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JIM STEINBERG

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INTERVIEW

Q: All right, all right. Today is May 9, 2025. This is an interview on the Dayton Peace Accords with Jim Steinberg. Can you tell me a bit about how you got involved in the Dayton negotiations, or, actually, primarily the Balkan issues in the 1990s?

STEINBERG: I was at RAND during the Bush administration from '89 to '93 and doing a lot of work on European security. And I got very involved in and very interested in the Balkans issues as a part of that, and began working with people like Suzanne Woodward and others who've been doing studies on the Balkans. This was in connection with European security in the post Cold War, but I had a particular interest in the Balkans, and spent a lot of time getting up to speed. I'd always been very focused on European security, but when I started this project, I didn't know that much about the Balkans.

Then, when then-candidate Clinton, Governor Clinton decided to run for president, I was involved in the campaign. I was particularly involved with the people who were working and advising him on the Balkans, including the statements he made during the campaign and his differences, which I shared, with the Bush administration's approach to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the conflict as it was emerging there. So, when I came into the administration, first at INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] in '93 and then at policy planning in '94, I was very focused on the Balkans. And was one of the people most directly involved in advising Secretary Christopher in the first instance, because I was at State, but also working with Tony Lake and others at the NSC [National Security Council] on this, because I'd worked with him and Sandy Berger during the campaign, So this was as central to my interest and portfolio as anything that I came into the Clinton administration about.

Q: So, did you travel to the Balkans prior to your appointment with the administration?

STEINBERG: I did not, no. My first trips were not until I was in government.

Q: Right. Was there something that sparked your interest in the Balkans? Like, how did you get involved? Like, primarily, what kind of made you so much interested in the Balkan issues? Was there something in particular?

STEINBERG: I think it was clearly apparent to everybody at the time, in the Balkans was the first test of what Europe was going to be like in the post Cold War world. When this conflict broke out, it was a part of the unraveling of the Cold War order And so, if you were looking at, to think about what's Europe going to be and what's the U.S. role going to be in Europe, in the post Cold War world this was the place to look, because there were other issues that we had to deal with, like the future of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], how the U.S., Europe and NATO handled the Balkans conflict was central to their future, but this even implicated that. And, you know, beginning in '91, it was clear that this was going to be definitional for the role of NATO, for the role of the EU [European Union], for the role of the United States. And so given my core interest in European politics and European security, it was natural that this is where you looked. And Jacques Poos was talking about the time of Europe, and you could see the inability of the European institutions to respond especially given the conflict between Germany and France over this. The big issues that one needed to think about in terms of where Europe was going and where the U.S. engagement was going to be were implicated there. So it was the natural place to really think hard in practical terms about what the architecture of European security was going to be like.

Q: So, how did your thought process change? Because I know that the Clinton administration produced a lot of memos, how to approach the Balkans, and then the approach started changing once Clinton was in the office. How did your approach to the Balkans change? Was it consistent, or did you learn more facts? How did that go?

STEINBERG: When you're in government, you become more focused on the constraints. When you're out of government, you can advocate a "first best" policy, and it's easy because you don't have to deal with implementing it. You don't have to deal with the Congress, you don't have to deal with the American people. You don't have to deal with the Europeans. You just have to have great ideas. But in practice they're obviously considerable constraints.

And then, when we came in, it was clear that, although President Clinton shared the overall orientation, this was not how he wanted his presidency to be defined. I mean, it's a famous line from President Wilson who said before his Inauguration, "It would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with international affairs." Clearly, when President Clinton came in, his focus was on the economy, so while he cared about the Balkans, this was not the driving force as to what he wanted to do as president. And so when we began to encounter resistance from both domestic audiences and from Europeans about the policy he advocated during the campaign, he, I think, was reluctant to push uphill, push the stone uphill, against all the forces that were against it. And you know, the first orientation, the lift and strike approach, was one which was the most congenial from a U.S. point of view, because it didn't involve us getting directly involved. It allowed the parties that we wanted to support to do the work. But, once that clearly wasn't going to fly, then it required some real hard thinking about how deeply committed the U.S. should be. At the time I was much more forward leaning. But I was very

conscious of the fact that Secretary Christopher had a lot of reservations about a deeper involvement, and President Clinton also.

