruel conflict."[8]

Clinton instinctively understood that the United States had a direct interest in ending the war in Bosnia. Allowing it to rage could ignite the ethnic and sectarian tensions that had lain dormant for the past four decades. Bosnia was not the only country threatened by war; Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia, all faced risks of a spillover of irredentist claims. And Clinton knew that America would be called upon to respond to those crises as well.

By 1993, the war in Bosnia was on the front pages of newspapers across the country. The Serbs, led by Milosevic, were systematically targeting ethnic Bosnian areas in an attempt to take over the country. Communities were being shelled, and civilians were being murdered, raped, and rounded up into camps reminiscent of those used by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Clinton had inherited a weak U.S. position on the issue. President Bush, excessively confident after his victory in the Gulf, preferred to let the Europeans handle Bosnia. Bush's abdication of responsibility proved a terrible misreading of the situation and made a mockery of his so-called "vision thing." In 1991, I had asked a member of his National Security Council staff, Bob Hutchings, why the Bush administration wasn't addressing the Bosnia crisis when the situation so clearly demonstrated the need for the implementation of the New World Order that Bush had called for. He replied that the United States couldn't solve all the world's problems. "We're going to leave this one to the Europeans," he said confidently. Secretary of State James Baker's similar comment—that "we don't have a dog in this fight"—symbolized that administration's wrong-headed take on the issue.

In contrast, Clinton understood the threat to American interests posed by another war in Europe—the risk of historical tensions erupting well beyond Bosnia—and understood America's responsibility to help end the suffering. During the campaign, he had advocated tightening the sanctions against Serbia, including freezing assets and weapons sales, an oil embargo, and expelling Serbia from international organizations. He had urged that European and U.S. naval forces in the Adriatic should be given authority by the UN Security Council to stop and search ships violating the arms embargo. He had called on the international community to take steps to charge the Milosevic regime and those responsible for the slaughter of innocent civilians with crimes against humanity. He also had endorsed a no-fly zone and its enforcement, while agreeing with the Bush administration's opposition to putting ground troops into a possible "quagmire" in Bosnia. While he did not do so publicly, Clinton had long wanted to endorse lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia's Muslim population but was reluctant to do so over the opposition of the Europeans. "If we aren't going to come in and help them, then we ought to at least let them fight for themselves," he argued privately on numerous occasions.

As the situation continued to deteriorate throughout the 1992 summer, Clinton issued a carefully crafted statement that "the United States

should take the lead in seeking UN Security Council authorization for air strikes against those who are attacking the relief effort. The United States should be prepared to lend appropriate military support to that operation. Air and naval forces adequate to carry out these operations should be visibly in position." Sitting in the Situation Room in March 1993, Clinton now had the chance to implement that policy. It would take a difficult period of trial and error before he developed a way to do so.

We have learned the proper lessons of history

As the principals sat around the table in March 1993, they thought a tougher negotiating strategy would succeed in ending the war. The use of force, however, remained controversial. The strongest opponent to force in Bosnia came from the Pentagon, and especially from the chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell. He, as did most of the military's leadership, saw Bosnia as a test of whether his generation had learned the lessons of Vietnam. The senior officers in the 1960s "knew the war was going badly," Powell later wrote in his 1995 memoir. "Yet they bowed to groupthink pressure and kept up pretenses. . . . Many of my generation . . . vowed that when our turn came to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in half-hearted warfare for half-baked reasons that the American people could not understand or support. If we could make good on that promise to ourselves . . . then the sacrifices of Vietnam would not have been in vain."[9]

As a Gulf War hero and the most experienced member of Clinton's team, no one was in a position to challenge him. Unlike the cabinet, chairmen of the joint chiefs are appointed for a set two-year term, usually renewed once. When Clinton took office, Powell had nine months to go in his term. The president was wary of a political challenge from Powell in 1996. The first black chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff *and* the first black national security advisor, Powell always posed difficulties for the president. A tall, handsome man who radiates power, Powell is warm, friendly, and loves a good joke. He tried hard to be a team player, but it soon became obvious his heart was not in it. As he had risen to power within Republican administrations, he could never be a full part of Clinton's team. He was always polite but often slightly condescending and at times testy with his colleagues, including the president.

