

**Exclusive:**

## **‘Pentagon Behind Karadzic Immunity Deal’, Expert**

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Balkan scholar says State Department insiders have revealed how Holbrooke came under pressure to pledge Bosnian Serb chief’s liberty.

*By Nidzara Ahmetasevic in Sarajevo for BalkanInsight.com*

The former US Envoy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Richard Holbrooke, did strike an unofficial deal with Radovan Karadzic, guaranteeing his freedom, an expert has revealed to Balkan Insight.

Charles Ingrao, a US history professor heading a documentation group on the Balkan wars, told Balkan Insight that Holbrooke “promised Karadzic he would not be arrested if he withdrew from politics”.

Ingrao says that through mediators, Holbrooke made a deal with the former Bosnian Serb leader in order to remove him from the political stage in the Republika Srpska, RS, the Bosnian Serb entity established at the 1995 Dayton, Ohio, peace talks.

He warned that written evidence of the agreement was unlikely to emerge, however. “Holbrooke is not stupid,” Ingrao said. “There is nothing written.”

Ingrao said his information came from four independent sources in the US State Department whose names he could not divulge. “We cannot reveal their identities, since they are still very active and would, in some cases, suffer professionally,” he said.

Ingrao said Holbrooke had been given no option but to offer key concessions to Karadzic regarding his future liberty.

“A top State Department official with intimate knowledge of Holbrooke’s activities has confirmed that the Ambassador explicitly assured Karadzic that he would not be arrested,

a concession known to several others at the State Department who have remained silent,” he said.

“It was the Pentagon, backed by [then President Bill] Clinton, that presented Holbrooke with a ‘fait accompli’ that US forces would not seize ICTY indictees,” he continued.

Ingrao’s statements come after the International Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia, ICTY, published a letter written by Karadzic in which he referred to an agreement struck with Holbrooke in 1996.

According to Karadzic’s letter, Holbrooke promised the Bosnian Serb chief would not be hunted down or arrested as long as he withdrew from the political scene and public life.

Holbrooke has strongly denied Karadzic’s claims that he offered him immunity from arrest while negotiating Karadzic’s withdrawal from public life.

"I'm tired of hearing to this piece of crap which is put up by Karadzic," Holbrooke said in [an interview given to BIRN Kosovo Director Jeta Xharra](#), in November 2006.

“The fact is that we made no deal with Karadzic,” he said.

The US State Department has also denied allegations that Holbrooke struck a deal underwriting Karadzic’s freedom.

“Ambassador Holbrooke and we have repeatedly made clear that no agreement was ever made in which Radovan Karadzic was provided immunity from prosecution or arrest,” a statement issued on July 31 read.

“No commitments granting Karadzic immunity were offered in return [for stepping down],” it continued.

Reports of a Holbrooke–Karadzic deal first surfaced in the Bosnian weekly, Slobodna Bosna, several years ago. One of the sources it cited was Aleksa Buha, foreign minister in Karadzic’s government and his successor as a head of Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, in 1996.

Buha claimed he knew of the agreement, and even possessed a copy of it in written form, though he did not produce written evidence for the weekly’s benefit.

Ingrao heads “The Scholar’s Initiative”, a programme involving about 300 scholars worldwide, working to establish the facts about the fall of Yugoslavia.

A former NATO commander in Bosnia in 1995 and 1996, General William Nash, meanwhile told Radio Netherlands Worldwide that “no specific orders were given for the arrest of the war crimes suspects Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic”.

He added: "It was feared that it would destabilize the situation after the Dayton agreements."

Holbrooke was sent to Belgrade in mid-July 1996 to negotiate Karadzic's withdrawal with the then Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic. At the time, the media said that following ten hours of talks, Holbrooke appeared before reporters, triumphant, with a statement about an agreement. "As of this morning, Karadzic is no longer president of Republika Srpska," Holbrooke is quoted to have said.

Ingrao said it was time the complete truth emerged. As the Scholars' project's American director, he said, he felt "a special obligation to hold the US government to account for its share of the responsibility for what happened in Bosnia".

The Scholar's Initiative notes that not one war-crimes indictee was arrested by NATO forces during their first 18 months of deployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Karadzic was wanted by the ICTY for genocide, compliance in genocide and crimes against humanity. The tribunal is still seeking the arrest and handover of two other top Serbian suspects, the former Bosnian Serb military chief, Ratko Mladic and the former Croatian Serb leader, Goran Hadzic.