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HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING

Topic: Recent developments in Yugoslavia and elsewhere in Europe

Witness: Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Niles

Time: 10 a.m.

Location: Rayburn Building, Room 2172

August 4, 1992

The editor of the report is Steve Ginsburg. Tim Ahmann, Eric Beech, Mary Gabriel, Peter Ramjug and Paul Schomer also are available to help you. If you have questions, please call 202-898-8345. For service problems inside the District of Columbia, call 202-898-8355; outside D.C., call 1-800-537-9755.

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REP. LEE HAMILTON (D-Indiana): Mr. Secretary, I understand you do not have a prepared statement. You may proceed, if you like, to make some opening comments and then we will turn to the members for questioning.

Do you have such comments, Mr. Secretary?

THOMAS NILES (Assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to be back with the subcommittee today. As you said, I was last here on the 23rd of June. Of course since then, although a relatively brief period, there have been some important events in the area of the subcommittee's jurisdiction. I might just cite the important meetings in Munich and Helsinki in the first part of July, the G-7 summit in Munich and the CSCE summit in Helsinki, both of which I think represented useful and productive occasions for those two groups to meet.

You referred to the Cyprus negotiations. There, the talks are underway in New York, and we believe that there is continued progress toward agreement based on the set of ideas  
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developed by the U.N. secretary general. Elsewhere in Europe we see some progress in dealing with the situation in Moldova. The talks on the crisis around the Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan are continuing in Rome, but progress has been very

slow in solving or finding a solution to that problem.

I regret to say that since we last met in June, there is little progress to report in the case of the former Yugoslavia, with the exception of the fact that the U.N. airlift into Sarajevo continues and has been able to deliver approximately 200 tons of food and other humanitarian relief supplies daily to Sarajevo. That's the level that the U.N. considers necessary to maintain the population of Sarajevo.

Elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina, of course there are similar situations, Gorazde and Tuzla where, unfortunately, we've not been able thus far to deliver humanitarian relief supplies.

I'd be pleased now, Mr. Chairman, to respond to your questions and those of other members of the subcommittee.

REP. HAMILTON: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. Let's begin with Yugoslavia and get a focus on American policy there. Tell us what American policy is in the former Yugoslavia  
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today.

What are the principal components of that policy today?

NILES: I say that the principal components of our policy in Yugoslavia today are to work with our friends in Western Europe and other members of the United Nations, the international community, to achieve a peaceful settlement to the crisis that has developed in what we now refer to as the former Yugoslavia to secure the recognition of the independence of the various republics under conditions acceptable to the international community and to prevent the further spread of the violence which has wracked particularly the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

REP. HAMILTON: Okay, those are the targets; how are we going to achieve them? What are the components of our policy to achieve those objectives that you've set out?

NILES: We have worked consistently, Mr. Chairman, with the members of the European Community and with other members of the United Nations Security Council. We've also worked within  
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the CSCE to use all available means to us, peaceful means to secure respect for the principles of CSCE and the United Nations charter by the governments which emerged from the wreckage of the former Yugoslav state.

This applies particularly, Mr. Chairman, to the government of Serbia-Montenegro which we believe, and I think the international community shares that view, to be largely responsible though not solely responsible for the tragedy which has unfolded in former Yugoslavia over the last 9-10 months.

REP. HAMILTON: Well, as I look at it, there are several strands here. We have the economic sanctions in place.

NILES: That's correct.

REP. HAMILTON: We are seeking to diplomatically isolate the Serbian government. We have the negotiations that you've referred to. We have this use of force problem. I want to ask you about that in a moment. We certainly have the humanitarian relief efforts.

Now would that be kind of the major strands of our policy at this point? Am I missing something there?

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NILES: No. I think you have hit all of the various points. Where we are engaged, Mr. Chairman, I would stress perhaps more than you did, the humanitarian side of the effort we're undertaking support for the delivery of humanitarian relief supplies, particularly to the people of Sarajevo. But basically you did cover the various strands of the policy which we have undertaken. It does, as you say, involve the imposition of very strict economic sanctions against Serbia-Montenegro, sanctions which we believe are having a major effect on the economy and we hope ultimately on the policies of that country.