News organizations were actively polling Powell against the president. One poll claimed by a three-to-one margin that Americans thought Powell would do a better job than Clinton in foreign affairs. In a race for president, Powell would beat Clinton 42 to 38.[10] As a national hero, Powell always considered himself above the fray—and it showed.

He had already made his views known publicly in the politically charged atmosphere of October 1992 in an op-ed in the *New York Times*. Normally, chairmen of the joint chiefs do not go public with their views. But Powell

was different. Responding to a press story that had accused the Bush team of dithering, Powell fired off an article, declaring, "You bet I get nervous when so-called experts suggest that all we need is a little surgical bombing or a limited attack." Cautioning against deeper military involvement in Bosnia, Powell declared the military had "learned the proper lessons of history, even if some journalists have not."[11] Powell stuck to his line in the 1995 memoir: "Whenever the military had a clear set of objectives, . . . as in Panama, the Philippine coup, and Desert Storm, the result had been a success. When the nation's policy was murky or nonexistent—the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, creating a Marine 'presence' in Lebanon—the result had been disaster. In Bosnia, we were dealing with an ethnic tangle with roots reaching back a thousand years." Powell equated the Bosnians with the North Vietnamese: "The harsh reality has been that the Serbs, Muslims, and Croatians are committed to fight to the death for what they believe to be their vital interests." "The West," he continued, "has wrung its hands over Bosnia, but has not deemed it a vital interest or matched their commitment." Powell then argued that no president could "likely sustain the long-term involvement necessary to keep the protagonists from going at each other's throats all over again at the first opportunity."[12]

It was this colossal misreading of the situation, shared by most U.S. officials in 1993, that kept the United States from acting sooner in Bosnia.

What would be the consequences to the Serbs of noncompliance?

Instead of using force to end the carnage in Bosnia, the administration sought to push the diplomatic front harder. In March 1993, there were signs that diplomacy might succeed in getting the Serbs to end their drive to take over much of Bosnia. In the Situation Room, Lake began the principals' discussion by explaining to his colleagues that forty-eight hours earlier, chances had been slim that the Serbs would sign a peace agreement in Bosnia. But now there were indications that Milosevic might be prepared to do so. The agreement called for a ceasefire within seventy-two hours, removal of the "heavy weapons" that were being used to attack civilians in Sarajevo, the opening of routes, and unimpeded UN operations.

Explaining it could be a "cynical ploy," Lake said there was "a chance there will be progress, and therefore we need to think about implementation." The United States needed to decide on whether to send troops to Bosnia to help secure the agreement. In February, the administration had stressed that the United States would send ground troops *only* in the event of a comprehensive peace settlement.[13] It now looked like that chit might be called in. Lake wanted to secure a "yes" from the principals but knew he faced strong opposition from the Pentagon—as well as from Congress and, of course, the American public. Members of Congress were insisting that

having "won" the cold war, the United States should stay home. The public was also reluctant to send troops abroad.

Clinton had not expected to have to address so quickly the issue of whether to deploy U.S. troops to Bosnia in the event of a settlement. Milosevic, having apparently changed his mind about signing the proposed peace agreement during a meeting with French President Mitterrand, now indicated that he might actually sign the agreement. That posed two dilemmas for the United States. First, how would the administration know whether Milosevic's signing was anything more than a cynical ploy for him to buy time as he sought to achieve his goal—swallowing up all of Bosnia? Second, if the signing were real and could be tested, the United States would be called upon to put troops on the ground to help implement the peace. Was it willing to do so?