Q: Right. Yeah. So, what was your day-to-day at policy planning, you know, primarily working on Bosnia and the Balkans? How did that go? Like, how were your interactions? What was your schedule like?

STEINBERG: Policy planning is unique. Because some of the work is focused on developing the ideas and the concepts, but sometimes the head of policy planning is also a senior advisor to the Secretary. And so, you know, part of my role was leading the work in policy planning, to develop ideas and concepts as the situation evolved. But a lot of the other part was directly involved day-to-day, I traveled with Secretary Christopher, almost all of his trips. And so I was on the plane doing the work of operational diplomacy. And so I made a number of trips with him to Europe where these were front and center in the discussion. Accompanying him on the trips and engaging with Europeans and UN [United Nations] officials on these issues. And then the other part was working closely with Tony Lake and Sandy Berger and the team at the White House, once the first round of policy didn't come to fruition. In '93 I was at INR, and you don't do policy when you're an INR, so in that first year, I was helping sort through the intel reports and supervising the intel work on that. But then when I came to policy planning, when working on plan B, then I'm both involved with my team at policy planning to come up with the ideas, working with the NSC people under Tony, and then also participating in diplomacy with Christopher.

Q: Right, right? So speaking of the "lift and strike," did you go on that trip with Secretary Christopher to Europe? Because that was probably prior to your appointment, was it?

STEINBERG: It was prior to my time in policy planning.

Q: I gotcha. So, can you talk a little bit about those two years between the "lift and strike" idea that ended up in that sort of a disastrous trip, as described by Holbrooke in his book, to '95? How did that go during that period of time? How did thinking change, and who were some influential forces that came into play before we even start talking about the summer of '95?

STEINBERG: I think that the core people who were at NSC that Tony Lake had a very strong, deep interest in this, and was the driving force on the White House side. And then, following the first year there were big changes at State, from the beginning–I had a long, close, personal and professional association with Tom Donilon, Secretary Christopher's chief of staff, so Tom and I were deeply involved in this. Secretary Christopher replaced Steve Oxman with Richard Holbrooke and Clifton Wharton with Strobe Talbott. We went from assistant secretary for Europe who wasn't deeply experienced in the Balkans, to one who was kind of committed on this. Also, in the first year, Peter Tarnoff played a much bigger role, but once Holbrooke came in, then Tarnoff basically ceded it to Holbrooke.

So, it really became Tom and Holbrooke and I and Talbot on the State side, and then Tony by late 1994 and at the NSC

Q: Great. So, can you talk a little bit about allies, pretty much Europeans? How did those interactions go in those years from '93 to '95? How was that going?

STEINBERG: The Europeans obviously didn't like the lift and strike idea at all, not least of which because of the kind of UN arms embargo. They didn't feel comfortable about acting inconsistently within the UN embargo, and they didn't think there was any chance that the UN embargo would get lifted, which was correct. The Europeans were paralyzed because there were really differences of opinion within European capitals about how to proceed and much less sympathy for the Bosnian position. Most of the key European capitals had long diplomatic connections with the dominant states, Croatia and Serbia. And not a lot of conviction that Bosnia was even a state in the same way that Serbia or Croatia was a state, and a lot of skepticism about the Bosnian leadership, including fears of the Iranian influence and the potential of radical Muslim influence in Bosnia. So there was a lot of tension. The Europeans on the whole, unlike our administration, did not see. This is, you know, a fundamental test of basic principles, and not just in terms of Europe, but also in terms of wider audiences outside of Europe in the Muslim world and others about whether we were prepared to do the same things for a Muslim dominant community that we were for Christians. So I think there was a pretty strong sense among the senior people, other than the Pentagon, that the U.S. had a big stake here. The Pentagon under Secretary Perry was much less convinced of this. But the Europeans were not, and it really wasn't until things began to go very, very badly in '95, and the huge, embarrassment to Europe of the massacres in Srebrenica and everything else that Europeans finally came on board to recognize what we have been pushing for a long time, which was we just couldn't be seen to stand idly by while this was taking place.

