

Air Force report on Ron Brown crash dodges the crucial question

by an EIR Investigative Team

On June 7, the U.S. Air Force released a several-thousand-page report on its investigation into the causes of the crash which took the life of U.S. Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown and 34 other top industry and government officials, during a trip to Bosnia and Croatia in April 1996. A serious evaluation of the Air Force report requires looking at two distinct issues, only one of which was touched upon in the report itself.

First, the report accurately and, by all appearances, honestly, presents the evidence that the security and safety procedures used by the Air Force during Secretary Brown's trip were horribly flawed, by what Lyndon LaRouche has called "consensual pragmatism," at every level of the command and operation. "Don't rock the boat," "carry out the mission, no questions asked," was the order of the day—even when it meant violating the basic rules of conduct, while operating in a theater of conflict.

Those procedural violations compound the investigative problem involved: The plane had rudimentary navigational equipment, no cockpit recorder, and the crew are all dead. In fact, no one knows, definitively, what caused the "pilot error" that apparently caused the crash, and the Air Force explanation is merely a plausible conclusion, drawn from the existing evidence.

But what the official report leaves out, is the political context—the motive—which could have impelled someone to take advantage of security loopholes so big, that it remains impossible to rule out that the flight was intentionally sabotaged—an act of murder, in effect, an act of war, against the United States and its policy in the region. The only conclusion that can be drawn at this point, is that the ultimate cause of the death of the secretary and his delegation is still uncertain.

That omission is the final flaw in the Air Force procedures that contributed to the death of Ron Brown.

Anglo-French 'war' against the U.S.

To properly evaluate the circumstances of the crash, it is essential to briefly review the state of affairs in Bosnia at the time of the secretary's visit.

British and French efforts to sabotage the U.S.-brokered Dayton Accords had precipitated a deep crisis. Although the purely military aspects of the peace agreement were moving

along on schedule—with no help from London or Paris—the far more critical economic reconstruction mission was stalled, in no small measure, through the sabotage of European Commissioner Carl Bildt, according to Pentagon sources involved in the Dayton Accords implementation. As recently reported in the London *Guardian*, during the long period of United Nations control over the Bosnia "peacekeeping" mission, prior to Dayton, British, and, at times, French forces had done everything in their power to covertly aid the Serbs in their war of genocide against the Bosnian and Croat populations. Bosnia, as *EIR* reported, was a battleground in the "war and a half" between the Clinton administration and the British.

To break the impasse, President Clinton decided, once again, to take unilateral American action. He turned to one of his most trusted colleagues, Secretary Brown, and asked him to organize commitments from some of America's leading construction and heavy industrial firms to rebuild Bosnia. According to Defense Department (DOD) sources, Brown organized commitments of over \$30 billion in infrastructure projects from dozens of American companies. The delegation of corporate CEOs and senior executives that Secretary Brown brought to Bosnia personified that commitment.

Given the strategic stakes in the Brown mission, given the venomous hatred that London and its French junior partners expressed toward the Clinton effort, and given the ongoing efforts of the Serbs to wreck the Dayton agreements, it would be folly to rule out the possibility that the crash of Brown's plane was an act of aggression by Britain or any of its surrogates. British Special Air Services (SAS) units operating on the ground, in forward positions in Bosnia, during the phase of UN "peacekeeping" forces, were guilty of abetting Serbian mass-murder, according to the *Guardian* and other accounts. Why not murder Ron Brown?

An 'accident' waiting to happen

At the press conference at which the Air Force report was released, Air Force Gen. Ronald Fogelman made what had to have been the most painful statement of his career:

"The United States Air Force was given the mission to provide operational support airlift for Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown and his party of American industrialists while they conducted various visits to sites throughout the Balkans.

. . . We failed to execute that mission. As a result of that failure, 35 lives were lost—29 civilians, to include Secretary Brown, some of the most distinguished business leaders in America, dedicated members of the Commerce Department, and six members of the United States Air Force, in addition to two Croatian nationals.”

His report went on to provide details of the final minutes of the flight, and the fatal “navigational error,” made by a crew which was attempting a complicated instrument approach, which they did not have the training to execute, using the outdated equipment they had aboard.