We are pursuing together with our allies a policy of isolating Serbia-Montenegro in the international community, of treating Serbia-Montenegro, you might say, as a pariah state because of its activities, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and I must say we're meeting with considerable success in that effort.

x x x Mr. Chairman.

REP. HAMILTON: Mr. McCloskey.

REP. FRANK McCLOSKEY (D-IN): Well, we've covered a lot of interesting ground this morning, Mr. Chairman. At this point, a lot has been said. I wanted to say that as someone who has been following this issue very closely for about 18-20 months now, and who has been lied to by Mr. Milosevic and

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Belgrade, and who has seen horrible Serbian atrocities in northern Croatian provinces, this issue has been a long time coming.

And the idea that we will have a coordinated congressional effort, if not major leadership on the part of the administration, I think is very heartening.

As to Mr. Niles, I understand you're very high ranking in the State Department. But I don't know, perhaps you can tell me some time, the extent of your impact on Yugoslavian policy.

If you here as a spokesman, the front person for Mr. Bush, Mr. Baker, and Mr. Eagleburger, I would say you've done an

admirable job of defending a feeble nonpolicy that surely and hopefully is on the verge of change.

We've heard all the discussion this morning. But basically we were talking about genocide, torture, mass exodus. If the administration does not know at this point of detention areas, or concentration camps, or whatever we're going to call them in those areas, I dare say we have no significant intelligence resources worthy of mention.

So I would hope that the administration would face up to this.

As to a particular remark by the secretary, I was  
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disheartened, Mr. Niles, by one or two of your earlier analogies. I was somewhat late coming in, essentially likening this to a civil war.

I think the new dynamics, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, that distinction, A, does not hold I think either the geopolitical or the moral force it used to. And with the recognitions of the various republics, surely we are beyond saying this is a civil war, and hold back.

I mean--and another simple fact is, besides the immediate problems of human slaughter, maimings and tragedy, facts, as they say, have developed on the ground. There's not been much discussion of this, but two-thirds of Bosnia right now is in basic Serbian control. The ethnic cleansing, if you will, has moved in more homogeneous Serbian populations. And I think more knowledgeable analysts than I are basically saying, as far as Bosnia, the deal is done; we're going to have a Serbian carve off of that ultimately, and also, the Croatian carve-off if you will.

I would just say that the fate of those people in that area I think is a lot more important than anybody's election here. I think if the president in this political year--and there's been a lot of criticism, I guess, as to possible

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political timing; I'm not going to make a judgment on that--but I would dare say, if the president would show profound moral leadership and courage, I got a sense, Mr. Niles, that things are brewing, that he wouldn't have a problem of Democrats or others taking potshots at him; he would get strong and bipartisan support of the U.S. Congress.

It's not a question of per se going to war. I think Mr. Milosevic has to know that he's going to suffer real problems if this goes on another week. I particularly have been very laudatory of the statements in recent months by Senator Lugar, our distinguished foreign affairs leader from Indiana, over there on the Senate side.

But this is just not going away. It's a horrible blight on our historical actions if someone doesn't wake up over there very soon, Mr. Niles.

I really have no question, other than if you care to comment on the civil war analogy. I think those have busted

through, if you will.

NILES: Well, where to begin? I essentially tried earlier to respond to the charges of a lack of leadership, so I don't see any particular virtue in going through that again. I  
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would continue to maintain that the United States has exercised leadership in putting together the coalition of international opinion against the actions of President Milosevic, and that those efforts will bear fruit.

I can't predict exactly when, but we are seeing strong signs that the economic and other sanctions are happening--

REP. McCLOSKEY: I'm not trying to be antagonistic, because I think there's so much eloquence from Mr. Lantos and Mr. Kostmayer, among others. But if you're in a concentration camp and two-thirds of your country is gone, where has American action and leadership been so far?

NILES: We are seeking to create the circumstances in which the actions of the Serbian government in Bosnia-Herzegovina cannot be pursued, Congressman. And that is basically what we've been trying to do, and what I think we're in the process of achieving.

Militarily, the idea that somehow military action could be taken to prevent the kinds of things that the Serbs are doing in Bosnia-Herzegovina is to my way of thinking a little bit far fetched.

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But the fact remains that the government of Serbia is under severe international pressure, and we believe that that pressure will bear fruit.

