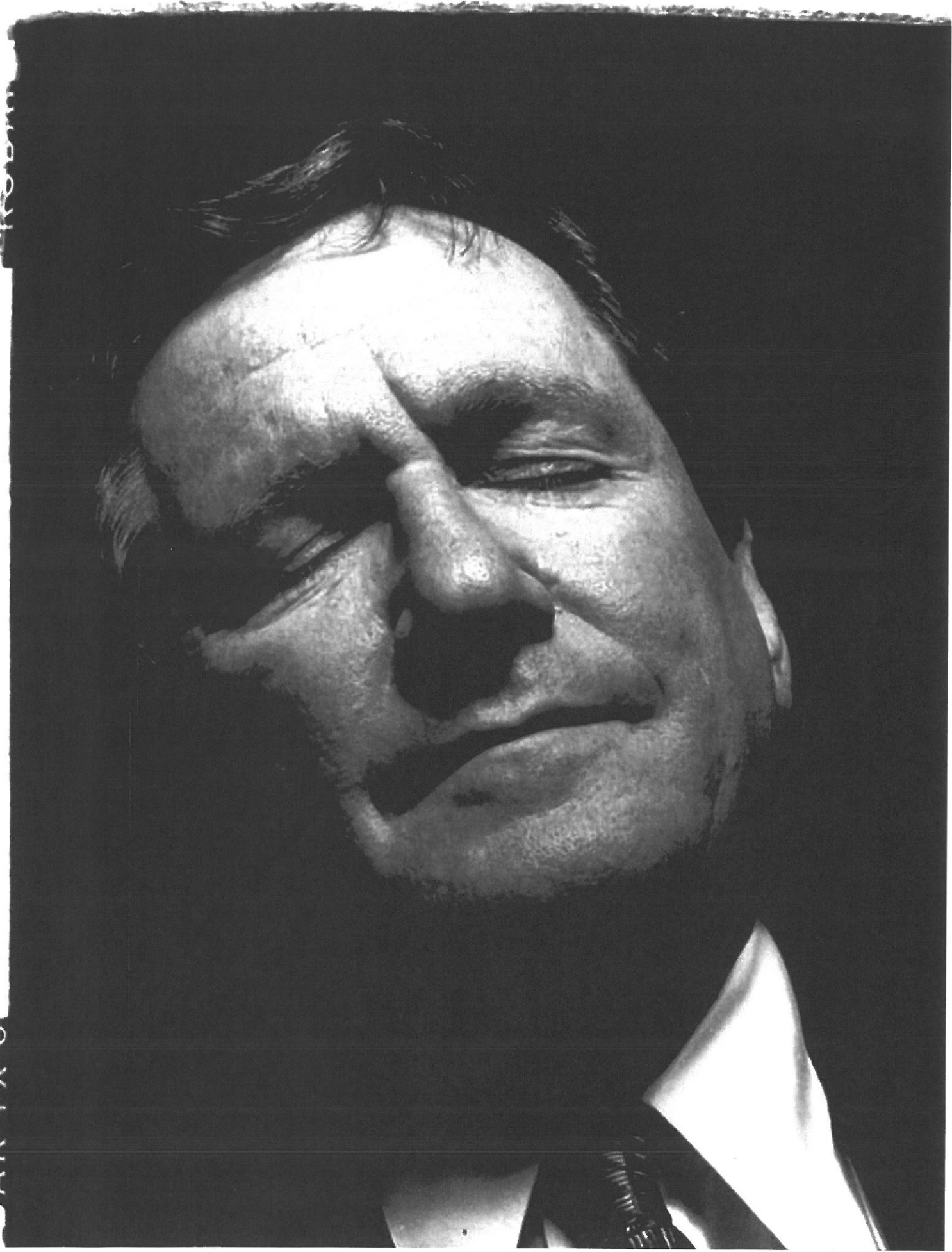


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When a Diplomat Dreams

Richard Holbrooke's Pragmatic Vision

RICHARD HOLBROOKE has a Dream. The "I Have a Dream" page in the *Leben* section of *Die Zeit* gives celebrated artists, statesmen, and personalities the opportunity to conjure up a world free of reality's constraints. Here the American Academy's founding trustee Richard Holbrooke spoke to journalist Christine Brinck about his vision of finding diplomatic solutions to the world's thorniest problems.

Richard Holbrooke, 61, is widely regarded as a leading authority on Europe in the United States. After serving as US Ambassador to Germany in Bonn in 1993–94, he was Assistant Secretary of State for Europe in the Clinton Administration. He became well known through his work as the US Balkan representative and architect of the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the war in Bosnia. Until early 2001, Holbrooke was the US Ambassador to the United Nations. He works today as an investment banker in New York and is committed to several non-profit organizations and causes, most notably aid for refugees and the battle against AIDS.

