



# SREBRENICA GENOCIDE DENIAL REPORT 2020

Srebrenica – May, 2020





Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery  
for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide  
(institution established by the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

**SREBRENICA  
MEMORIAL**

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This document is an official Report made on behalf of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide (hereinafter the Srebrenica Memorial).

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**“The Court concludes that the acts committed at Srebrenica ... were committed with the specific intent to destroy in part the group of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina as such; and accordingly, that these were acts of genocide.”**

**International Court of Justice**



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# FOREWORD



Across from my office at the Srebrenica Memorial Center, there is a white two-story building with a conspicuous balcony. In July 1995, I remember this balcony as having been crowded with men, newly separated from their families, robbed of their possessions and documents, and awaiting transport to one of the mass executions sites the Bosnian Serb military had designated in Eastern Bosnia. Driving by on my way to work, I often see clothing hung up to dry on the balcony, even children's toys. Today, there is some family living comfortably in this house.

Rarely, if ever, has a genocide been as normalized as the genocide against the Bosniaks. It is a process which began simultaneously with the genocide itself—not only with the expansive cover-up campaign of its perpetrators, but with the rhetorical onslaught of minimization undertaken by the international community. The term “ethnic cleansing,” coined in the 1990s by the perpetrators of genocide to normalize their actions, was quickly taken up by international pundits as a means to circumvent less morally, legally, and politically ambiguous terminology. Across the globe, Serb policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina were conceptualized not as genocide, but as “ethnic cleansing;” not as forced deportation, but as “population transfer;” not as systematic rape, but rather as a regrettable by-product of war.

In this as well as all its other manifestations, denial is an inextricable part of genocide. It allows both perpetrators and bystanders to exculpate themselves from feelings of guilt by excluding the victims from their own moral universe, in which right and wrong, crime and punishment, are clearly defined.

This year marks twenty-five years since the genocidal operation in and around Srebrenica as part of wide and systematic three and half years long attempt to eradicate Bosniaks as a nation and Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state. It also marks twenty-five years of genocide denial. Rather than abating with time, denial of genocide has only grown more insidious in recent years—locally, regionally, as well as internationally.

Fight against genocide denial is now more urgent than ever before. Also, the time is ripe for the Memorial Center to assume a leading role in this struggle. While it has existed as an institution since 2001, the Memorial Center has necessarily been preoccupied with the sober responsibility of identifying and burying Srebrenica's dead. With this task nearing completion, the Srebrenica Memorial Center is embarking on a new chapter in its development. As we continue to grow as an institution, we not only expand our capacities to honor the memory of Srebrenica's victims, we situate ourselves at the forefront of genocide awareness and education worldwide. This report is the first of what I hope will be many future Memorial Center publications to this end. Its author is a foreign national, who is fiercely dedicated and with a keen mind for research. Her work on this report and other projects has allowed our message to reach ever wider international audiences.

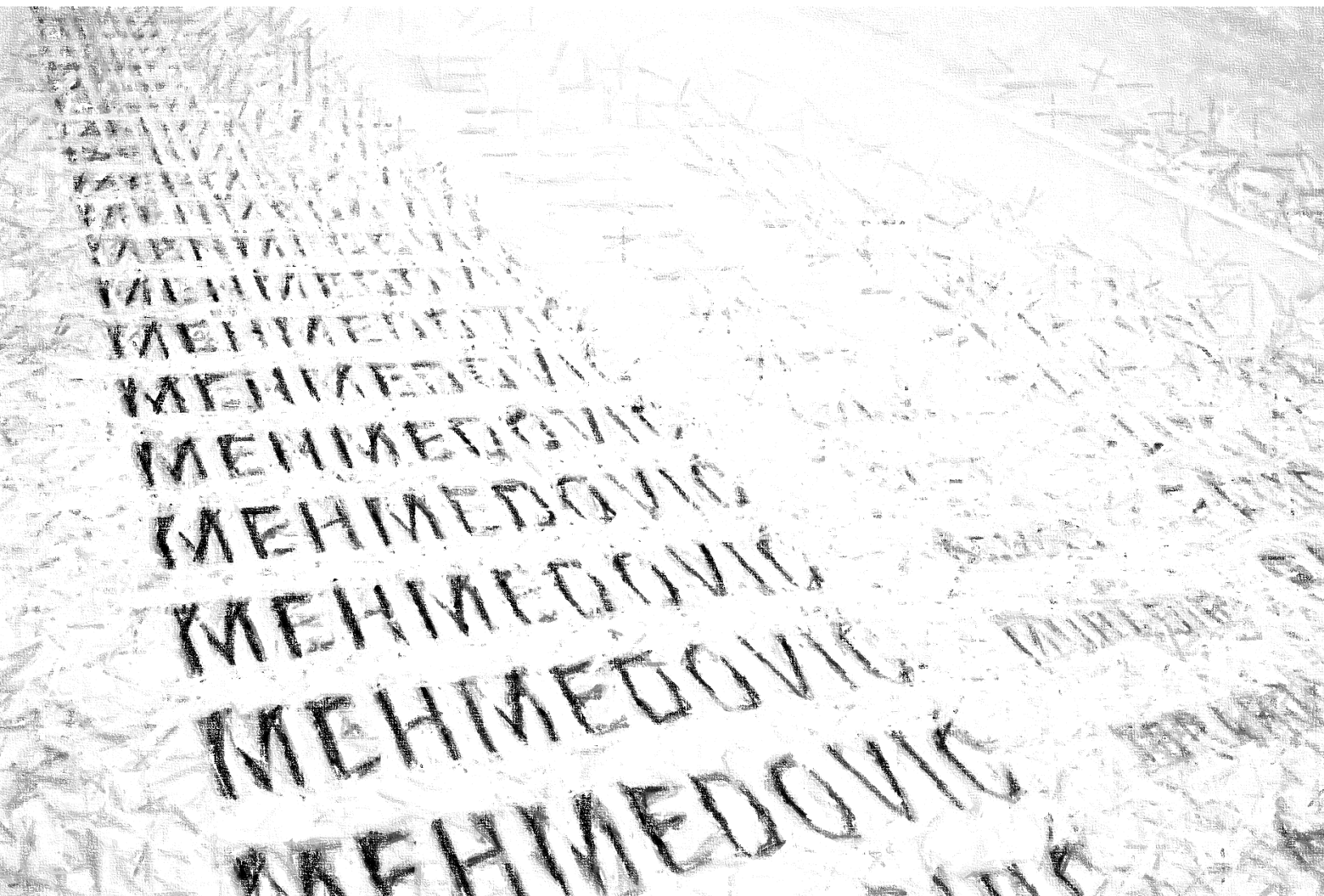
We had intended to release both the original report and the Bosnian translation in early April. Then the pandemic struck.