My reference to civil war was more in terms of what has been provoked, or what has been provoked in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a republic where Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, and Catholic Croats, live together peacefully for some years, roughly from 1945 until 1991, '92. And that civil war between the communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, provoked, we believe, by the actions of the government of Serbia, is the reality in that province today.

And that was the reference, that was the reason I referred to that as a civil war situation; not referring to civil war in terms of the struggles between the republics of the former Yugoslavia. We've recognized the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, so that's not the reference--that was not what I was referring to when I used the term, civil war.

REP. McCLOSKEY: Is there any possibility that coming out of this there may be implications in the Mideast and elsewhere? It's okay to slaughter people on the European continent if they happen to be Muslim, rather than of Christian  
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background?

NILES: That is a reprehensible concept, and certainly one that I don't think has been accepted anywhere.

REP. McCLOSKEY: To a certain degree, with what's going on now, I think those thoughts may be emerging as far as Christian persecution of Muslims, particular Greek Orthodox, Serbs, and in this case, primarily or predominantly Muslim population of Bosnia--

NILES: The Serbs have falsely claimed that they are resisting Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, that's true. But that's a claim which I don't think anybody in the world takes seriously, least of all here in the United States or in Western Europe. Nobody takes that claim seriously.

The Serbs have made it. They've made--drawn analogies between their experience today and the situation that Serbia faced in 1389 when Turkey invaded Serbia. But in my view, none of those analogies hold any water.

REP. McCLOSKEY: Excuse me, (inaudible) when I said  
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Greek? I correct myself. I met with the hierarchy there. I meant--when I said, Greek Orthodox, I meant Serbian orthodox. I think we know that.

Mr. Chairman, I yield my time. I thank you very much.

REP. HAMILTON: Mr. Secretary, there are a lot of negotiations begun to develop a treaty pursuant to that? And can you give us some idea as to the time frame on it?

NILES: Well, we have followed up with the Russian authorities, and we hope to be moving ahead fairly quickly to conclude agreement on the text of what would be the treaty, putting into effect the understanding reached by President Bush and President Yeltsin on the 17th of June.

We have made specific proposals on that.

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REP. HAMILTON: Can we expect that to be put into a treaty form within the next couple of months?

NILES: We hope so. Mr. Chairman, again, it's hard to predict.

REP. HAMILTON: I'm not trying to hold you--now, the Senate had a very interesting vote yesterday. You'll recall that the House, as part of its defense authorization bill, approved a year-long moratorium on nuclear testing. We've done that before, of course, in the House. But the Senate yesterday

for the first time--I think for the first time--voted for a nine-month moratorium on nuclear testing, and then limited tests over a period of several years, three years I think, and then eventually called for a complete test ban.

What is the position of the administration with respect to those proposals?

NILES: The position of the administration, Mr. Chairman, is that a very limited program of nuclear testing for the security and safety of the nuclear deterrent is required as long as the United States relies upon nuclear deterrence for its  
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national security.

The president has made clear that the program of nuclear tests that we've proposed, that the administration proposes to carry out over the next several years would be very limited; the numbers would be considerably less than were carried out in previous years; and that only tests having to do with safety and security or enhancing the safety and security of the deterrent, would be conducted.

So we're not talking about developing new nuclear warheads.

REP. HAMILTON: Now, the president announced that he was in effect freezing nuclear testing at current levels with no more than--for a period of--well, with no more than six, I think it was, nuclear tests. We announced that unilaterally, is that correct? Or was that done in connection with Russia?

NILES: That was done unilaterally. But obviously against a background of steps taken by certain other countries in the area of nuclear tests.

And more importantly, I think, Mr. Chairman, the president's decision which was part of a number of broader  
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policy--reflected the successes we've achieved in nuclear arms control with Russia, and of course the decision for example not to continue to procure the M-88 warhead for the D5 missile. That sort of development reflecting the successes we've achieved on the arms control front.

REP. HAMILTON: Is it my understanding that the defense authorizations would be vetoed if either of those provisions in the House or the Senate were included in it?

x x x guarantee that.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Have you heard of the city of Bukovar in Croatia?

NILES: Yes, I've been there several decades ago when I was with our embassy in Belgrade, so I know the town well.



REP. KOSTMAYER: Then you know what happened?  
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NILES: I do know what happened.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Describe what happened in Bukhovar.