Q: Right. So let me ask you, speaking of Iran and Iranian influence, because I know there was a huge debate whether Bosnia and the Balkans were a humanitarian issue, and then when you put Iran into the larger picture, there is even national security, including with, you know, when it went bad with the genocide and all those issues that happened in '95 and throughout the war. I'm curious whether that elevated the issue to the level of actually being a national security problem, rather than just a humanitarian issue, as the George H. W. Bush administration was portraying it.

STEINBERG: Some of us always thought it was a national security issue. And I think that was an important aspect of the debate about the U.S. and European in the conflict, impact on the states and the long term future of Europe and NATO. My view was that we had an interest in sustaining NATO and an alliance in the post Cold War world, but that if NATO and these structures couldn't deal with a conflict within European territory, publics would say,"well, why keep NATO?" so, my view has always been that this was more than a humanitarian issue. And I think this was a view that Holbrooke and Donlin and Tony Lake shared.

So this was not just about the genocide on human rights, but really about order in Europe, and then it was going to have an impact, in the first instance, obviously, on the neighboring states, on the other Balkan states, and on the Central and East European states, but also that the credibility of the democratic transitions in Europe, and therefore the long term stability in Europe, depended on a successful resolution of this conflict that recognized that force could not be the solution. The argument was, if this is going to happen in the Balkans, what's going to happen, if there was, in Hungarian revisionism over the Treaty of Trianon. There are lots of borders in Europe that were still arguably issues that could cause instability. Czechoslovakia dissolved peacefully but there was a chance that other national disputes could turn violent, and that's now Czechia and Slovakia. This is obviously before that all went south. And so I always thought it was a security issue, which is why NATO should have needed to be involved and the United States needed to be involved more than just as a human rights issue.

Q: So what about Russians? Because I know that started to change, because at one point, there were–basically, '95 they started saying it's time to remove the sanctions, again, that were imposed in Serbia. How did that relationship, you know, was it complicated? Was it easy to navigate?

STEINBERG: So I mean, when you said Serbia, I'm a little puzzled by that framing of it. What do you mean by that?

Q: Because I know there was, I think Holbrooke talks about in his book, the Russians were kind of, you know, lobbying for a removal of sanctions in Serbia, or actually on Yugoslavia primarily.

STEINBERG: Well, I mean, clearly there was a desire to end the arms embargo, because, I mean, there was no desire to send U.S. troops in, and the Europeans weren't going to send troops in. So the only way to, you know, support the Bosnians was to be able to provide military support. That was the point of lift and strike. So that was the main focus there. And then the next time sanctions come into play, we're sort of in connection with trying to get an agreement with Serbia to end the war. But that's sort of the main point was simply just to find a way to make it possible to support Bosnia directly.

Q: Let's go and talk about the summer of '95? A lot of things happened during that summer, from Sarajevo marketplace shelling to Srebrenica, then the Operation Storm, but also the tragedy over at Mount Igman, with three of our diplomats dying. How did that summer impact the U.S. approach toward the Balkans in the final push to end the war?

STEINBERG: I don't think it radically affected the U.S. approach.expect perhaps to add urgency, first of all, it changed the European view. This is when Chirac basically came over to the side of intervention, which was critical, because you needed for France to be involved, and Europe in general, after all, it was the Dutch peacekeepers who were standing by while while the Srebrenica Massacre took place–so, I think it broke the resistance of Europeans to a more activist role, and got them more willing to help us push along with the general support that we hoped Secretary-General Kofi Annan to have a

more activist UN role in dealing with this. And so I think by the early summer of '95, on both sides of the Atlantic, there was now a sense that this couldn't be left alone, and that there was no amount of diplomacy or blue helmets that was going to stop the Serbs from continuing to do what they were doing. And then you also had the risk of escalation, because, you know, Croatia was now taking matters into its own hands too, and ethnically cleansing the Serbs from Eastern Croatia, from the Krajina, and to everybody's point of view. And again, I think the big change was when the French came over to believe that intervention is now going to be required.