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin was the first to speak up. "What *exactly* are we talking about?" he asked. "If we are talking about a signing, especially a cynical one, that leaves us with an *enormous* problem," he said, hands flailing. Shirt rumpled, tie loosened, his top button undone, Aspin was the antithesis of the ship-shape military he now ran. A brilliant military expert, he knew as much about weapons systems and force levels as the generals in the room. His problem was that he alienated them with his unorthodox and sloppy management style. But on Bosnia, he shared his military colleagues' skepticism.

Aspin went on to outline the key problem, one that the United States would struggle with for the next two years: the United States had never "sorted out" whether it was "for enforcing and implementing an agreement." He pointed out that if the United States tried to implement an agreement that the Serbs had signed only as a tactical ploy to gain time, we would be in for a "*major* military undertaking." Aspin was asking the key question: was the United States prepared to go to war in the Balkans to enforce a peace? He clearly was not for that course of action, nor were the uniformed officials in the Pentagon.

No one expected Milosevic to sign an agreement for other than short-term tactical reasons. CIA director Woolsey chimed in to say that "no one believes" that if the three parties (Croats, Bosnians, and Serbs) sign, "they'll observe what they sign." As Aspin and Powell stalled on any discussion of ground troops, Lake argued in frustration, "I don't think any of us ever believed this would be a self-enforcing agreement. We are all talking about enforcing the agreement and that would require ground forces." In a reference to the "Powell Doctrine" of only using force overwhelmingly, Lake pointed out in this case we would not need two hundred thousand ground troops. "We need to take a careful look at doing it," he explained, arguing there would only be a brief window of opportunity to move to support an agreement if one were reached.

Four key issues blocked the administration from taking action: suspicion that the Serbs would never live up to their commitments, in effect a "sincerity test"; the lack of an exit strategy, which might lead to another Vietnamese-style quagmire; U.S. aversion to "ownership" of the Balkan problem; and the question of whether to use force to bring about Serb compliance. The last question was the toughest one of all.

As would be the case for the next eight years, Leon Fuerth first raised the question no one wanted to discuss: "What would be the consequences to the Serbs of noncompliance?" Madeleine Albright quickly joined in, arguing that "we should start thinking about the threat of the use of force." Otherwise, we would "weave ourselves out of the game." Powell dismissed Albright's repeated calls that we use force to back up diplomacy as naive. He later wrote in his memoir that her calls for the use of force almost gave him an aneurysm. Albright's position would ultimately prevail.

No one had yet come to terms with the need to use force to back up diplomacy. No one had an answer to Leon Fuerth's key question of whether we would force compliance, especially if the Serbs failed to end the deadly use of heavy artillery. Expressing growing frustration with the weak European position on Bosnia, Fuerth pointed out, we had to "get the allies to endorse that this time we mean business."

Powell immediately seized on Fuerth's point and wasn't about to let it pass. "What about Leon's point?" he asked, as Lake tried to bring the discussion to a close. Lake replied that Fuerth was asking how we could use the threat of air strikes or other means to encourage the parties to comply. "No," replied Powell, "I heard more. What I heard was that if any party hasn't complied, American military power will be used to force them to comply."

This was Powell's moment to live up to the promise he had made after Vietnam. This time, he would stop the quagmire before it started. He would block the limited use of force in the Balkans. Throughout his tenure as Clinton's chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell argued repeatedly that any such action would be tantamount to going to war with Serbia. If we go that route, he argued, "We have to be prepared to go to war with Serbia. If so, let's do it. But don't use 'additional measures.' Don't fall in love with air power because it hasn't worked." To Powell, air power would not change Serb behavior, "only troops on the ground could do that."