NILES: Well, the town of Bukhovar was destroyed by the so-called Yugoslav people's army in December and January of last--

REP. KOSTMAYER: The Serbs.

NILES: That's correct, controlled by the government of Serbia, it was effectively destroyed, the town which had probably 50- or 60,000 inhabitants I suppose now is largely uninhabited.

REP. KOSTMAYER: How many people were killed there, do you know?

NILES: I imagine that deaths probably were in the range of 1,000 to 1,500, but I don't know specifically. It was a tragedy; no question about it.  
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REP. KOSTMAYER: Is it true that after the Serbs conquered the city, they entered the city and went house by house slitting peoples throats, street by street, house by house? I guess you can't confirm that, can you?

NILES: Well, as a matter of fact, I can't, because I have not seen confirmation of those reports. But terrible atrocities were committed just simply by the bombardment of Bukhovar.

REP. KOSTMAYER: What is to prevent the same atrocities from occurring when the Serbians eventually conquer Sarajevo as they clearly will.

NILES: Well, first I don't--no, I'm sorry, I don't accept your assumption that--

REP. KOSTMAYER: This is the third largest army in Europe. This is the Yugoslav army. Communist built, communist supplied, communist trained, fighting what is basically a ragtag militia. Isn't that correct?  
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NILES: At the time of--

REP. KOSTMAYER: Is that correct?

NILES: Well, let me explain. Let me answer your question, okay?

REP. KOSTMAYER: Just give me a yes or a no.

NILES: I can't give you a yes or no.

REP. KOSTMAYER: You can't tell me whether this is the third largest army in Europe?

NILES: I can't tell you that, because it's no longer the third largest army in Europe. At the time of the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav people's army was a formidable fighting force. But this army has gone through quite a bit of stress and strain over the last--

REP. KOSTMAYER: Is this a fair fight in any sense,  
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Mr. Secretary?

NILES: Of course it's not a fair fight. You have an organized force conducted by the government in Belgrade, the Serbian government, attacking essentially unarmed people in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nobody is trying to stand up to--

REP. KOSTMAYER: But you don't think it's inevitable that the Serbs will conquer Sarajevo and enter the city?

NILES: Well, the Serbian forces are significantly over-extended in their efforts to conquer large parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They've not been able to take Sarajevo, and I see no reason to believe that they will.

The actions of the international community in support of the people of Sarajevo, the delivery of 200 tons of food and other humanitarian supplies a day to Sarajevo is the best guarantee that the Serbians will not succeed in conquering Sarajevo.

So I don't believe that the disaster that occurred in Bukhovar is waiting to--

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REP. KOSTMAYER: Well, I don't understand how providing food will prevent the Serbs from taking the city if the people in the city don't have weapons to defend themselves with, and if the embargo includes the prohibition of providing weapons to the people in the cities, as it does.

NILES: The Serbian forces have been able to surround Sarajevo, although they do not fully control the area around it.

They've not been able to take the city, or to take even regions of the city.

So I see no reason today to believe that despite their efforts, the Serbian forces will succeed in taking the town of Sarajevo.

And the international community, by mounting the humanitarian effort into Sarajevo, 20 airplanes a day, roughly 200 tons of food and other supplies a day, has demonstrated to the Serbs of Bosnia and the Serbs in Belgrade that this won't be accepted; that this is not something they can expect to achieve.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Don't you think you could do a better job of sending a message to Mr. Milosevic about what we were prepared to do?

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If he were listening to this hearing, I would think his reaction would be that he can continue to conduct himself pretty much in the way we has.

NILES: Well, I don't agree with that, congressman. If he were listening to this hearing against the background of what he knows is happening in Serbia, in his own economy, I think he'd be pretty worried. This is a country on the verge of collapse.

Now, I can't tell you whether it's going to collapse tomorrow, or in two weeks from now. But the Serbian economy, as a result of the policies of the Milosevic government, and the sanctions adopted by the Security Council, is in grave danger. And without a functioning economy, the Serbian authorities cannot maintain the war that they're prosecuting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. So if I were Milosevic, I would be very worried right now.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Let me just ask you one more. What would his reaction be if we were to engage in U.S. air strikes against the Serbian gun sites, and Serbian positions? Why don't we do that? Why don't we simply go in and knock out the Serbian

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positions?

