

Yugoslavia: How Holbrooke Lied His Way into a War

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This is an article originally published in [December 9, 2008](#), while Holbrooke was being considered for the position he held in the Obama administration.

Shortly before the bombing of Yugoslavia began in late March 1999, Richard Holbrooke met with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. By his own account, Holbrooke delivered the final ultimatum to Milosevic — that if Yugoslavia didn't agree to the Rambouillet text, NATO would begin bombing.

The Rambouillet text called for a de facto occupation of Yugoslavia. On major U.S. media, after the bombing of Yugoslavia began, Holbrooke claimed that what was called for in the Rambouillet text, despite Serbian protests, "isn't an occupation". Several weeks later, when confronted by a journalist familiar with the Rambouillet text, Holbrooke claimed: "I never said that". This was a lie, it was also a tacit admission that the Rambouillet text did call for an occupation (why else would Holbrooke deny saying it when he had?) So the U.S. demanded that Yugoslavia submit to occupation or be bombed — and Holbrooke lied about this crucial fact when questioned about the cause of the war.

Here are the specifics: The [Rambouillet text](#) of Feb. 23, 1999, a month before NATO began bombing, contained provisions that provided for NATO to basically occupy the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), not just Kosovo. Excerpts from Appendix (B) ([I attempted to draw attention to this at the time when I became aware of it.](#)):

7. NATO personnel shall be immune from any form of arrest, investigation, or detention by the authorities in the FRY.
8. NATO personnel shall enjoy... free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters.
11. NATO is granted the use of airports, roads, rails and ports without payment...
15. [NATO shall have] the right to use all of the electromagnetic spectrum...

On April 6, 1999, about two weeks after the bombing began, Holbrooke appeared on the Charlie Rose show and was asked about what started the war. ([Video is here](#), approximate times in the interview are provided):

[3:45] "The 81 pages of the Rambouillet agreement, which the Serbs rejected, contain all the elements of a really solid interim solution. ... Although Rambouillet itself was rejected, the principles embodied in the Rambouillet

agreement make a hell of a lot of sense. ...”

[13:00] “The [Yugoslavian government] decision was to trigger the bombing of their own country instead of accepting this very reasonable political offer.” ...

[14:00] Asked how to explain the actions of the Serbs, Holbrooke claims the Serbs said: “The choice you’ve given us is to have our sacred soil violated by an invading force. I said this isn’t an invasion, it isn’t an occupation, it’s an international peacekeeping force that will save the Serb minority in Kosovo. ...”

[15:00] “We walked the last mile for peace.”

[17:00] “The bombing must continue and must intensify until the Yugoslav leadership realizes they have to change their positions.”

On April 23, 1999, journalist Jeremy Scahill of Democracy Now questioned Richard Holbrooke as he was leaving the Overseas Press Club’s 60th anniversary dinner:

Holbrooke: “One question.”

Jeremy Scahill: “You’ve said, since you gave the ultimatum to President Milosevic, that the Rambouillet accords do not call for the occupation of Yugoslavia. In –”

Holbrooke: “I never said that. That’s the end of that. You got the wrong person and the wrong quote. That’s your question.”

Scahill: “Do the Rambouillet accords ... Are the the Rambouillet accords a call for the occupation of Yugoslavia — how do you reconcile that with Appendix B?”

Holbrooke: “I was not at Rambouillet. You’ll have to address it to the people –”

Scahill: “You delivered the ultimatum, you’re familiar with with the text –”

Holbrooke: “I did not discuss that detail with him. That’s your question.”

Scahill: “You haven’t answered the question though.”

Holbrooke: “I have answered the question. Good night.” (See the [April 23, 1999 Democracy Now, especially beginning at 29:00.](#))

It’s tempting for many to think that the current Bush administration and the 2003 invasion of Iraq are totally unique. They’re not, the methods of the U.S. government lying its way into a war are long standing and many of the culprits are still very much part of the political structure.

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