In the midst of this crisis, we are releasing the first annual report on denial of the Srebrenica genocide. We have made this decision, not for the sake of supplying thought-provoking reading material to the general public to pass the time in isolation (although this is certainly a consequence), but rather to provide some of our readers with a different context through which to understand the current situation. We in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been told so many times over the past three decades that our experience is not relevant, or at least not in the way we believe it to be.

Now, across the globe, many are being forced to contemplate, for the first time in their lives, the possibilities inherent in the break-down of civil society, shortages of food, inaccessibility of medical care, not to mention the possibility of the endangerment or loss of loved ones on a large scale.

As you rise to confront these challenges, we hope that you will find strength in the resilience of others. We ask you to remember that the world of anxiety and uncertainty which is emerging from this crisis is one that we in Bosnia and Herzegovina have inhabited for decades and which we will likely continue to inhabit irrespective of the pandemic's outcome. Genocide denial is one of the most certain indications of future violence and it is sure to survive this crisis. When the world surmounts this critical junction and most return to their normal lives, we will still be plagued with uncertainty. We will still be at the risk of renewed political violence. In light of the new perspective that many around the world will have gained from this experience, we hope that you will be with us in the fight against denial and the struggle to prevent genocide.

**Dr. Emir Suljagić**  
**Director**  
**The Srebrenica Memorial**



# THE SREBRENICA MEMORIAL

Established by decision of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2000, the Srebrenica Memorial (full name: Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide) is a place of remembrance for the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. The Memorial Center is dedicated to the preservation of history and to confronting the forces of ignorance and hatred which make genocide possible.

Genocide denial and islamophobia remain serious obstacles to peace and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the Srebrenica Memorial, we understand the danger posed by historical revisionism to the processes of peace-building and transitional justice. We are committed to confronting the pernicious forces which seek to deny the historical experience of the Bosnian people through a facts-based approach which promotes tolerance, inter-ethnic dialogue, and reconciliation.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early nineteen-nineties, forces gathered around self-declared “Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (later known as *Republika Srpska*), with the support of the Serbian government in Belgrade, launched a war of aggression which culminated in July 1995 with the Srebrenica genocide. In just over one week, Armed forces of Republika Srpska (hereinafter: VRS) and its police forces executed over 8,000 Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) men and boys, and deported roughly 25,000 women, children, and elderly from the nominally declared UN ‘safe zone’ of Srebrenica. Despite overwhelming forensic evidence of these crimes and unanimous rulings by multiple international courts, denial of the Srebrenica genocide persists to this day—not just in Serbia and the Serb-dominated parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but around the world.

This report identifies the following **talking points and tactics** as the most frequently used in denial of Srebrenica genocide:

**Disputing the Number and Identities of Srebrenica’s Victims:** Revisionists attempt to minimize the death toll of 8,372 victims of the Srebrenica genocide, despite the forensic evidence and legal consensus substantiating this figure. They additionally refute the identity of the known victims and the circumstances of their deaths in order deny that genocide against Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) took place in Srebrenica.

**Theories of an International Anti-Serb Conspiracy used to Undermine the International Courts:** Deniers seek to undermine the legitimacy of the international courts whose investigations and judgments affirmed the facts of the Srebrenica genocide. The most common approach relies on fabricated theories of international conspiracy and anti-Serb bias within these legal institutions and the international community at large. Deniers also repudiate the international legal consensus by exploiting perceived ambiguities in the UN Genocide Convention in an effort to discredit findings of genocidal intent and central direction in the Srebrenica operation.

