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Interview with Peter Tarnoff

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Under Secretary for Political Affairs

October 23, 1996

Participants: Derek Chollet (DC)

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OSD 287  
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Tape Transcripts

DC: I would like to primarily talk about today is your role in what we have been calling "the summer crisis" last summer. And I guess really the story as I see it starts in spring, when the cease fire had been negotiated in part by former President Carter came in an end to early May of 1995. And during this time we have been told there is sort of informal discussions started among a group here, yourself included, Talbot, Steinberg, at times the JAG director on the weekends. Sort of informally, a couple of times I think it was at Talbot's house, one time some met at your place, do you remember those at all?

PT: Your information is good, curiosity of Mr. Talbot right. It's nice to know that you are basing your findings on the information, yeah. I mean I can't give you dates because I don't remember them. But when the cease fire began to break down and various of us who were involved felt that there simply was no way to think it was possible to muddle through these requests and that as bad as things were looking for not only Bosnia friends but also for the Western Alliance and its role in this thing that something. Therefore conversations among us and I don't remember who had the idea we did think to have some off site meetings and a couple of these were \_\_\_\_\_. And I missed one of those, to just sit back and brain storm and to think about what might best for us without the confines of papers or situations with others. Sandy Berger was also part of this, and that getting a plain in theory on the paper \_\_\_\_\_ I think in a variety of ways each of us came to the conclusion that there had to be a higher level of US intervention and therefore a higher level of risk. Political and human for the administration if we were going to gain a role. We thought that increasing the \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_.

DC: Now can you characterize these risks that the group felt the US?

PT: Yes, I think without saying what particularly forum the US had taken, without revisiting the issue putting more forces on the ground prior to an agreement among the parties. Just remember once in 1993 the base line that the President said

\_\_\_\_\_ defined is the necessary criteria sufficient necessary \_\_\_\_\_ for US forces \_\_\_\_\_. Bombing for example, was in this because it would expose the UNIFOR forces to possible risks and a major concern for our allies and forces on the ground and the UN command. We also believed that if bombing was conducted and didn't work would there have to be a pattern of escalation going beyond a limited stages to further \_\_\_\_\_ besides the Republika of Srpska before we find ourselves basically a role in the thunder which goes back to Vietnam era, when some of us were in Vietnam, and a sense of open ended military commitment to extend the military pressure up the line. When there was, there was a logical result that we were looking for, or basically coming to the table by Serbia forces. But not a logical \_\_\_\_\_ point in the military pressure, would not open the prospect of \_\_\_\_\_ aspirations. We were worried about political reasons but humanitarian reasons, something that would cause on the Muslims population but also on civilians \_\_\_\_\_ not involved in Croat and Serbia part of the country as well.

DC: So can you identify anything that really came out of this brain storming at least multiple sessions?

PT: I think what came out of it is reflected at least in this part of the conversation, that the few of us involved had with the Secretary in which I think you had to check with

them, it was probably replicated elsewhere. But that was coming from if not the bottom of the heap at least on a level below the top of the heap, in three of four appointments whether or not to get involved in this, mainly a concern that the United States had to be prepared to step forward in a more accurate way in order to get the process moving.

And we could no longer either rely on some combination of Europeans or United Nations or the parties to find a way out of it. And the situation was heading downward more thoroughly and toward yet another winter in the \_\_\_\_\_.

DC: Well of course in the early summer, early June the decision was made at the principal level to, Frasure's negotiation with Milosevic were doing really going anywhere and turn things over basically to Bildt for a while. And around that time, the barrage of documents, around that time this is a copy of a paper that you and Steinberg circulated, it looks like somewhat informally, around the end of June. And apparently this paper was discussed in a June 30th meeting that was in the Secretary's office and we don't think the Secretary was actually in attendance. But it was you, Steinberg, Frasure and Talbott in which you discussed this proposal which is essentially was maybe a substance outcome of something you had talked about informally calling for a three president's conference and some point of mutual recognition and sanctions.

