

Envoy Denies Immunity Offer to Leader of Bosnian Serbs

By [MARLISE SIMONS](#)

Published: March 25, 2009

PARIS — A member of the American team negotiating to remove the Bosnian Serb leader [Radovan Karadzic](#) from power in 1996 said that he was never promised immunity from prosecution as part of a deal to step down, contradicting several accounts cited in an [article](#) on Sunday in The New York Times.

Philip S. Goldberg, who was on the team led by [Richard C. Holbrooke](#), issued a statement saying that “at no time during the negotiations in Belgrade or elsewhere in the region was an immunity agreement made or contemplated.”

The Times article reported that a new study published by [Purdue University](#) said that Mr. Karadzic had been promised that he would not be pursued by the war crimes tribunal in The Hague if he left politics. Several people cited anonymously in the study were also interviewed by The Times.

Mr. Holbrooke, now a special representative on Afghanistan and Pakistan for the Obama administration, has repeatedly denied having made such a promise. Objecting to the publication of the article in The Times, he reiterated his denial, cited in the article, and challenged the reliance on anonymous sources by both the article and the Purdue study.

The people quoted “should have the courage to identify themselves,” he said in an e-mail message to The Times. “All of this is fabricated and untrue.”

Longstanding rumors of a deal have resurfaced because of the publication of the Purdue study and because Mr. Karadzic has repeatedly said that he had been promised immunity at the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, forcing the court to deal with this claim.

Mr. Karadzic, who was [arrested](#) last summer, faces charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The judges have ruled that no immunity agreement would be valid in cases involving charges of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity. Mr. Karadzic has appealed that ruling.

Two of the people interviewed for the article in The Times, a former senior State Department official who served in the Balkans and an American who was involved with peacekeeping in the 1990s, said Mr. Holbrooke had assured Mr. Karadzic that he would not be pursued for war crimes. The second American said that Mr. Holbrooke had personally and emphatically told him about the deal on two occasions.

Contacted again this week, they stood by their version of the events.

Another American diplomat cited in the study as having drafted the agreement for Mr. Karadzic to give up power, [Christopher R. Hill](#), sent an e-mail message to The Times on Tuesday denying any role in it. Mr. Hill, who had previously been on Mr. Holbrooke's Balkans team, said that by that time he had already moved to Macedonia as the United States ambassador. "I had nothing to do with anything regarding Karadzic's departure either in Macedonia or before," he wrote. "I was not consulted, nor did I produce any papers."

The study's co-editor, Charles W. Ingrao, said Tuesday that he would look into Mr. Hill's contention.

After intense negotiations, Mr. Karadzic agreed to step down on July 18, 1996, and signed a brief statement that made no mention of immunity.

American diplomats have said that rumors of an immunity deal emerged in Serbia in recent years, circulated by Mr. Karadzic's relatives. David Binder, a former Balkans correspondent for The Times who is now retired, said Wednesday that Mr. Karadzic told him in 1996, shortly after he stepped down as the Bosnian Serb president, that Mr. Holbrooke had offered him an immunity deal.

Obrad Kesic, who said he had met Mr. Karadzic in Pale, Bosnia, with Mr. Binder, confirmed the account.