NILES: Where?

REP. KOSTMAYER: In the hills surrounding Sarajevo?

NILES: Have you been to Sarajevo?

REP. KOSTMAYER: No, sir.

NILES: Well, let me tell you, that is a formidable undertaking to cleanse the hills around Sarajevo, which are numerous, and particularly around the airport, and knocking out those guns would not necessarily mean that the people who were

there couldn't bring in more guns.

And you'd have, in the middle of this, a U.N. effort to deliver humanitarian supplies to the people of Sarajevo.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Well, obviously, you'd suspend the planes going into the airport while American bombers were bombing the hills, Mr. Secretary.

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NILES: I am not sure such an attack would be a prudent course, nor am I sure, as a nonmilitary person, I'm not in a position to say that it would necessarily be the kind of message we'd want to send to President Milosevic.

REP. KOSTMAYER: What kind of a message do you think it would send to him?

NILES: I'm not sure--

REP. KOSTMAYER: Don't you think it would stop the killing at least temporarily, and bring him perhaps to the table?

What have we done to make this situation intolerable for him?

NILES: We are--we are in the process of making that situation intolerable, I believe through a combination of economic sanctions and political isolation.

REP. KOSTMAYER: I can't understand why unilateral or U.N.-sanctioned airstrikes wouldn't be effective and might not  
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bring them to the table and would at least stop the killing?

NILES: Well, all I can tell you is that the opinion of the military experts, of whom I am not one, would differ, Mr. Congressman.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Well, your testimony today has been deeply disappointing.

NILES: I'm sorry you find it so.

REP. KOSTMAYER: Well, it's reminiscent, I think, of the attitude of the State Department prior to World War II when we turned our backs on the Jews of Europe, as we did in this country.

And I believe that the time will come when we look back on the conduct of this administration with deep shame and humiliation.

NILES: Well, I have take very strong exception to

that. You can be--

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REP. KOSTMAYER: You can take strong exception to it.

NILES: Well, I will. And the fact of the matter is that the United States has been at the forefront--

REP. KOSTMAYER: The United States has not been at the forefront. President Bush has not shown any leadership. This is the most weak-kneed lily-livered presentation I have heard in 15 years in the Congress. You haven't shown any leadership, and neither has he. And there isn't anybody sitting up here or out there who thinks you've shown leadership.

Basically every member of this panel, Mr. Secretary, has been critical of the administration for not showing leadership. You haven't shown any leadership. You're scared of your own shadow.

NILES: That's nonsense, Congressman, let me be quite frank and tell you that. The fact of the matter is, if you equate leadership with the use of force, you're turning your back on some of the most important capabilities that the United States and the international community has to deal with a problem such as we have--

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REP. KOSTMAYER: You aren't even prepared to threaten this guy. You aren't even prepared to say, we will consider U.N.-sanctioned military force.

NILES: I just said that; we're working on it.

REP. KOSTMAYER: You say: I won't rule it in, and I won't rule it out.

You aren't prepared to even talk tough. You aren't prepared to make a threat. You grudgingly acknowledge the analogy with Hitler; you only do it very grudgingly. You're defensive.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. WAYNE OWENS (D-UT): Mr. Secretary, you just said that we're not talking presidential politics here. And yet I know several weeks ago the administration was talking a lot tougher, a lot firmer, about the possibility of using force to deliver relief to Sarajevo.

But 10 days ago, the Democratic presidential nominee made a strong statement for just such military intervention. And  
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the next day the president's press secretary let loose a

fusillade, which was basically condemned by the former Republican chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, because the position of Mr. Clinton was basically his, and of many other Republicans.

But there has very apparently been a retreat on the part of the State Department from a willingness to get involved to provide this humanitarian relief which is so desperately needed, which was stated so movingly by our colleague from California just a few minutes ago.

What is happening if presidential politics isn't intervening? You say that it is not. It certainly looks like you have backed away from your own position because of where the Democratic nominee has gone, what has happened other than that in the last two weeks to indicate this lessened interest in some military assistance?