PT: I remember the paper, this is a point in detail it is difficult to conceive that there would have been meetings when he did not attend \_\_\_\_\_. Well Jim, did I think in what was the last of our \_\_\_\_\_ meetings was with our backing of course, took down some of his own thoughts in regard to substantial \_\_\_\_\_ and this looks as if this was the paper that came out of this two or three meetings. Although I am interested that this is strictly diplomatic and we at least in our conversations can remember that was

anything that was recorded on this part of the agenda, did discuss bombing military pressure as well.

DC: And from this paper, Bob Frasure then revised a memo that he had been working on then you sent to the Secretary, which interestingly then you point out that you thought was a very good idea. And he should engage Lake with this, do you know whether or not anything was done with this? The Secretary himself couldn't really remember.

PT: No. I don't know what the, again I remember the issue but I do not remember whether the Secretary raised it with Tony.

DC: The closest thing we have in terms of the paper trail following that is this Night Note, which the Secretary sent the President then five days later.

DG: Was Sandy Berger keeping the NSC informed of these informal meetings?

PT: I am sure he was keeping Tony informed.

DC: Then as you can see that the crux of the Secretary's intervention in this memo refers a wider range of options for 4104, that was the concern. And the Diplomatic Initiative which was the real thrust of the Frasure memo isn't really mentioned.

DG: And this is the night note

PT: Well but it maybe, that maybe that the wider range of options on 4104 reflects conversations that we had with the Secretary on the north hand side. And I mentioned earlier that we did talk at least some about that, just conjecturally this may have reflected rather at most part of the conversations rather than the first Frasure

DC: OK, well shortly then after this July 6th memo the crisis with the safe areas begins and the British then offered their capital as a place for the allies to meet, July 21st. We

talk about sort of renewed NATO effort. Do you remember any ways that you were involved in the preparations going into London, particularly the formulation of US strategy going into London.

PT: Well we had mixed feelings about that. So yet another large gatherings that we often felt were designed to bring attention to the host of the problem and not always the best form for a gathering to produce mixed results. We as you know \_\_\_\_\_ being of our position press the Europeans hard in a variety of ways, especially on the absolutely critical question of whether there could be a greater degree of military pressure. That could bear on the Serbs bear on the Bosnia-Serbs and \_\_\_\_\_ forces. And although there was some reluctance around, Russian, General Janvier as I remember it and maybe a one of two others, as I remember it, maybe one or two others. We were presently surprised at the sense of outraged with the Serbs was sufficiently high. From the Europeans in the large number in the Lancaster House 100 degrees whether we should \_\_\_\_\_ also outside the \_\_\_\_\_ publicly and in quieter conversations with us. \_\_\_\_\_ were at a point they too ready to admit the situation was sustainable on the ground for political for them and they would be willing to sustain some failure risk including their own personnel who resulted from higher degree of military actions, something we had of course been in favor of but inhibited by the fact that we didn't have people at risk. So of all the, I know the various decorations, documents produced but I since remember coming back from that meeting with the Secretary briefed on \_\_\_\_\_ its not a great deal at least the element of progress on \_\_\_\_\_ and write \_\_\_\_\_

DG: Was there some sort of written agreement at this meeting? We've had trouble tracking that down?

PT: It was a declaration, that it was decided that because of reservations primarily coming from the Russians, it was not a signed statement but there was a Chairman statement that was led by. Which I think reflected quite well the general trend of the discussions.

DC: And going into London then, getting down to specifics, the strategy was to modify in some way the dual key system and as well as get protection of Gorazda, but at the least. But possibly the protection of all the safe areas, is that correct?

PT: And there is a lot of talk about how practical it would be to be one way of the other. And there were the French ideas and the American ideals, but at least we were talking about protecting people in a much more accurate way. Even if we helped them and did not reach an agreement on how to do it, ultimately we did but not immediately. And that was part of it and \_\_\_\_\_.

DG: Was there a general sense among participants that the dual key would get revised?