Despite Powell's reluctance, officials in the Pentagon over the next few months did develop plans for the use of air power against Serb artillery in the event of noncompliance. The process, however, was a difficult one. "If you are asking me what kinds of forces will be needed, it all depends on whether people are serious about these kinds of issues" was a typical Powell response. The Pentagon dragged its feet in developing the military plans for Bosnia and raised numerous objections. For instance, Admiral David E. Jeremiah, vice chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff, argued—rightly—that

U.S. troops would not "get in and out with a 'quickie' operation." Knowing the United States would need a quick insertion of troops to solidify the agreement, the Pentagon insisted that it would "take weeks, months to get a force in there."

The Pentagon's early estimates of the number of troops required to help implement an agreement involved a range of twenty thousand to forty thousand troops. Senior military leaders were quick to point out that any such deployment would require a call-up of the reserves, which would be politically unpopular, especially for a new president wanting to focus on domestic issues so early in his term. Interestingly, at this stage, Powell did not object to the command structure that was envisioned—a U.S. general on the ground reporting through the French and the Germans back to the United States.

The principals discussed using "tactical air strikes that will have an effect on the instruments of war." In other words, the strikes might be used to take out the heavy weapons of the Serbs, but not to force the Serbs to the negotiating table. "Short of war," Lake summed up the policy in that early principals' meeting in 1993. In the end, the Serbs reneged on the agreement shortly thereafter, so the urgency of making a decision on whether the United States would send troops to enforce an agreement dissipated. But the crisis did not.

Tell, don't ask

I first noticed that Clinton was beginning to challenge his own government's approach on Bosnia on May 10, 1993. I walked down the aisle of Air Force One and into the president's spacious office to give him his daily intelligence briefing. Each morning, except Sunday, Clinton received the Presidential Daily Brief (PDB), a short document prepared by the CIA on important developments around the world. Access to the document is restricted to only a very few top officials in order to keep the sensitive information from leaking. Normally, eight to ten one- to three-page memos made up the PDB. Short additional memos were often provided separately as well. I had first started taking the PDB to Clinton during the transition in Little Rock. As the NSC staff person traveling with the president that day, my job was to bring him the PDB and other foreign policy updates.

We were on our way to Cleveland where he was scheduled to give an address on the economy, and then on to Chicago where he was to talk to high school students the following day. But foreign policy was on the president's mind as he sat behind his rectangular desk on Air Force One. Funding for these planes—two identical reconfigured 747s—had been pushed through Congress by Ronald Reagan at a cost of $266 million. There was a kitchen, a senior staff room with four first-class-style chairs, a big conference

room with a TV, and two types of sections in the back: one for staff with a variety of work tables and a basic business-class section for the press. In the flying Oval Office, on the wall to the president's left were two large, clumsy phones, the dial-up kind in use in the 1970s, although these had no dials. One was beige for secure calls and the other was white for open communications. Unlike commercial flights, on which one can call directly with a credit card, Air Force One phones can only be used through a tedious process involving a "signal" operator back in Washington. The president had a portable stereo on the shelf behind him, together with a variety of CDs—classical, country, and pop music. His draft speech was spread out on the desk as he rewrote it.

As I entered, he stopped working on the speech and looked up at me, his eyes flashing. I knew the look. It meant he was not happy about something. I handed him the usual review of the morning's intelligence reports, but he ignored the papers.

"I think Chris is wrong," he said. He was referring to the secretary of state and his recent failed mission to convince our European allies to support our new "lift and strike" policy, which called for lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnians and supporting air strikes if Serb attacks continued. Unwilling to put U.S. troops on the ground, Clinton and his advisors had agreed to push for the new policy as a way of tipping the balance back in favor of giving the Bosnians a fighting chance. The Christopher trip had failed. The Europeans, with troops on the ground, rejected the approach.

"He's wrong not to push just because the Europeans wouldn't go along," complained the president. This was the first time I had heard him criticize the respected Christopher. I responded that he still had the option to push for the policy. He needn't give up just because Christopher's trip had not succeeded in getting the Europeans on board.