NILES: Well, Congressman, I've been involved in dealing with the crisis in the former Yugoslavia for some time, and certainly, experience covers the period to which you refer, and I can assure you there have been no changes, there has been no change, in the position of the department, or for that  
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matter, the position of the administration as far as the readiness of the United States to support a U.N. Security Council resolution to make available certain types of military support for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

That position has been, and remains clear. I don't think it's changed. At least I'm not aware of any changes in it. And in response to the questions posed by Congressman Lantos and Chairman Hamilton, we have been working in New York. We continue that effort to secure what we consider to be the necessary United Nations Security Council resolution.

REP. OWENS: Well, I thought you were very vague on that. Are we in fact pressing the Security Council to pass just such a resolution?

NILES: This is a process that involves a certain amount of negotiation--

REP. OWENS: We are negotiating but not pushing?

NILES: We are working with our allies, in the first  
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instance the British and the French, to come up with a resolution that we believe would gain the support of the nine members of the Council, including the five permanent members.

REP. OWENS: Are we circulating a draft, and asking for U.N. approval?

NILES: This is obviously something that we wish to accomplish. And we support it, certainly. But coming up with a resolution that can command the necessary support within the Security Council when you're talking about the possibility of using military force is not an easy--

REP. OWENS: When do you think something will happen, Mr. Secretary?

NILES: Well, we've been pushing, we've been working for some time in the Security Council on this. I can't predict exactly when that will happen, but honestly, we hope it will happen very soon.

REP. OWENS: This week?

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NILES: I wouldn't want to give you--put a deadline on it. But we're working, and that's basically what I can tell you today. Efforts continue.

REP. OWENS: We watched the grandmother of these two children, or one of these two children ourselves on television this morning if we caught the morning news, herself hit by armaments at the funeral.

Now when are you going to get something done in the United Nations?

NILES: Mr. Chairman, this does not depend solely on the United States.

REP. OWENS: We understand that.

NILES: If it did, I can assure you that the action would already have been taken. But we need to work in a group of 15 countries to come up with nine votes in favor of a resolution, including at least no veto by one of the permanent members. And that's not something that can be automatically

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achieved in the case of the former Yugoslavia. That's my point.

So we're working on this very diligently. We're working in the U.N. We're working in capitals. We're in contact with the other Security Council members.

I can't tell you when we'll come up with the necessary support for this resolution, but we certainly are doing all we can to get there.

REP. OWENS: Well, it certainly look to me like you have lost heart.

NILES: I don't see on what basis you can say that. I don't see on what basis you can say that, because I'm telling

you exactly what we're doing. We're pushing ahead.

NILES: I don't believe it's possible--I really wish we could extract the element of presidential politics from this.  
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I don't think you can show any sign of change in the position of the administration over this period, irrespective of what may have been said on the campaign trail.

REP. OWENS: I think I have, and I think I probably will. But let's move to Secretary of State Cheney--

NILES: Secretary of State Baker, or defense, Cheney?

REP. OWENS: Secretary of Defense Cheney, who may be acting secretary of state, apparently. Because he said last week that the U.S. could not intervene militarily in Bosnia because we did not know who the enemy is.

Do we know who the enemy is there in Bosnia? I thought that you said quite clearly that we did.

NILES: We know, and we believe, and we're not alone in this--I think the international community shares that view--that the government of Serbia, and the Serbian forces, are primarily responsible for the tragedy in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Knowing that, and being convinced of that, does not necessarily mean that you can identify a military target against  
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which you can move. And that, I think, is what the secretary of defense had in mind.

If you look at the conflict currently underway across the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is difficult to come up with clear military objectives that one might go after in order to deal with this problem.

So what we've been trying to do, Congressman, is to, if you will, go to the source. Go to the government in Belgrade, which we consider to be primarily responsible for this tragedy, and put sufficient pressure on them, so that they would withdraw, and pull back from their efforts to create a Serbian state of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

REP. OWENS: What pressure are you putting on them?

NILES: Economic sanctions to start with, which we believe are having a very very pronounced negative impact on the economy of Serbia-Montenegro.

Political pressure, creating a situation in which Serbia-Montenegro is regarded by the international community as a pariah state.

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REP. OWENS: Are you threatening an air cap?

NILES: I beg your pardon?

REP. OWENS: Are you threatening an air cap? Are you threatening military protection for the relief troops? Are you threatening use of military force?

NILES: We are not threatening that. We are working in the United Nations for a resolution which would authorize the use of military force to secure the delivery of humanitarian supplies.