**Historically Revised Narratives which Glorify War Criminals and Bolster Serbian Nationalism:** Public and political figures promulgate historically counterfactual narratives in which the roles of victim and perpetrator in the Srebrenica genocide are completely reversed. Factually baseless discourses of Serbian victimhood and Bosniak aggression embolden pernicious strains of nationalism already well-grounded in Serbian society. This phenomenon can be observed throughout Serb dominated parts of the former Yugoslavia, manifest in divisive practices such as the public canonization of convicted war criminals, the normalization of hardline Serbian nationalist symbols, and alternative historical curricula taught in public schools. Through institutions as well as popular culture, this triumphalism is passed down to post-war generations.

In the past year alone, a number of alarming incidents bear testimony to the escalation of historical revisionism surrounding the Srebrenica genocide. The following **case studies** are presented in this report to illuminate emergent patterns in local, regional, and international denial of the Srebrenica genocide:

- **The New RS Investigative Commissions on the Srebrenica genocide**
- **Developments in the Municipality of Srebrenica**
- **Nobel Prize in Literature Awarded to Peter Handke**

The intensification of Srebrenica genocide denial is wholly consistent with broader global trends in right-wing extremism, Islamophobia, and Holocaust revisionism. In order to combat these dangerous developments, the Srebrenica Memorial calls on individuals and organizations around the world to use all resources and platforms at their disposal to speak out against denial of the genocide in Srebrenica. To political and civil society actors, we make the following specific **recommendations**:

#### **To International Actors and Policy Makers Abroad:**

- **Educate the Public.** Partner with individuals and organizations educating the world about the Srebrenica genocide. Observe the annual Srebrenica Remembrance Day on July 11th and organize commemorative events at the national and local levels.
- **Legislate Against Denial.** Support laws which ban genocide denial as a form of hate speech designed to incite violence against minorities.
- **Take a Stand on the World Stage.** Prioritize genocide acknowledgment for international cooperation and avoid complicity by taking a principled stance against foreign actors engaging in genocide denial. Protect vulnerable communities and activists from discrimination and violence at home and abroad.

#### **To Political and Civil Society Actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

- **Advocate for Education Reform.** A standardized curriculum which acknowledges the Srebrenica genocide must be implemented across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Encourage field trips and commemorative events in Bosnian schools as a way to combat denial and promote tolerance.
- **Adjudicate War Crimes and Legislate Denial.** Continue to support legislation banning denial of the Srebrenica genocide at the state, entity, and local levels of government.
- **Speak Out Against Denial and Support Relevant Institutions.** Use your political influence to speak out against genocide denial. Support institutions like the Srebrenica Memorial and associations of genocide survivors and victims' families who are engaged in the fight against denial.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the most religiously and ethnically diverse of the six constituent Republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). According to the last pre-war census in 1991, it was comprised of roughly 43% Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims),<sup>1</sup> 31% Serbs, and 17% Croats, with the remaining 8% identifying either as ‘Yugoslavs’ or other minorities.<sup>2</sup>

Following the disintegration of the SFRY in 1991, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence on March 1st, 1992. Although this move was soon recognized by the international community, it was staunchly opposed by Radovan Karadžić and the political leadership of the Bosnian Serb ethnic community, who had declared themselves an autonomous Serb region within Bosnia and Herzegovina, later called Republika Srpska (RS).

Self-declared “Serb Republic in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, led by their president Radovan Karadžić and with the support of the Milošević regime in Serbia and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), launched a brutal war of aggression which lasted from April 1992 until November 1995. Their campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina relied on the policy and tactics of ethnic cleansing to purge the territory of its Bosniak and Croat populations in order to advance the of ‘Greater Serbia.’

The Srebrenica genocide in July 1995 was the culmination of the Serbian genocidal operation of extermination of Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a matter of days, over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were systematically executed, and over 25,000 women, children, and elderly were forcibly deported. Twenty-five years later, despite overwhelming forensic evidence and the unanimous rulings of multiple international criminal courts, denial of the Srebrenica genocide remains rampant.

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<sup>1</sup> **Authors Note:** The term *Bosniak* denotes the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this report, *Bosniak* and *Bosnian Muslim* are hereinafter used interchangeably for the sake of variegated diction, at the stylistic discretion of the author.

For more information about the complex relationship between religious, ethnic, and national identities in the former Yugoslav territories, see: Tony Bringa, “Islam and the Quest for a National Identity in Bosnia,” in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Sabrina Ramet, *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe: Challenges since 1989* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Martina Topić and Branislav Radeljić, *Religion in the Post-Yugoslav Context* (London: Lexington Books, 2015); Reinhard Henkel “Identity, Ethnicity and Religion in the Western Balkans,” in *Emerging Geographies of Belief*, ed. Brace et. al (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011): 91–111.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Statistics Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Zavod za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine Bilten no 234,” (Government of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1991).

# The Bosnian War (1992-1995)



In April 1992, units of the JNA began shelling the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo and were soon joined in their attack by paramilitary forces loyal to the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić. The violence quickly spread to Eastern Bosnia, where Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) living in small villages and towns such as Višegrad, Foča, and Zvornik were forced to flee their homes under heavy fire. In less than two months, the self-declared “Serb-Republic” captured around two-thirds of Bosnian territory through coordinated assaults by Bosnian Serb forces (VRS) under the command of General Ratko Mladić and units of the JNA.