PT: That had always been our position, and while the Europeans were for formal reasons and political reasons unwilling to take the second key out, they had made very clear that under certain circumstances they expected the key to be turned on automatically for not to act independently. And that message was very, very clear. So I think it was very clear to \_\_\_\_\_. So we never insisted that it be made this clear, because that the second key be removed but in effect much probably not as broadly as we would have liked, but more broadly than had been the case before. A second key could not remain unturned and then be actually brought as a result.

DC: Skipping over then the US diplomatically, right around this same time, the NSC began to circulate a document which had become in the lower Bob Woodward the end gate strategy; which I don't know if you actually saw the document at that time, I think that was circulated at a foreign policy team meeting, in which the President dropped by on the 17th. Do you recall when you first started to get involved in formulating State strategy in response to this document. That the 17th this is actually the package of papers that went forth to the President on the 5th, as the result of - a State paper there is attached.

PT: Well what the Secretary did was that he came back the various meetings, and he would have four or five of us working with him in, we can talk about the papers, and also the shape of diplomatic country. Actually we call this memo, more than

\_\_\_\_\_ but I do remember here is the Albright piece of it. This was two weeks between the 17th and the 5th, but then we call I think, I seem to recall had a shot at this or least one version at least in substance.

DC: Who is we all? Yourself

PT: Talbott, Steinberg, Donilon, Holbrooke I imagine and the Secretary. And then there were I forget the head of their, at least a couple of meetings one or two meetings, with the President in August which.

DC: We can actually jump to that, this package of papers prepared that meeting and the Secretary was in Asia so I believe you were at the meeting. And this was the first time this package was discussed with the President in August 7th, do you recall anything about that meeting?

PT: I remember we were in the Cabinet Room, and Tony was present, pretty sure had the memo or least a summary of the memo \_\_\_\_\_ but, essentially went over the overall strategy. And he expressed a couple of things, the first was that he too objected to the inclusion of the United States \_\_\_\_\_ to much more involved for the same kinds of reasons that we had been discussing before hand. And also that he wanted to make what ever moves just the United States take sooner rather than later before the summer began an additional examples of tragedies had to be dealt with and he was quite active. Tony was telling various of us, don't know how accurate, that in his private conversations with the President. The President was increasing pro-active and had been pushing for a strategy for more US involvement, that he had realized that the previous approaches simply were not agree and that nature catastrophes would occur and pushing for them and Tony to the rest of us pushing on principles so that everyone was on very short notice to come up with a strategy and this clearly is the document that we wrote.

DC: And at this meeting it was then decided that a Lake mission you would join, would take off. And you, as I recall you worked with an inter-agency team to get together the Lake talking points, which were hashed over the 8th, discussed the evening of the 8th. Do you recall any of those meeting, anything in particular that would stand out in terms of crafting what really became the strategy from this 30 some pages of paper.

PT: The only issue that I remember actually coming up with the President and being able to assess that was a concern that Secretary Perry had. That Gorazda and I am not sure, I remember offering myself and others offered language we hoped would be acceptable to him but his particular concern was to have an exposed and safe area in the

middle of hostile territory \_\_\_\_\_ this has come up obviously in the discussions. Especially in the defense, protection and re-enforcement and I think the single most controversial issue we talked about in the definition of \_\_\_\_\_. Otherwise I do remember going back and having one maybe a couple of meetings on refining the points after the meetings before we took off. But I think it flowed very well from the concepts from the beginning.

DC: And obviously you were reporting back to the Secretary on these meetings. Do you recall any of his reactions to the pack of papers, the President's decisions, the Indian Points?

PT: He wanted very much to do it up obviously, he wanted the Department involved both in the process and in the diplomacy of it. And so he clearly I don't want to say the preparation, but the prior discussions with him that he had been holding since the two of three informal off-site meetings that had gotten him thinking about something along these lines. And certainly if it was me I would keep him informed before and after the meetings and \_\_\_\_\_ he was quite comfortable.

DC: And he departed with Lake and a few others on the 9th. Do you recall when the decision was made to extend the trip beyond London, Bonn and Paris?