"You mean do it unilaterally?" he asked, clearly indicating he was considering such a course. "Probably not unilaterally," I said. "But if you really push, I'd bet you can get the Europeans to go along." Clinton was tired and testy, complaining that he did not think we were moving in the right direction on the Bosnia policy. As so often was the case when Clinton did not like the policy he had adopted, he began testing new ideas, calling his friends, and mulling over a variety of other options, complaining about his poor choice of options throughout. He would talk to anyone who happened to be in the room—and today, it happened to be me.

Clinton had ample reason to be testy. Still wedded to acting in concert with Europe, the administration—and the president—had decided to dispatch Secretary Christopher to seek support for the new, more robust approach, "lift and strike." The Europeans believed the policy might undermine their diplomatic efforts and put their own troops at risk of retaliation

by Serbs. The Christopher trip had furthered the image of the Clinton administration as weak and vacillating on foreign policy. But the policy's failure also galvanized Clinton.

An hour later, Clinton called me to the front of Air Force One to continue the discussion. This time, he was in the private front cabin, a smaller room in the nose of the plane with two couches and a small desk, again with secure and nonsecure phones. The president's back was hurting and he was on the floor doing stretches throughout the conversation. He again pressed me on what I thought he should do. I again said that he should push for what he believed in. The "lift and strike policy is a good one, and we shouldn't take no for an answer," I urged. Clinton had long wanted to lift the arms embargo and was frustrated by European inaction. "If I were a Bosnian, I'd want to be able to decide whether I wanted to go down fighting. Some things are worth fighting and dying for," he had told British prime minister John Major in an earlier call on April 18. A few weeks later, he had erupted when I had shown him a cable from our embassy in London saying Major was inclined toward air strikes only and not a lifting of the arms embargo. "That's crazy," the president fumed. He was convinced lifting the embargo was the right thing to do, especially since the United States was not prepared to enter the war. But the Europeans were not going along.

The problem with the policy, however, was larger than just a failure to push the Europeans. The administration was not yet ready to link the use of force to diplomacy to end the war. In addition, the president and his team still opposed putting ground troops into Bosnia other than to help implement a peace settlement. Without American troops on the ground, the United States was poorly placed to push the Europeans to support a policy that would put *their* troops at risk. We were thus hostage to the weaker European approach, and they opposed bombing Serb targets. By midsummer 1993, it was clear that the effort to work out a common approach with the Europeans was failing, and the situation on the ground in Bosnia was getting worse, with CNN photos of the siege of Sarajevo and horrible suffering on the nightly news. The president told Lake he should look at all options on Bosnia—including for the first time the use of American ground troops.[14] He began to cross the Rubicon of a new use of force.

In July 1993, Lake followed up on the president's request and asked Secretary of Defense Aspin to take a serious look at how many troops it would take to end the siege of Sarajevo. The earlier discussions of whether to put ground troops into Bosnia to implement a peace agreement were supplanted by discussions of how to use force to achieve an end to Serbian aggression in Bosnia. The Pentagon's first response to the request was a plan requiring an estimated seventy thousand to eighty thousand troops to protect Sarajevo.[15] After Christopher and Lake visited the Pentagon to press for options involving fewer ground troops, the Pentagon suggested that the

more limited goal of protecting relief supplies to Sarajevo could perhaps be achieved with twenty-five thousand.[16]

While the president had in principle authorized a discussion of ground troops, in practice, no one was ready to make such a politically unpopular decision. In the spring and summer of 1993, the American public was deeply skeptical of any involvement of U.S. ground troops in Bosnia. Only 16 percent of Americans felt that a moral desire to stop atrocities in Bosnia was a "very good reason" to authorize air strikes against Serbian forces.[17] They opposed U.S. participation in a UN peacekeeping operation 49 percent to 44 percent.[18]