As a young man, I was in Vietnam and took part in the Paris Peace Talks. I directed the Peace Corps in Morocco. During the Yugoslavia conflict, I saw horrific tragedies and negotiated directly with Milosevic. At the United Nations, I sat among dictators and charlatans. All the wickedness I have seen should make me a cynic, but I have not stopped dreaming. I dream of a world in which people have more consideration for each other's problems and fears – of a world in which people are not satisfied so long as inequality remains widespread. I dream of seeing the gap between the rich and the poor begin to close.

Instead of this, I see a world increasingly divided – into north and south, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped. More and more people find themselves living in hopeless conditions. When I was growing up, diseases like smallpox, polio, and malaria were being eradicated. True, smallpox has not returned, but polio and malaria are not yet conquered, and tuberculosis has come back with a vengeance. At a time of amazingly rapid medical advances, how can general health conditions be deteriorating so drastically? It is a frightening surprise.

My father was a doctor, and he wanted me to become a doctor too. He died when I was a teenager. By that time I had long

since decided against a career in medicine. But much later I realized that his commitment to helping other people had influenced me profoundly. His intellectual curiosity and his humanity always inspired me. This is why I dream of a world of suspended egotism and increased generosity. This can be realized with the help of international organizations, governments, and humanitarian NGOs. Bill Gates's immunization program is of historic importance. His efforts to support the development of vaccines have been exemplary. We need more "dreamers" like Gates, Ted Turner, and George Soros. When I dream, I see rich people spending less on jewelry and more on humanitarian aid.

Virtually everyone is aware of these problems, but few are actively doing something to solve them. We sit around at international conferences – myself sometimes included – drink good wine, smoke cigars, and come to the conclusion that nothing can be done.

For me, the so-called "German-American crisis" is not a crisis but more like a family quarrel. Rather than wring our hands, Europe and North America should sit down together and try to solve the widespread problems in Africa, Asia, and Latin America – not to mention in the poor neighborhoods in cities like New York and Berlin. This is my biggest dream.

But it seems that the trends are heading in the opposite direction. A lot of people are ready to claim that these ideas are unrealistic and naïve – the dreams of "liberal softies." To them, the world is nasty and brutal, just as Hobbes described it. There are articles and editorials out there affirming that human beings are wicked by nature and that war is the most normal thing in the world. I don't believe it. I believe that the majority of humanity is good. (Though there are some admittedly awful types one has to deal with.) I had a wonderful, successful time in government service, and I am thankful for what I was able to accomplish in Asia and Europe, for refugees, and in the fight against AIDS. In my dream, I get another chance to serve the public and make a difference.

I am not an artist, a poet, or an author. I am practical – even when dreaming. That's just the way I am. I always want to determine which dream can be made a reality. In my dream, the US remains the

leading power, using its power and wealth to guide the world actively in the fight against the problems on both sides of terror. In my dream, the US leads, and Europe is a partner. We argue less about trade issues and instead seek a common strategy for helping the world's poor. These poor countries would no longer be enticed or bullied or misled by charlatans and liars – like Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Dos Santos in Angola, Saddam in Iraq, or Khaddafi in Libya – who have betrayed and stolen from their own citizens.

In this dream world, people act rationally, listening to truth instead of their emotions. Religion would be a holy, private matter – not state-dictated or controlled, as it is in Iran or the Balkans. This is no simple fantasy of "peace on earth" and brotherhood among all peoples. It is not a dream based on empty rhetoric or magic. I'm still a pragmatist. War, disease, and poverty will not disappear. Even a dreamer knows this. I dream that we Americans will renew our engagement, which was so incredibly strong after World War II but has just faded away in the last twenty years. The evil in Europe was defeated, the restructuring was moving forward, and many people were better off than before. But somewhere along the line, the willingness to engage in the problems of the world disappeared and was replaced by a sort of social Darwinism.

The American optimism of the 1950s and 1960s is gone. In my dream, the problems of the world, large and small, are solved by leadership. Then I wake up, turn on the television, and watch the morning news.

There is one dream I will never abandon: that in the world's biggest conflict zones – the Balkans, the Middle East, Cyprus, and Kashmir – each side will eventually acknowledge that the other side has a point. The total victory of one side over the other is impossible. Only when both sides find a way to live with each other will the people begin to realize their potential. This potential has, for political reasons, been denied to entire generations. I dream that these deep ethnic, religious, and national differences can be bridged through understanding, and that differing views can be taken into account. Even if we are not convinced of one another, "Let's agree to disagree."

By the way, one of my dreams has become a reality: the American Academy on Berlin's lake Wannsee. After five successful years, the Academy has come into own. It is a dream come true – a durable institution aimed at deepening the American understanding of Germany and the Germans, supported by people on both sides of the Atlantic, like Henry Kissinger and Richard von Weizsäcker. ◀



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