I don't think it's prudent to threaten the use of force before you're in a position--

REP. OWENS: What else will Mr. Milosevic listen to?

NILES: I hope ultimately that Mr. Milosevic listens to the people of Serbia, who are in the end going to suffer terribly as a result of the collapse of the Serbian economy.

REP. OWENS: In justifying military action against  
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Iraq, President Bush of course invoked an analogy between Saddam Hussein and Hitler. But in Bosnia, it seems like to me the Hitler comparison is even more compelling.

With these reports of torture, which you said aren't clear, but which your spokesman yesterday made clear a pattern of abuse, these reports of ethnic cleansing, this final solution idea, isn't the comparison with Hitler even clearer than it was in Iraq, in Kuwait?

NILES: The comparison between the actions of the government of Serbia and that of National Socialism?

REP. OWENS: That is correct, the system of torture and--

NILES: Well, leave aside these latest reports which I continue to say we have never said we could confirm, but which we are seeking to confirm. We believe that the actions of the Serbian authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina are totally beyond the realm of what is acceptable, and disgraceful behavior.

Ethnic cleansing is a policy reminiscent of the policies of national socialism, so if that's a comparison you'd  
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like to draw, I can see some good justification for it.

REP. LANTOS: You know, even in your opening remark this morning, you deferred to the EC.

I would just like you to respond to one of my points. Would it not be desirable to have a bipartisan position on this

issue? And what steps has the administration taken to develop a bipartisan position? Has Governor Clinton been called in to discuss this crisis?

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NILES: Mr. Lantos, I think there is absolutely no relationship between the fact that we happen to be in a presidential election year, and the policy that we have adopted in dealing with the crisis.

REP. LANTOS: There is a 10-year-old child who disbelieves it.

NILES: Well, I'm sorry about that 10-year-old child, that I'd have to disagree with him or her. But honestly, I do not believe that we have been dominated or influence--

REP. LANTOS: Has Governor Clinton been briefed or brought in for consultations on this matter?

NILES: I don't know, Mr. Lantos. That's not my responsibility. I'd be delighted to brief the governor, if he'd like to come and talk to me about Yugoslavia. And I'm sure the same is true of the secretary of state and acting Secretary Eagleburger.

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REP. LANTOS: Has such a briefing been offered?

NILES: I'm not aware of that, nor has such a briefing been requested, at least not to the best of my knowledge. Now if such a briefing is requested, I'd be more than happy to do it myself. But as far as I know there has not been a request to do that.

But we're not talking about presidential politics here. This is not what is driving the problem and not driving our response to the problem.

We're trying, as I tried to describe, maybe inadequately, in response to the chairman's questions, to put together a firm international coalition of countries that are prepared to take appropriation action to deal with this serious crisis.

Now, there are a number of things that can be undertaken short of the use of military force, that President Bush has not excluded, and we might indeed be prepared to do that; but it's not a step that any leader, President Bush, the European leaders, are prepared to take on lightly. And this is the situation in which we're acting today.

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REP. HAMILTON: Mr. Secretary, just a point. What

presence do we have as a government in Bosnia-Herzegovina today?

NILES: We do not have diplomatic representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We did not have a consulate in Sarajevo prior to the--

REP. HAMILTON: So we have no U.S. personnel?

NILES: We have no U.S. diplomatic personnel there. We certainly have people with the U.N. forces. We have military pilots and so on coming in with the flights.

REP. HAMILTON: How do you expect to confirm these reports if you don't have anybody there?

NILES: Well, we have contacts with the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and what we're suggesting, Mr. Chairman, is not that the United States confirm directly these reports, but that the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has responsibility under the Geneva Conventions for atrocities of this type, or verification of atrocities of this type, would be  
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in a position to visit these detention facilities.

REP. HAMILTON: What I'm trying to drive at, there's quite a distinction being made here between the word 'report' and the word 'confirm'. You have reports, but you don't have confirmation. At what point does a report become confirmed in your view?

NILES: When an authority, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, is able to visit a facility and confirm that something either has or has not happened; or something is or is not happening. That's one way to do it.

I mean, obviously, there are other ways to do it. But given the nature of the charge, which has been levied here, and the responsibilities that the International Committee of the Red Cross has under the Geneva Conventions, we believe that that organization--and that organization believes that it is the best qualified organization to follow these charges up.