The VRS continued its advance throughout 1992, wreaking particular devastation across Eastern Bosnia. The hastily assembled and poorly equipped Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RBiH) managed to hold some positions along the front lines; however, their resistance was crippled, by a pre-existing international arms embargo which greatly advantaged Serbian forces, securing their monopoly over the weapons supplies of the JNA.

Apart from tipping the scales against the legitimate government of RBiH in this manner, the international community’s involvement at the outset of the conflict remained minimal, mostly confined to the delivery of humanitarian aid. Although the UN eschewed the possibility of military intervention, they did eventually deploy international protection forces (UNPROFOR) to a number of so-called UN “safe areas” within Bosnia.

These safe areas quickly became prime targets of the VRS. Meanwhile, the atrocities which VRS inflicted on non-Serb populations throughout Bosnia grew more numerous and intense. Along with laying siege to a number of Bosnian towns and cities, including the capital of Sarajevo, the VRS military and political leadership were operating numerous concentration and rape camps across the country. Rape and sexual torture became an integral part

of the Serbian genocidal campaign. In the patrilineal and often patriarchal society of Bosniaks, the forced impregnation of women as well as lurid acts of sexual violence against both women and men, were seen as effective means of decapitating local power structures and destroying the social fabric of communities.

While internationally mediated peace talks had resulted in a number of proposals, the Bosnian Serb military leaderships' unwillingness to relinquish any of their acquired land doomed these proposals to failure. With no end to the violence in sight, NATO leaders became gradually disposed to action. In its first-ever use of force, NATO fighters downed four VRS aircraft which were in violation of the UN no-fly zone in February 1994.

More isolated airstrikes against VRS targets were carried out later that year at the request of the UN, however these attacks failed to bring an end to the conflict. In 1995, on the heels of the Srebrenica genocide and a series of the VRS attacks on a Sarajevo market, more concentrated NATO airstrikes combined with the land offensive launched by the Bosnian Army together with local and regular Croat forces at last succeeded in bringing the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table. Serbian President Slobodan Milošević represented the Bosnian Serbs at the U.S. led peace negotiations held in Dayton, Ohio in November 1995.

The resultant Dayton Accords, formally signed by all three parties to the conflict that December, at last put an end to the war. After nearly four years of bloody conflict resulting in well over 100,000 casualties,<sup>3</sup> tens of thousands of rapes, and 2.2 million displaced persons,<sup>4</sup> peace was finally achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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<sup>3</sup> Earlier estimates of the overall casualties of the Bosnian War provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other sources range from 200,000 to 250,000. ICTY claimed at least 105,000 killed.

<sup>4</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Global Report on Internal Displacement (2018), [https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/GRID%202018%20-%20Figure%20Analysis%20-%20BOSNIA%20\\_%20HERZEGOVINA.pdf](https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/GRID%202018%20-%20Figure%20Analysis%20-%20BOSNIA%20_%20HERZEGOVINA.pdf).

# The Srebrenica Genocide



In July 1995, the small town of Srebrenica in north-eastern Bosnia became the epicenter of the most horrific massacre in European history since the Second World War. In the course of just a few days, RS military and police forces killed over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys, and forcibly deported over 25,000 women, children, and elderly. This heinous massacre was the culmination of years of terror, persecution, and attrition, and was carried out within a UN designated 'safe area' under the averted gaze of the international community. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) ruled that the crimes in Srebrenica were acts of genocide. All military and political activities carried out during the operation which began after the fall of Srebrenica on July 11th, 1995 and ended five days later, had a single objective: the total extermination of the Bosniak population of the Srebrenica enclave.

## The Siege of Srebrenica

By spring of 1993, as a result of the persecution of civilians throughout Eastern Bosnia, the population of Srebrenica increased significantly, swelling to well over 50,000 people. From 1992 onward, the enclave was under constant attack from the VRS. Those wounded in VRS attacks in Srebrenica arguably suffered a worse fate than death, as the town hospital had only six doctors and virtually no access to basic medical supplies. Hunger was the defining characteristic of life in the enclave. The pre-war food reserves were quickly depleted, and people began eating everything they could find that was even remotely digestible. The Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN, Diego Arria, visited the enclave in the spring of 1993 and described the situation in Srebrenica as “slow motion genocide.”

On April 16th, 1993, in response to the escalating humanitarian crisis in Srebrenica, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 819 which formally declared Srebrenica a UN protected “safe area.” Two days later the first UN protection forces arrived in Srebrenica and helped to mediate a ceasefire agreement which lasted almost a year. In the spring of 1994, the RS Army General Staff suspended the ceasefire and ordered the Drina Corps under its command to reduce the enclave to the size of Srebrenica’s municipal territory.

After a year of continuous escalation, RS president Radovan Karadžić issued “Directive 7 of the Supreme Command” in the spring of 1995. This directive ordered the VRS “to create an unbearable situation of total insecurity, with no hope of further survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica,” through relentless military onslaughts and deprivation of humanitarian aid. In June of that year, the Drina Corps Command prepared “Krivaja-95,” the battle plan to attack Srebrenica; on the afternoon of July 5th, the VRS commanders received the orders to put the plan into action.

## The July 1995 Offensive

At three o’clock in the morning on July 6th, 1995, the VRS began their attack on Srebrenica. Advancing from the south, they set fire to the Bosniak homes and villages in their path, forcing thousands of civilians to flee to the UN base in the nearby town of Potočari where several hundred Dutch troops were stationed.