Q: Can you talk a little bit more about the French and about the intervention?

STEINBERG: After lift and strike failed, we had been pushing for a more robust, direct involvement. Europeans were just reluctant to do it. And you needed a European champion to help move the European process along, both within Europe, but also within the NATO context. And so, Chirac's reaction, which was, this was the point, which was, this is too much that we can't tolerate this anymore. That basically broke the logjam, and nobody wanted to be seen, at this point, as being unwilling to be more directly involved. So it became possible to discuss, in a NATO context, a more direct role, including the use of force,

Q: Right, all right. Can you talk a little bit about Bob Frasure? I know he was instrumental in those early days, before the shuttle started. Did you work with him? What was, sort of, his involvement in this whole process?

STEINBERG: We had a Troika of U.S. front line officers, I mean, which was the sort of the U.S. government forward, which was Bob Frasure, Joe Kruzel, and Nelson Drew, representing the Pentagon, State, and the White House as Holbrooke's Team, but also, you know, the inter agency abroad. Bob was the State Department person representative working with Nelson and Joe, ones who were really kind of doing the day-to-day management of the issue, and doing a lot of the diplomacy and the engagement in Europe.

Q: Yeah. So let me ask you about the ethnic leaders, meaning the leaders of Croatia, Serbia, and, of course, Bosnia. Did you have any interactions with them? What was your take on all three of them? How would you describe them?

STEINBERG: I did. I was in a number of meetings with them, some before Dayton. And I was at Dayton for a considerable period of time. This was a very, very difficult group of people, extraordinarily difficult. It was very clear with Tuđman and Milošević in particular, that these were not good people. I mean, that they were hard nationalists who had deep ethnic dislikes and no respect for democracy or human rights or principles. It was just old fashioned, autocratic, hard-men politics. They were untroubled by the violence and they were going to seize whatever opportunities to advance their ethno-nationalist causes. And no amount of flattering and talking about democracy or international reputation mattered to them, Franjo Tuđman had been nominally the first democratically elected President of Croatia. And we'd recall this to him and try to bring

out the better instincts, of which he had really had none. Though I don't know for a fact. There is a ring of truth to the story that in 1991 Tudjam and Milosevic met and drew a new dream map craving up Bosnia between the two of them on which they were the worst combination of ethno-nationalist and communist bureaucrats, apparats. And so, it was just clear that these people were never going to, as enlightened leaders, see the advantage of coming to a peaceful understanding that represented reality. They didn't believe that Bosnia was a state. I think they were Islamophobic, and so they were just really, really difficult.

Izetbegović was much more complicated, because he was also not a Western enlightenment figure. He was a profoundly religious, kind of conservative Muslim, and so, we're trying to hold him up to be this figure who represents the image of multi-ethnic Sarajevo from the 1984 Olympics reflecting tolerance. But he wasn't any of that. But he was largely our guy. And so you had to work with him. And then you had Haris Silajdžić, who was very suspicious of a motive and good faith. This was an extraordinarily difficult, complex people, who carried all this weight of all this history with them. There were few heroes. I mean, you know, I think Haris was, at the time–though, over time, he evolved after Dayton in ways that were not very fortunate–was one of the better ones. They were still all living the scars and pains of all their histories. The combination of their life together in this bizarre world of Tito and post-Tito communist Yugoslavia, and then the previous weight of all the history, going back to Kosovo Polje. But, I mean, it was fascinating, fascinating. But were they amazingly difficult people? Yes. And then you had all the other people, all the side players, you know, you had the three big leaders of the three countries, but then you had the ethnic leaders within each camp. And the Bosnian Croats and the Bosnian Serbs. And, you know, it was quite an extraordinary, interesting but challenging group of people to work with.