REP. HAMILTON: You're in a real box here. The Red Cross can't get to these camps. How can they possibly confirm it?

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NILES: The Red Cross has not yet been able to get to the camps, Mr. Chairman.

REP. HAMILTON: But Serbia can block their access to them.

NILES: Serbia could block their access, that is correct.

REP. HAMILTON: And therefore they would block the ability of you to confirm.

NILES: Well, if Serbia would block the access of the International Committee of the Red Cross, I assume they would block the efforts by say the United States independently to go in and verify what's going on in these camps.

So we think that an impartial, internationally recognized body, such as the ICRC is, the best qualified body to go and try to verify what in fact is happening in these camps. And that is the effort which we're pushing for.

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REP. HAMILTON: The reports that you have at this point are what kind of reports? Just from the media in general?

NILES: Oh, no, no. Media reports indeed. And we also have reports which I cited from our telegram from our embassy in Belgrade that the Bosnian government has released a list of 105 concentration camps and prisons, 94 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, plus 11 in Serbian Montenegro, where they claim these activities are taking place.

Now, the ICRC has this information and has requested the right to visit them, and we have strongly supported that request with the Serbian authorities. Now, that's where we are today.

We have gone back, or our charge d'affaires has been instructed by the acting secretary of state, to go back to the prime minister of Serbian Montenegro, Mr. Ponich (phonetic), and to insist that the ICRC has the right to visit these camps.

And that's basically where we are right now.

REP. HAMILTON: Mr. Gilman.

REP. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN (R-NY): Mr. Chairman, I want  
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to welcome Secretary Niles with us today, and we appreciate his reviewing these problems with us.

Mr. Niles, is it accurate that the Serbian repression is increasing in the Kossovo province? And just what is the state of affairs now in the Kossovo province?

NILES: Well, I wouldn't say that the Serbian repression in Kossovo is increasing. It is continuing at the same unacceptable high level where it has been for several years, Congressman Gilman.

I could say, there's a report on the very interesting development, I think today, yesterday I'm sorry, a CSCE monitor team arrived in Belgrade, mandated by the CSCE summit earlier--

well, I'm sorry, last month in Helsinki to visit Kossovo, the Byobordina (phonetic), and the Sanjak of Novi Pesar (phonetic) in south central Serbia to look into the situation there, and to determine what's going on.

So the efforts of the international community, again I would say spearheaded by the United States to keep pressure on the Serbian authorities, to cease their human rights violations among other places in Kossovo, are continuing, and are bearing some fruit.

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REP. GILMAN: Did we take up the Kossovo problems with Mr. Milosevic?

NILES: We've taken them up with Mr. Milosevic ad infinitum, Congressman Gilman.

REP. GILMAN: Recently?

NILES: Most recently, I guess, when my deputy, Ralph Johnson, was in Belgrade in April, spent 6{ hours with Mr. Milosevic.

He is not one to have a reasonable conversation with about the problems of Kossovo. But we certainly have taken up the issue with him.

REP. GILMAN: So essentially we didn't accomplish too much?

NILES: No, we haven't. But we have continued to focus international attention on the problems of Kossovo, on the human rights violations that are taking place there.

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REP. GILMAN: Mr. Secretary, let's talk for a moment about the Freedom Support Act. It's been awaiting House action for over four months now. And we keep hearing how important it is to move it ahead. And unfortunately, it's my understanding that some of the leadership on the other side of the aisle now opposes even considering the measure.

Can you tell us just where we stand on that measure today?

NILES: Well, obviously, our efforts to secure House action before the recess continue. I understand the president will be meeting with members of the leadership today. We are--we continue to hope that the rules committee could act, maybe as early as tomorrow, on the matter, and that a vote by the House would be possible before adjournment, which as I recall is scheduled for the 11th or 12th of August.

So our efforts continue, and we certainly hope that with a bipartisan effort, that this very important piece of

legislation can clear the House before adjournment, and then shortly after Congress reconvenes in September, a conference to deal with the differences between the two versions of the bill, PRESS RETURN TO CONTINUE OR ENTER ANOTHER REQUEST.

and we can move ahead.

This really is high priority legislation, Congressman.