The RBiH soldiers failed to prevent the Dutch troops from abandoning their observation posts, which fell one after the other to the Serbian advance. By July 9th, the VRS was poised just one kilometer outside the city center of Srebrenica. The RBiH Army launched a counterattack the following day, briefly forcing the Serbs back to their starting positions, but their success was short-lived. On July 11th, General Ratko Mladić, and declared before a throng of assembled journalists, “we give this town to the Serb nation...the time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region.”<sup>5</sup>

That very night, around 15,000 Bosniak men gathered in the areas of Šušnjari and Jaglić and set off through the forests in an attempt to reach free territory. Well over two-thirds of the men who embarked on this journey, which would come to be known as the Death March, were eventually captured and killed by the VRS.

Meanwhile, the UN compound in Potočari had become completely overcrowded. By the time VRS soldiers took control of the camp, facing no resistance from the UN forces, as many as 6,000 refugees were crammed inside the Dutch base while more than 20,000 others took shelter in surrounding buildings nearby. Conditions inside the enclave were horrendous. In addition to shortages of food and water, the Bosniak civilians in Potočari faced

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<sup>5</sup> Prosecutor v. Ratko Mladić, Judgment, 22 November 2017, Vol. 3, page 1257.

unspeakable abuse at the hands of the VRS soldiers. Survivors recount torture, beatings, gang rapes, and murders. VRS troops soon began to separate Bosniak men from their families. One woman recounts her husband being taken away and horrific murder of her young son:

Then at 4:00 the next day, they took my husband away. My husband was with two of my children, a daughter and my three-year-old son. They took my son out of his arms and just threw him on the ground. I was screaming, but they didn't stop. Then they made my daughter break away from my husband, and they threw her on the ground, too. And then my son Esmir . . . . It is just so hard to talk about this, I can't, it just breaks my heart. . . . I was holding him in my arms. He was my son from my first marriage. We were hugging, but they took him away. They grabbed him and just slit his throat. They killed him. They made me drink his blood. I just can't say anymore, I just can't, you have to understand that it is breaking my heart.<sup>6</sup>

The women, children, and elderly were loaded onto buses and forcibly deported to Kladanj. The men and boys were taken to holding sites in and around Bratunac, and most were never seen alive again. In the course of hardly a week's time, the VRS slaughtered over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in and around Srebrenica. Over 25,000 women and children, many of whom reported rape and abuse at the hands of the VRS soldiers, were simultaneously deported. Formally ruled a genocide by multiple verdicts of international courts, the crimes committed in Srebrenica in July 1995 constitute one of the darkest pages in human history.

## Mass Executions

The first large-scale mass execution occurred in the **Cerska Valley**, on July 13th, 1995. The victims—men between the ages of 14 and 50—were forced to line up along one side of the road while VRS soldiers fired upon them from the other side. Of the 150 victims, all but three were in civilian clothing, and many died with their hands tied behind them. Their bodies were covered with dirt where they lay.<sup>7</sup>

That same afternoon, VRS soldiers used hand grenades, rifles, and anti-tank weapons to kill over 1,300 men in a warehouse in **Kravica**.<sup>8</sup> Most of these victims had been captured in a field in Sandići, where some 200-300 men had already been murdered. While most of these men died by machine gun fire, some were exhibited knife wounds, which led investigators to believe that the local civilian population likely played a part in their deaths.<sup>9</sup>

The buses used to forcibly deport refugees stopped in the town of **Tišča**, where the women and children were forced to proceed to Kladanj on foot. Particularly in the first convoys which departed Potočari on July 12th, a number of men had also managed to board the buses. Upon arriving in Tišča, however these men were rooted out, bound at the wrist with telephone wire, and systematically executed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Human Rights Watch, *The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of U.N. Peacekeeping*, October 1, 1995, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Prosecutor vs. Radislav Krstić, IT-98-33-T, Judgment, 71, (August 2, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>9</sup> Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, "Part IV: The repercussion and the aftermath until the end of 1995," in *Srebrenica: A 'Safe Area,'* 2011, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Prosecutor vs. Radislav Krstić, IT-98-33'T, Judgment, 76, (August 2, 2001).



Beginning in the early morning on July 14th, VRS soldiers took around 1,000 prisoners to the town of **Orahovac**. They detained the prisoners in the overcrowded gymnasium of the Grabavci school with no food or water, and they led the prisoners to believe that they would be handed over to the UN in a prisoner exchange. Instead, VRS soldiers blindfolded the men and took them to an execution site one kilometer from the school, where they lined the prisoners up and shot them. Those who survived were shot again. The execution site consisted of two adjacent fields, so when one field filled up with bodies, the firing squads merely switched to the other field. General Mladić himself was reportedly present at several of these executions.<sup>11</sup>

Between July 14th and 15th, VRS soldiers detained more than 1,000 men in similarly horrible conditions at a school in **Petkovci**. Prisoners suffered unspeakable physical abuse at the hands of the VRS soldiers. Some prisoners resorted to drinking their own urine because of the unbearable heat and dehydration. VRS soldiers took the men outside in small groups, forced them to strip to the waist and remove their shoes, and bound their wrists behind their backs. These men were then transported to a nearby dam, where they were lined up and shot.<sup>12</sup>