Q: Yeah, so what did you learn from those interactions, like just observing, what general lessons of diplomacy, general lessons on how human personalities and psychology work? What did you sort of get out of this?

STEINBERG: So I think that one has to understand—a lesson was incredibly important when I got deeply involved right after this in the Northern Ireland peace process—is that people are principally motivated by their fears and their anxieties and their sense of threat and danger. And that while you want to try to engage them to the higher, better aspirations, the "better angels," in Lincoln's words, that unless you deeply understand this, and you find ways to address it, you just can't just somehow be pollyannaish about this. I've written a great deal about this, about the way that history, and an individual's perceptions of history and understandings of history profoundly shape the way they see the world and interact. I was very fortunate because I had spent a lot of time before I was engaged as a government official and a diplomat in this, learning a lot about this, so none of this surprised me, but in the world of diplomacy, you see it, in a very vivid, intense way. And I think the problem is that a-lot of American diplomats just tend to kind of be forward looking, and we don't feel history the way others, not just Europeans do. I've written about how Asians feel their history. The Japanese still think about the heavenly wind that saved them from China in the thirteenth century, So I think that's the most

important thing, is just to understand that, there aren't a lot of Nelson Mandelas out there, with whom you're making peace. I think we understood this from the Middle East too, and the Rabin-Arafat thing, relations, and I had the privilege, all through the 90s, of being deeply involved in all of these negotiations and coming to understanding this feature of diplomacy, and conflict, and conflict resolution,

Q: Right. Can you talk a little bit about your involvement in the shuttle diplomacy leading to Dayton? How did that go? What were your responsibilities? What were your day-to-day, sort of, interactions with the members of the team?

STEINBERG: Holbrooke had the lead, but he felt, and I agreed, that it was critical in key moments for Secretary Christopher to be engaged, because he felt like it was a way of putting more pressure on the parties and raising the stakes. And so we would periodically, basically, blow the whistle and ask Chris to come in. And so that's when I was involved. I didn't participate, except when the Secretary was there. But I was in all the meetings when the Secretary went. So it was, when Holbrooke felt it was important to deploy the Secretary to put some more muscle into getting progress on these things, then Tom and I would accompany Christopher and join Holbrooke in the negotiations.

Because they're very different personalities, Christopher and Holbrooke. They each brought different dimensions to the table. One of the things that Christopher brought was, I think, a sense from the parties that he spoke directly for the President in a way that maybe wasn't as obvious with Holbrooke and both parties would put on a good show for Secretary Christopher to put themselves in a good light. Tuđman was just a cold, difficult person. Milošević tried to play, "I'm a European enlightenment guy, and, you know, I want to be part of a modern post cold war Europe". It was all completely and transparently false. So you would see all this graciousness and talking about all these things, bravado and joking. But Christopher, who was having none of it, you know, sort of trying to bring Milošević back to the need to resolve issues. And Milošević was trying to basically deflect all the pressure by putting on a good show. Izetbegović was the "Eeyore" of the negotiations. He felt that he was going to be sold out at the end of the day, that nobody really cared about the Bosnians. And so he just mistrusted the U.S. and U.S. motives. Did we really care about what he cared about? He felt like he was the victim, he shouldn't have to do anything to bring out an agreement, we should be getting the others to do it. So, you inherently sympathize more with Izetbegović, but he wasn't making it easy on his end either.

Q: Right. Was it a surprise to have a conference over in Dayton? Or, like, how did the Department react when Holbrooke decided, or actually, the department decided that the conference was going to happen in Dayton?

