chapter 12

Peacemaking
Successes and Sabotage on Bosnia

Introduction

UN/EU mediators succeeded twice in getting the Bosnian parties to accept peace agreements: the Vance-Owen plan and the Stoltenberg-Owen plan, also known as the Invincible plan because it was concluded on the British aircraft carrier, the HMS Invincible. Twice the plan was killed by the USA. From May, 1993 to 21 November, 1995, when the Dayton Accords were signed, tens of thousands of people died who would not have done so had the Vance-Owen plan been supported. Again, in September, 1993, the Bosnian parties enthusiastically accepted the Invincible plan only to have the Bosniacs repudiate their acceptance a week later because of American pressure on President Izetbegovic. From then to 21 November, 1995, tens of thousands of people died. Whatever the reasons for US policies, the incontrovertible fact is that they cost tens of thousands of Bosnian lives.

Warren Christopher, Anthony Lake, Richard Holbrook all have written about the US success at Dayton. None of them has chosen to remember that US policies led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Objective commentators acknowledge that the Vance-Owen plan was far better than the Dayton Accord. Ivo Dalader, in his book, Getting to Dayton, acknowledges that the Contact Group map was based on the Stoltenberg-Owen map. The Contact Group insisted for months that the Bosnian Serbs must accept the plan as put down and would not talk to the Bosnian Serbs. Six months later they changed their mind and agreed that changes in the plan could be negotiated among the Bosnian parties and agreed to talk to the Bosnian Serbs again. All the people who died between June of 1994 and December of 1994 died because of Contact-Group miscalculations in ruling out negotiated changes and in not talking to the Bosnian Serbs during the period. The facts speak for themselves.

Why did negotiations fail to prevent the violent break-up of Yugoslavia? Why did negotiations fail to prevent the outbreak of conflict in Bosnia and Hercegovina? What are the lessons to be learnt from successive efforts to negotiate a settlement in Bosnia and Herzevovina? These are questions that will be debated for a long time.
Any Clean Hands?

For three and a half years I saw the principal players in the Yugoslav drama close up: in innumerable meetings in Geneva, New York, Brussels, Washington, Dayton, Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tirana, and elsewhere. There is indisputable evidence that Serbs and Croats committed many atrocities on Bosniacs. The Bosniacs also had some share in this dirty business but, admittedly, on a lesser scale.

From what I saw on the peacemaking and peacekeeping sides, however, there were no clean hands on any side of the Bosnian drama. I had, and have, much feeling for the Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, who was called upon to protect his people as best he could in very difficult circumstances. No one can understand the burdens on such a person but himself. From what I saw, however, he was more interested in continuing the fight because of his world-view than in concluding a peace agreement.

I shall never forget the moment in August, 2003, when he asked of Radovan Karadzic six concessions which would permit him, he said, to put the peace agreement under discussion to his colleagues in Sarajevo. He would not recommend the peace agreement to them, but would put it to them for their consideration. Owen and Stoltenberg squeezed Karadzic to make the six concessions, which he did. Izetbegovic went away and denounced the agreement. One of his aides, whom I had come to know quite closely, wept on my shoulders. Why would he not choose peace, the person asked me? Does he not know how much we are suffering? This was a searing moment for me. But it was the name of the game throughout.

A few weeks earlier, when Stoltenberg and Owen first broached with Izetbegovic, Milosevic and Tudjman the concept of a peace agreement providing territorial guarantees for the Bosniacs, ‘with access from the Sava river to the Adriatic Sea, and with economic viability’, Izetbegovic, at a meeting in the Villa Saugy in Genthod, on the outskirts of Geneva, said he was very much interested in the concept and would like to discuss it more. He asked for more details. When he left the meeting and faced the press outside of the Villa he denounced the concept! At the request of Stoltenberg and Owen I had to rush out to the journalists present to correct the record.

A few weeks later, in September, 1993, on the British warship HMS Invincible, Izetbegovic accepted a peace agreement along the lines of the same concept, which became known as the Stoltenberg-Owen peace plan. After the talks on the HMS Invincible we were taken by helicopter to the Croatian town of Split, from whence we flew together in a United Nations place to Zagreb.