No one had figured out a way to use ground troops effectively without "owning the problem" and bogging down U.S. troops in Bosnia for the foreseeable future. In discussing the issue with his colleagues in May, Powell had complained that, "unlike in Desert Storm," there was "no way to seize the initiative" in Bosnia, it "doesn't have the clarity of Desert Storm." While saying that it "doesn't mean we shouldn't act," Powell proceeded to lay out the case for why the United States should not act. "The only real way to stop the Serbs is to go in and take over Serbia with several hundred thousand troops. . . . Go in with a force to kick their butt. There is no certain or clear objective. The only way to do this is on a large scale." With strong congressional opposition to the use of ground troops in Bosnia, and only one principal—Madeleine Albright—supporting the option, discussion of the use of ground troops quickly petered out. The new, more robust policy would rely instead on tougher American leadership and the use of air power alone.

Lake decided to seek to change U.S. policy in two fundamental ways. First, while he continued to oppose a total break with the Europeans, Lake felt more American leadership could lead to more progress. Rather than *ask* the Europeans their views, we would *tell* them what the American president had decided to do and invite them to join. This time, rather than consult as Christopher had, Lake "informed" the allies that the president had decided on this course of action, and that the president expected NATO to act in accordance with that decision. The new assertiveness was dubbed "Tell, don't ask" in a play on the policy on gays in the military in a front-page story in the *New York Times*.[19] With the United States in the lead, the allies quickly, if somewhat grumpily, lined up and supported the new policy.

Second and most importantly, rather than just use air power to alleviate the Serb siege of Sarajevo and other Muslim enclaves, Lake linked the use of air power directly to the diplomatic track. Lake later explained, "The idea was, if we're going to use power for the sake of diplomacy, let's relate it directly to the diplomacy."[20] The United States would conduct air strikes against the Serbs if they continued the "strangulation" of Bosnian safe areas or refused to negotiate a settlement. Like pornography, Lake explained, we

would "know it when we saw it" when asked to define strangulation. In addition, Lake left his responses to the Europeans vague regarding what the president would do if the Europeans failed to take our lead.[21]

Thus, for the first time, American force would be used to back up American diplomacy in the Balkans. Building on the principals' discussion of the previous March, Leon Fuerth finally got an answer to his question, "Would the U.S. force compliance?" The answer was suddenly yes, but with air power and not ground troops. The goal was to use air power to force the Serbs to commence serious negotiations.

Throughout the fall, the United States worked to make the threat real. The goal was to gain the agreement of the allies to issue an ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw their forces around Sarajevo and stop shelling the city, or face bombing attacks against those forces. At the NATO summit at the end of the year, Clinton got his "Sarajevo ultimatum." The effort eased the situation—but only for a while.

The air strikes that eventually followed—NATO's first combat operation in its forty-five years—were viewed as "pinpricks" and ultimately divided NATO. The air strikes put in question the neutrality of the troops on the ground and were eventually called to a halt. United Nations peacekeepers were killed and taken hostage. Murders of thousands of Bosnians continued. Maintaining European solidarity and the neutrality of the peacekeeping operation became the goal, not the end of the war. The problems of the dual chain of command in which both the UN and the commander on the ground had to approve military action (dubbed the "dual-key" arrangement) and other coordination issues continued to hamper progress. Negotiations for a peace went nowhere. The Serbs continued their attacks on the UN safe areas, coming close to overrunning the town of Bihac in 1994.

Although the new "Tell, don't ask" approach brought new U.S. leadership to the Bosnia problem and helped in Sarajevo, the crisis continued as long as Washington was unwilling to use sustained force to bring about a broad final agreement to end the war. Through the eight years that followed, the Clinton administration would use force successfully and sustainedly, and bequeath to its successor the foundations of a twenty-first-century world in which the United States could count on widely accepted rules to constrain others and broad support for the use of force when those rules failed and the threat justified force. That approach ended some conflicts and successfully managed others. It was first forged and tested in the killing fields of Bosnia. Not until the summer of 1995 would Clinton decide to put the full weight of the U.S. military behind efforts to end the war there.