The report reveals that this was an accident waiting to happen. The general in charge of the 86th Air Wing, his executive officer, and the operations officer for the unit, have been relieved of their commands, and may be court-martialed, because they failed to implement a 1994 headquarters directive which said that no instrument landings could be made at non-DOD fields, unless the commercially published approach charts were reviewed and certified as accurate and safe, by the Pentagon. The approach into Dubrovnik, Croatia, where the crash occurred, had not been approved for instrument landings. General Fogelman pointed to this as the fundamental problem raised by the report: “How could we have an Air Force instruction in the field that was not being complied with, at the major air-command level? I need to find the answer to that, because, in my view, that’s the start of this chain of events.

“We had evaluated a situation—that is, the use of these non-DOD approaches—and, based on that evaluation, which did not just occur here in the headquarters—we had inputs from out in the field—we made a very deliberate decision to change the Air Force policy. We made it. We distributed that guidance to the field, and it was not implemented. . . . That, more than anything else, haunts me.”

The chain of command involved in implementing, or not implementing, this order, is not a short one. The 76th Airlift Squadron, which was flying Secretary Brown that day, provides special mission airlift support to visitors from the White House, Congress, the Department of Defense, and other U.S. and foreign dignitaries. The 76th Airlift Squadron is one of three flying squadrons belonging to Ramstein Air Base’s 86th Airlift Wing. The Commander U.S. Air Forces in Europe, or USAFE, has operational control of all airlift operational support airlift in the European theater in the 86th Airlift Wing.

Requirements come directly from Headquarters United States Air Force Special Air Missions Office at the Pentagon, or from U.S. European Command Stuttgart, Germany, and they go directly to the 76th Airlift Squadron through the USAFE Air Operations Squadron. Command is exercised by USAFE through the 17th Air Force Sembach Air Base, Germany, and the 86th Airlift Wing and the 86th Air Operations Group, both at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. The 86th Airlift Wing is the most heavily tasked flying unit in the entire Air Force, and not only provides VIP support throughout the

European theater, but has handled most of the logistics for the IFOR (Implementation Force) operations in Bosnia. Without its capabilities, there would be no flexibility in U.S. policy, on the ground, in the entire region.

In 1994, the Air Force reviewed the status of the navigational charts and procedures which were being used throughout the Eastern European Region—which had only recently been open to western aviation—and determined that unless DOD specialists certified the published approach information as accurate, no instrument landings could be permitted. The implications, for the 86th Air Wing, were enormous. According to General Fogelman, if they had followed this directive, they “would not have been able to carry out their mission.”

It has not been explained, why this clearly problematic aspect of the Air Force directive was not addressed when it was issued. And it seems disingenuous, to act as though no one in the Air Force knew that its most heavily tasked unit was somehow fulfilling its missions, even though that would be impossible under the regulations. The record does show how the problem was overcome at the unit level: There was a consensus to break the rule. One way around the directive was to request a waiver for a particular airfield. Such a request was made for the Dubrovnik approach, by the 86th Airlift Wing, and it was *rejected* by the Air Force Flight Standards Agency on Jan. 2, 1996.

An officer at USAFE headquarters sent a message to the 86th Operations Group commander on Jan. 23, informing him of the waiver denial, and instructing him to rescind the 86th Airlift Wing instruction authorizing the use of Jeppesen approaches at unreviewed airfields. The message also instructed the group commander to forward a list of airfields to USAFE for review.

After receiving the USAFE message, the 86th Operations Group commander sent an e-mail message to the wing commander, vice commander, and the squadron commanders, as well as certain officers at USAFE and the 17th Air Force, saying, “My view on this: Safety is not compromised if we continue flying ops normal until approaches are reviewed.” The wing commander replied, also via e-mail, “Let’s step back and use common sense . . . these approaches have been used for years and years. . . .” A meeting took place shortly afterwards between the group commander and the three squadron commanders, and the report states that the “consensus from the squadron commanders and [the] chief of standardization and evaluation was that safety was not compromised and the Jeppesen approaches could be continued to be flown,” pending major command review. After the meeting, the 86th Operations Group commander elected to continue to fly “ops normal,” even though he knew that the wing was not following the letter of the directive.

Carl Osgood, Jim Olson, and Leo Scanlon contributed to this report.