STEINBERG: Holbrooke came to Christopher with a plan, and he said, "Here are the desiderata that I want." He said, "I want to be in the United States. I don't want it to be in Washington, but I want it to be close enough to Washington that the President and the Secretary can come at a short moment's notice. And I want it to be a place where we can seal it off so that the press can't get it." And so that clearly meant it had to be a military

base, but not in the immediate Washington area. So Dayton seemed fine, it seemed as good as any place. I don't recall how he specifically came up with Dayton, but I think, you know, and there was no disagreement. And I think everybody thought his concept was exactly right for all these reasons that he basically did it the way I like to do, which is develop some design criteria and then figure out what fits the design criteria. And, you know, the fact was, Dayton fit the criteria. It was more just, it's an hour's flight. It's a military base. They have housing where you could have all the delegations there in separate wings, but they could all be housed there, and they wouldn't have to go in and off the property. And you could, literally, you know, wall 'em up in there, and not let them out.

Q: So, can you talk a little bit about the Dayton conference and you being there? What were your responsibilities, you know, you were with Secretary Christopher for most of the time, right?

STEINBERG: Yeah. I mean, it was intensive, day-to-day shuttles with really long, long meetings with each of the parties interspersed with long meetings of our team and the Europeans, right? So it was this incredible, you know, ten-ring circus. Because, you know, you have all the three delegations, plus you have the reps from the key European parties, and the UN, and it's the Holbrooke show, he's the master of ceremony. He's calling in the elephants. He's holding up the hoops for the tigers, and he's got a sense of both the theater that needs to take place and the way it needs to go. There's just, there's a game plan for everything. There are the days we're going to go and jolly them up and be informal and have more light hearted conversation and go have a drink. There are days in which we're going to, you know, be tough and mean and force them to work. All of us had enough confidence, broadly, in Holbrooke's ability to mastermind, to choreograph the show that we largely went with him. But there were, you know, there were times in which there were substantive issues that had to be thrashed out by our team. And there was some pressure from the Europeans who felt like they were, just there as ornaments and not really being used. But it was extraordinary that, I mean, it was a very talented group of Europeans who were with us, you know,Wolfgang Ischinger, Pauline Neville-Jones, Carl Bildt and a French representative whose name I can not recall.

Q: Oh yeah, the one who was complaining about being sniffed, right?

STEINBERG: They were really good, and they were very supportive, and they understood that this was the Holbrooke and American show, and really, I mean, it was a tour de force. And it was very tense, as you know from the stories, and from all the books. On various occasions, various people got ready to walk out and pack their bags. It was not a foregone conclusion at all. There were many moments in which we thought the negotiations would fail. So it was not a kind of a set piece where–and, you know, there were the great moments, like when the map was shown, and Momčilo Krajišnik nearly fell off his chair, when he saw that his hometown had been given to the Bosnians.

I've reflected a-lot on how much the outcome is attributed to “agency” and how much was this a foregone conclusion. You know, the structural people say, "well, they had a

‘hurting stalemate’, and there's nothing else they could do." But I don't think that was right. The situation was modestly ripe for agreement, but, and again, you could tell from the literature, that you only get an agreement where everybody agrees that the agreement is better than the best available alternative, right? And there were plenty of people who were not convinced of that in the end. And the hardest one in the end was to get Izetbegović. Because for both Tuđman and Milošević, they had bigger fish to fry in the long run. So, you know, when they basically saw that continuation of the war was not necessarily going to help them, you could see that, for them, although they also tried to play different to get, because they have to show that they have an alternative. For both of them, a deal was better than continuing to fight. But for Izetbegović, it was tough. I mean, he was, it was the hardest on his end. And this is where Silajdžić, I think probably played the key role in convincing Izetbegović to do it. I've never been entirely clear, but I think that's probably right. And I think also Christopher, telling Izetbegović that the U.S. would be there for them. But it was, as I said, it was a very, very difficult negotiation, very difficult people, and it's a tribute to everybody that it got done. And it's easy to criticize the agreement itself, and there's gigantic literature about its flaws and limitations. But nobody should underestimate both the difficulty of getting agreement, and the realistic chance that the parties would have gone back and continued the war.

Q: Right. Yeah. I know there was a whole question, what about flaws, as they say, and you know, question whether the Dayton Accords were a perfect agreement or not, whether, you know, they just ended the war rather than solve the issue. And I know there are a bunch of different schools of thought, but I'm curious, as you're saying, it was the realistic agreement. It was basically the best option that could have happened, and it was perfect for that. I also heard from a few people that there was even a worry that, once the conference was over, Kosovo might be next.