As many as 1,200 prisoners were transported to an overcrowded gymnasium in the village of Pilica on July 14th. Here VRS soldiers again denied them food and water; several prisoners reportedly died of dehydration in the course of their two days' detention. On July 16th, VRS soldiers tied these men in hand restraints and transported them to the **Branjevo Military Farm**. VRS soldiers often beat and humiliated the men before mowing them down with machine guns. The slaughter of innocent prisoners continued into the next day. Men who were not killed instantly were left to suffer prolonged, painful deaths from their injuries. After these executions were completed, the VRS soldiers proceeded to the Pilica Culture Center where they killed another 500 men with grenades and rifle fire.<sup>13</sup>

The final mass execution of around 1,000 men near the village of **Kozluk** took place sometime between July 15th and 16th.<sup>14</sup> Numerous smaller scale executions continued to take place however, including the execution of ten Bosnian men on July 19th in the vicinity of **Nezuk**,<sup>15</sup> and the killing of 150 Bosnian men in **Mačesi**<sup>16</sup> around July 20th.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 77-80.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 81-83.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 87-89.

<sup>14</sup> Prosecutor vs. Momčilo Peršić, IT-04-81-T, Second Decision in Respect to Srebrenica Agreed Facts, 9, (September 30, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>16</sup> Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, Archived from the original on 29 August 2009.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090829194758/http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/kar-ii951116e.htm>.

# The Cover-Up

Within the context of the Bosnian genocide, denial took place simultaneously with the killing, deportation, and operation of concentration camps. During and in the immediate aftermath of the Srebrenica genocide, the perpetrators continuously lied to the international community about the events which took place in and around the enclave, and participated in the systematic concealment, destruction, and contamination of all evidence of these criminal activities. The most exacting part of the cover-up—the burial, exhumation, and reburial of victims—was usually carried out under the cover of night, through some manner of cooperation between military, police, and civilian structures.

## War-Time Subterfuge

The disinformation campaign surrounding the Srebrenica genocide began the moment VRS forces initiated their attack on the enclave. RS political and military leaders invoked the false narrative of “terrorist activities” being carried out by RBiH forces from within the UN “safe zone” to justify their intensifying attacks. In a July 1995 letter to the commander of UN troops in Bosnia, Ratko Mladić wrote that the Bosnian Army had been conducting attacks from the enclave which targeted Serb civilians and had resulted in more than one hundred casualties. Regarding the impending genocide in Srebrenica, he wrote “this action is aimed to neutralize the terrorists. Our activities are not aimed against civilians or the UN.”<sup>17</sup> Mladić’s claims, which were faithfully echoed by other elements of the Republika Srpska political and military establishment, were objectively false.

Despite openly declaring in front of news crews on July 11th that it was ‘the time of vengeance,’ Mladić and his fellow officers went to extraordinary measures to make their intentions in Srebrenica appear anything but genocidal. The day after this publicized announcement for example, a fire engine and several cistern trucks arrived in Potočari from the RS. In front of television crews, VRS officers distributed bread, candies, and water from the trucks to the Bosniak refugees. As soon as the cameras were turned off however, the soldiers took back the food and water, leaving the gathered mass confused and frightened.

VRS soldiers repeatedly told the Dutch UN officers and the crowds assembled in Potočari that none who surrendered would be hurt. On the same day as the fire truck charade, Ratko Mladić informed the residents of Srebrenica that “all who wish to go will be transported, large and small, young and old. Don’t be afraid, just take it easy. Let the women and children go first ... No one will harm you.”<sup>18</sup> Shortly thereafter, VRS soldiers began separating the men from the women and children.

This was done under the pretext of vetting the male population for war criminals, but in reality, no such vetting was taking place. VRS soldiers took the entirety of Srebrenica’s men, almost all of whom were civilians, to detention centers and then to sites of mass execution. In an even more audacious feat of deception, VRS soldiers appropriated UN uniforms and transport vehicles from the Dutch troops in Potočari. Masquerading as

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<sup>17</sup> Samantha Power, “Bosnian Serbs Seize ‘Safe Area’; Fall of Srebrenica Enclave Challenges U.N., Prompts Warnings of Pullout,” *The Washington Post*, July 12, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Chris Hedges, “Serbs Start Moving Muslims Out of Captured Cities,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 1995.

international peacekeeping forces, VRS soldiers were able to carry out atrocities with greater alacrity and under less initial scrutiny.

The UN troops stationed at the enclave were not merely innocent bystanders, but directly facilitated the Bosnian-Serbs' deceit through both action and inaction. In the days and weeks leading up to the attack on Srebrenica, Dutch troops failed to report clear indications of a looming offensive including troop movements, the presence of new reinforcements, and large shipments of fuel and supplies arriving at the enclave. As the genocide in Srebrenica unfolded, this complicity and dereliction of duty on the part of the UN battalion continued. Not only did Dutch troops fail to make any effort to intervene to protect Srebrenica's civilian population, they failed to report obvious escalations in the nature of the violence and the Serbs' emerging genocidal intent. In the investigations which followed the fall of the enclave, even more shocking allegations of Dutch misconduct during the genocide in Srebrenica surfaced, including the suppression and destruction of both incriminating and potentially life-saving evidence.<sup>19</sup>

