

FW: The Envoy

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The Envoy

Posted by Hendrik Hertzberg

Last night, as I was unlocking my bike on a windswept Greenwich Village sidewalk after leaving a holiday party, a friend approached, cell phone in hand. A few minutes earlier, she and I had been inside, chatting happily amid the buzz and warmth of a holiday party. Now she had tears in her eyes. "Richard Holbrooke died," she said.

Notwithstanding the hospital bulletins since he fell ill on Saturday—critical condition, damaged aorta, emergency surgery—this sudden, awful ending was a shock, because Richard Holbrooke was such an astounding volcano of vitality. Everything about him was large: his physical size, including the ultimate "in your face" face, a face like a Times Square billboard; his buzz-saw voice, a highly expressive instrument, equally adept at piano (a side-of-the-mouth, gossipy wisecrack, often pleasingly nasty) and forte (a high-decibel outburst of anger or indignation, almost always calculated for effect); his appetites (for experience,

for danger, for praise, for power, for fun); and his ambitions (for himself, for his beliefs, for the United States, for the world). He was no doe-eyed peacenik, but as a diplomat he labored long and hard to seek alternatives to war