STEINBERG: Yeah, well, we knew, by the way, we knew Kosovo was likely to happen. There was no doubt in my mind that Kosovo was the next crisis waiting to happen after the Bosnia War was over. For those of us more on the policy side, we immediately started thinking about Kosovo, and we were better prepared, I think, for Kosovo, because of all the things we've been through with Bosnia, to realize both of this was coming, and we needed to think through what the strategy was.

Q: All right, yeah. So, can you tell me a little bit about the interagency cooperation? How did that go? And, you know, different agencies working together on annexes, but also later on, on the implementation?

STEINBERG: The State and the White House on implementation were joined at the hip, a reflection of the fact that we work with each other all the time on everything, and the personal relationships were very strong. Both Tom Donilon and I were very close to both Tony and Sandy. And so between State and the White House, there were after the initial scratchiness around '93, around the time of the Christopher visit to Europe which was like, not a good time, but once this got going, there were no differences at all and very close coordination.

The Pentagon was more complicated. They didn't want to be involved in peace implementation. This is not what they do. And so, there was a lot of time in, first in terms of the U.S. getting involved militarily, first instance, and then deploying a peacekeeping force. At the end of the day, the challenge became that the Pentagon said, "Okay, well, if we're going to do this, we need to have 100,000 troops there to do it, because that's how we do it, and the only way to be sure that the troops are not at risk" And we and the White House said, "You can't possibly need that many, the war is over," right? And Congress is not going to be supportive. So there was a lot of difficulty and operational issues. "Tension" is too strong, but there were significant differences. And at the end of the day, you know, there was this moment, I think it was Clinton who said it, but it was like, we were trying to push back on the Pentagon about the size of the force, and Clinton basically said, "Just give them what they want. We need them to be on this side." And we had a good partner Walt Slocombe was a very important player in this. Walt, I had known for a long time, which made it easier to work through the differences. Walt was a good bridge between understanding the political imperatives and the concerns that State and the White House had, with being able to translate to us this is what needed to keep the joint chiefs on board. So I give Walt a lot of credit for helping to manage that, and our recognition that, we had to take, when he told us, this is what we need to do to keep the chiefs on board, our recognizing that we had to take that seriously,

Q: So was the implementation hard?

STEINBERG: This complex civil-military operation was relatively new. I suppose, after World War II, there were similar efforts, in both Japan and Germany; a kind of civil-military fusion. Certainly MacArthur had that in Japan. But it had been fifty years since we've done anything like that, and there's just no experience with this. And so we created a coordinate structure led by Jim Dobbins and Richard Clark. It was hard operationally to really build the kind of institutional structures that allowed these things to work together.

As it turns out, of course, we spent the next twenty years doing this everywhere, in Bosnia, then Kosovo, then in Iraq, then in Afghanistan, but this was all learning and building these protocols and arrangements. And again, there were a lot of great people, Dobbins and Clark and the people who kind of masterminded that, you know, working with the team at the Pentagon. And you had to do this both at the Washington level and the Sarajevo level. So it was challenging and huge amounts of time were spent dealing with the kind of day-to-day operational difficulties of who's in charge and who's doing what, and who makes what decisions.

Q: So what are some general lessons that you learned, or that the United States learned from the Bosnian peace process and implementation?

STEINBERG: I think that, first of all, as we keep saying, the U.S. is an indispensable nation, you need a leader to galvanize action and decision. If you have a large number of actors, each of whom have their own perspectives, and nobody who can bang heads and assist decisional authority, nothing ever happens, and that's why Europe was unable to do

something in '91, '92. There's a collective action problem. Everybody knows it. But you need an actor with both the capacity and the inclination to get things done, to help drive the process. And this is obviously a great anxiety today, if the United States steps back from this role, who will do it? Some people say, "Well, you don't need to do it at all." That's a separate question. I would dispute that too, but once you accept the idea that these things matter, and that these kinds of conflicts can metastasize and spill over and ultimately harm us. The U.S. is the indispensable leader.