## **“Asanacija” and the Destruction of Evidence**

In July of 1995, the VRS attempted to hide their crimes by burying the bodies of Srebrenica's victims in a series of primary mass graves in proximity to the execution sites. The public discovery of these mass graves, however, precipitated an even more elaborate and sophisticated cover-up operation between August and November 1995. During this period, the VRS exhumed the bodies from most of the primary gravesites and, in a highly organized and systematic process, transported them to a number of smaller secondary grave sites. On some occasions, the VRS exhumed the bodies buried in these secondary graves, transported them, and interred them a third time in tertiary mass graves. The reburial operation was referred to as *asanacija*, a term signifying sanitation or hygiene measures. The systematic process of robbing of mass graves and subsequently redistributing the remains in secondary and tertiary locations in an attempt to cover-up mass murder is a phenomenon which has not been seen outside the context of the Bosnian genocide anywhere else in the world.

The cover-up operation was initially undertaken in secret by engineering units of the Zvornik and Bratunac brigades operating under the direction of the main staff of the VRS. When military resources proved insufficient for the enormity of the task at hand however, RS leaders were forced to engage civilian manpower and infrastructure in their criminal enterprise, including private sanitation companies from both Zvornik and Bratunac.<sup>20</sup>

Even bearing in mind similar operations undertaken by the Serbian Interior Ministry in Kosovo in 1999,<sup>21</sup> the cover-up operation following the Srebrenica genocide is remarkable not only for its level of organization, but also for its sheer expansiveness. While the exhumation, transportation, and reburial of thousands of bodies can be ordered by a single person, such a laborious and elaborate undertaking requires the work, resources, and complicity of hundreds if not thousands of individuals.

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<sup>19</sup> According to the Human Rights Watch report, *The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping*, there is credible evidence that UN troops suppressed a list of missing men from the Potočari base that was intended to ensure their safety after the fall of the enclave, as well as destroyed video footage of human rights abuses by VRS soldiers at the Dutch base.

<sup>20</sup> Emir Suljagić, *Srebrenica MCMXCV* (Sarajevo: Vrijeme, 2017), 30-31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The legal as well as social implications of such widespread participation are staggering. While only a handful of high-ranking and influential leaders will be tried and convicted for the atrocities committed in Srebrenica, the cover-up connivance demonstrates that not only these leaders but a large segment of society was aware of what took place in Srebrenica, and more importantly of its illegality. War may be waged by the few and powerful; killing may be carried out by a more numerous but still select armed contingency; an organized and covert conspiracy to conceal evidence in the form of thousands of mutilated bodies, however, incriminates entire communities, and underscores the larger social project of which Srebrenica was only a part.

The destruction of documentary evidence in the aftermath of war crimes was another systematic component of the RS campaign of concealment and denial. As the ICTY testimonies of several VRS insiders indicate, after carefully documenting their crimes in accordance to standard procedure, an extensive operation was subsequently undertaken to destroy those documents which were deemed potentially incriminating. In the course of admitting their guilt before the ICTY, Momir Nikolić and Dragan Obrenović also described an organized attempt by the Drina Corps and its units to destroy all documents pertaining to the genocidal operation in Srebrenica. Nikolić stated that upon leaving the VRS in 1996, he had destroyed all documents related to Srebrenica in the presence of his superior officers.<sup>22</sup> Obrenović, on the other hand, testified that in the weeks leading up to the 1999 NATO airstrikes in Kosovo, that the Drina Corps systematically relocated all of Srebrenica related documents to JNA Serbia, in order to prevent their discovery by international troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>23</sup>

## **Unearthing the Evidence**

In August 1995, US Secretary of State Madeline Albright released the first evidence of the crimes committed in Srebrenica to the international community. In a closed session of the UN Security Council, Albright presented aerial photos captured by US military spy planes showing recently dug mass graves in Nova Kasaba. Shortly thereafter, David Rhode, an American journalist, visited the location identified in the photographs, and came upon what appeared to be a decomposing human leg sticking out of the ground, as well as various personal effects belonging to the victims. In light of these revelations, a meticulous investigation ensued to uncover the truth about the crimes which took place in Srebrenica in July 1995, and to hold the perpetrators accountable under international law.

The expansive cover-up operation undertaken by the VRS made the work of investigators and DNA analysts decidedly more difficult. US intelligence experts played a critical role in using satellite photography to identify the locations of mass graves, which were then excavated and analyzed by teams of international scientists. The identification of victims exhumed from the mass graves in and around Srebrenica has been arduous task. Throughout the VRS cover-up, bodies in various stages of decomposition were exhumed, transported, and reburied, sometimes multiple times, using heavy machinery. During this process the bodies underwent further disarticulation in addition to the commingling of remains, which greatly complicated the identification process. In

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<sup>22</sup> Joint Motion for Consideration of Plea Agreement Between Momir Nikolić and the Office of the Prosecutor, Statement of Facts and Acceptance of Responsibility, 6 May 2003, ICTY.

<sup>23</sup> Dragan Obrenović, Prosecutor vs. Vidoje Blagojević and Dragan Jokić, 3 October 2003, transcript page 2562.

some instances, the remains of one individual have been found at as many as four different gravesites, and as many as thirteen DNA tests have thus been necessary to identify a single victim.