PT: Yeah, there has been a, I was on that part of the trip, but as I remember there was going to be at least a couple other stops beyond the trip to Rome and Madrid. But then as we got out there and the idea seemed to gain \_\_\_\_\_ favor, with some exceptions in places. Totally in particular the \_\_\_\_\_ now was the time to touch as many bases as possible, and \_\_\_\_\_ had a fixed schedule so I would be coming back it was really in

enroute. I think they had searched because we came through Turkey and one or two other stops, which were added on when we were already in Europe.

DC: Before you left for Europe there was a discussion, probably on August 7th and 9th about who would lead the regional shuttle. Do you remember was there any was it always assumed that it would be Holbrooke or is there any talk Lake would lead the mission or

PT: There was some talk of Tony leading it, but least when I was involved this was during the first part of the trip. Others may have discussed \_\_\_\_\_ and Tony raised it and we talked about it \_\_\_\_\_ but certainly expressed \_\_\_\_\_ it was never an issue, it was something we talked about.

DC: Well I get, after that point then out came back here, and how did you then keep up with the Holbrooke shuttles as they began. What was your real role here in Washington to work this process?

PT: Well basically at that point also Dayton \_\_\_\_\_ I was one of the two or three people with the Secretary while he was here, vetting the issues being touched person along with Dick as well as developing whatever reactions on instructions we had. Both during his shuttle and then after Jim \_\_\_\_\_ after the accident and then out again \_\_\_\_\_ . And so it was a continuing that process a lot of this was necessary as the Secretary went with him, because the Secretary was with him on the spot they could make more decisions \_\_\_\_\_ .

DC: Does anything stand out in particular, say that a period during the shuttles or Dayton that was a decision that was poured over quite thoroughly here in Washington that was going on out there?

PT: Nothing, I was just trying to think back and see if there as one or two that would stand out.

DG: Was there any concern about the amount of autonomy that Holbrooke had for any answer here on points

PT: Not in this building, maybe elsewhere. The Secretary believed that before and during the shuttle, Dick had exhibited a very good sense of what he should and what was desirable and there were cases, let me see if I can recall immediately when someone of us would sit around and say, "Dick wants to do this, I wonder whether it makes any sense. And the Secretary would say, "Yes I can see arguments on both sides but, he has taken it this far lets give him what he wants." So I don't remember there being any, there were cases that \_\_\_\_\_ something like that, were we actually had to call Dick and said to him, "we think what you are going for is a bit too much more than we are prepared for \_\_\_\_\_" but not often. Mostly even when there was a question, there was a disposition. The Secretary in particular to give him his head and let him see if he could go in a certain direction and get what he was looking for.

DC: When the government began to prepare for Dayton in October and create this document, which logistically get prepared, were you involved in way in any of that?

PT: There would send the documents back, so I remember in the fall was not talking, sometimes in front of him something he was being \_\_\_\_\_ would along with Kornblum and other people \_\_\_ point out to us what the big issues were and what the decisions were. So its not as if anyone suggesting this people from the office \_\_\_\_\_ come in the morning found a big dump of papers. There were a big dump of papers somewhere in the building but we had enough if the real time sensitive \_\_\_\_\_

both in his meetings with the parties sort of speak. And issues we were dealing

\_\_\_\_\_

DC: Was there any particular issue that you personally felt was crucial in the negotiations, that you might have taken an interest in and pressed particularly with the Secretary or Holbrooke?

PT: I can't remember.

DC: And you did not go to Dayton, correct. Were you involved in any of the follow on debates, any implementations whether it be Paris or

PT: No. The conferences that were

DG: Do you remember some of the, I guess \_\_\_\_\_ statements to get the first bombing started? Back in September we starting bombing after the Sarajevo shelling for roughly two or three days and then called a pause, there was some controversy about that. Do you remember what the US role was and States' role was in getting that implemented?

PT: Sure I received \_\_\_\_\_

DC: That's all we really have now.