Second, you need people who have a lot of experience. We had an extraordinarily experienced team of people. Holbrooke had spent a lot of time in the Balkans. He was not just being parachuted into something that he didn't know anything about. He knew a lot about it, spent time there, and so that was an indispensable asset. And a lot of the other people who were involved had deep knowledge of this. That's the second lesson.

So third, you do have to have high level commitment, and you can't do this at a junior level. I mean, a lot of the problems that have happened in the post-Dayton environment have come about because not enough senior people have been involved, and so the parties just don't take outside actors seriously. This was my own experience when Carl and I went back to try to help put some energy back in the Dayton agreement during the Obama administration. I was a deputy secretary, he was a former prime minister. But, it's not the same as having a President and Secretary of State, and so, if you don't have this high level of engagement, it's very hard to get things done. And that was true in the Middle East, was true in Northern Ireland, it's true in this case, that those things matter a lot. And then the final lesson, is the need for a broad base of support having the Europeans engaged in this was extremely important, and not just the U.S. We needed to lead it, but we couldn't have done it effectively on our own.

Q: Was there sort of an expectation that there was going to be Dayton 2.0? Because I know some people are kind of wishfully thinking about it even today.

STEINBERG: During the negotiations, when questions arose, people would argue "well, we can always revisit this," right? What Carl and I did in 2009 was a mini Dayton Two. But I don't think at the time, anyone was thinking about a follow on. We just wanted to get this done and end the war. We hoped that, over time, people will become pragmatic and put their grievances aside, see the benefits of peace, and start to work out things. And we've seen this everywhere, a hope that time heals wounds and cool passions. But it didn't happen in the Middle East. It has happened to some degree in Northern Ireland. It's, you know, the hope that peace will be a snowballing of things. But I do believe that you only get progress under the pressure of crisis. Absent a real sense that the status quo is intolerable, compromise is hard, it's hard to get parties to revisit a deal when things are difficult, like they are now in the Balkans, but people aren't killing each other. And so you need the pressure of a war, or the violence in Northern Ireland, or the violence that we had in the Middle East during the Intifada, to get people to take seriously the idea, "Well, compromise is hard, but war is worse."

Q: All right, were there, in your opinion, any mistakes that happened during the implementation that basically just prolonged the whole implementation process?

STEINBERG: Of course there were mistakes in hindsight. The problem is that you can't sustain that same high level of attention that we had for two, three years during the war itself. Once the peace came, there were other issues. There was the Middle East, and so it's just hard for working level people to be able to do the kinds of things that very senior people do. And it's not a criticism of them. It's just that they don't have the clout, they don't have the energy.

Q: Yeah. Is it fair to say that the Dayton Accords were an inflection point in U.S. foreign policy, and they impacted our decision-making process, basically, for other conflicts and how we were approaching them? I know you were talking about Kosovo, but I'm curious whether it was an inflection point in our diplomatic history.

STEINBERG: It's hard to answer that because you have to think about the problem in the subsequent historical context. You can't disassociate the trajectory from what happened in Iraq. After Bosnia, came Kosovo. And then you have a 2000 election campaign in which candidate Bush and the Bush team criticized our approach for using the military as a "police force" and its involvement in building civil society. They wrote in Foreign Affairs magazine that the Bush administration was not going to do those kinds of things. And then, of course, then do the same and more in Iraq. And so it is hard to know what would have happened to U.S. policy if we had not occupied Iraq in 2003. You had a trajectory for a more interventionist approach in the post Cold War environment.You know, it now becomes possible to do things like Bosnia and Kosovo and Haiti but after Iraq and Afghanistan, the mentality is now 'We're never going to do these things again'. So where's the inflection point, and what causes the inflection point? It's hard to say.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Makes sense. Anything else to add? I think we covered everything, so I'll stop here.

End of interview