



On 7 September 1991, the first session of the European Community Conference on Yugoslavia, chaired by former British Foreign Secretary Lord Peter Carrington, was held in The Hague. Though it would undergo reformations and changes, the Conference would continue to exist for over four years, yet ultimately would ultimately largely failed in its mandate to resolve the Yugoslav Crisis. The war in Croatia ended not with a comprehensive settlement, but with Croatian military victory, while the settlement ending the even bloodier war in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina would be delivered by a separate American mission led by Richard Holbrooke, not the Peace Conference.

Significant scholarly attention has been given to the peace mediation effort and the reasons for its failures before 1995. However, most of this has focused on the roles of governments and international organisations, or on the deficiencies of the particular peace plans proposed. With the exception of Holbrooke, the individual mediators who chaired the peace talks have been subject to relatively little detailed personal analysis, instead largely only being discussed as minor details within a much broader diplomatic effort.

In this presentation, focusing on the roles of three such mediators – Peter Carrington, Cyrus Vance, and David Owen – I argue that the personal roles of individual mediators in fact played a more significant role in the development of the conflicts and the possibilities for how they might end than has often been appreciated. The structures of the Peace Conference gave them considerable autonomy and discretion to set the terms and norms of peace talks as they wished, and to propose models for settlement that they thought reasonable and realistic. As a general rule they were unfamiliar with the Balkans as a region, and their approaches to peace talks, and the solutions they proposed, often reflected their prior experiences and prejudices acquired over the course of their political careers.