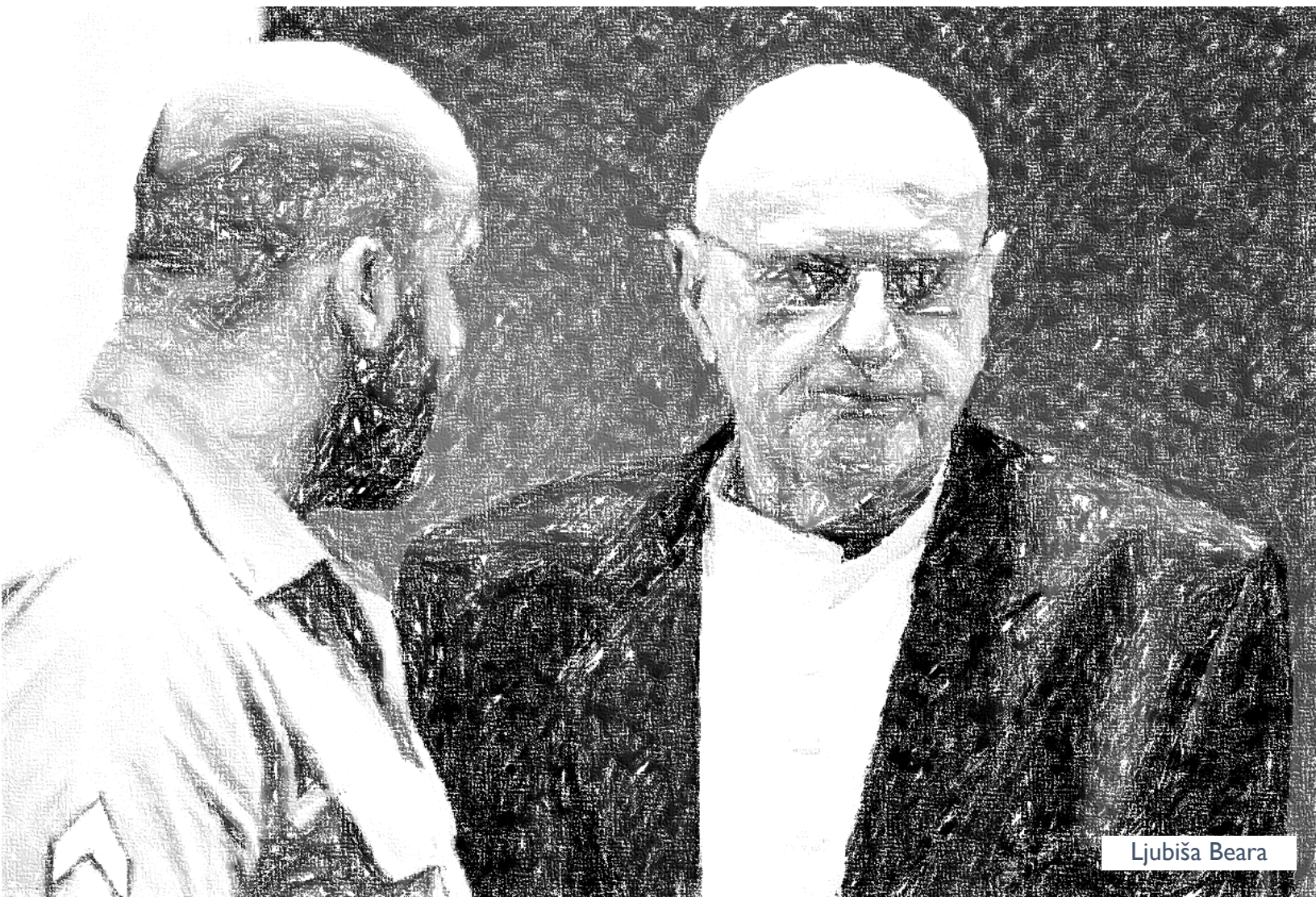
Nevertheless, years of painstaking effort on the part of international scientists have allowed investigators to reconstruct the atrocities which took place in Srebrenica. Through comparisons of soil, tissue samples, clothing fragments, and other evidence from the scenes of these crimes, we have come to understand where and how the victims were killed, and the process in which their bodies were relocated among a network of dozens of mass graves. To date, 94 mass gravesites have been exhumed in Srebrenica, and the remains of over 6,900 victims have been positively identified.<sup>24</sup>

The search continues for the more than 1,700 victims who are still missing, however. For victims' families, the process of identifying the remains of their loved ones is often emotionally traumatic. In most cases, only partial remains of a victim are able to be recovered, identified, and prepared for burial at the Srebrenica Memorial Cemetery in Potočari. Even when families are able to achieve some degree of acceptance and closure through the burial of even fragmentary remains, their pain is seldom over. In many cases, additional remains of a victim are recovered even after the initial burial, and these families must re-live their anguish with the recovery and internment of each new fragment.

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<sup>24</sup> International Commission on Missing Persons, "Srebrenica Figures as of 28 June 2019," <https://www.icmp.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/srebrenica-english-2019.pdf>.

# PROSECUTION AND CONVICTIONS



Ljubiša Beara

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was established by the United Nations Security Council in 1993 to prosecute the mass killings and serious violations of international law that were committed during the Bosnian War. While the ICTY was formally dissolved in December 2017, the residual functions of the court including the overseeing of sentences and consideration of appeals continue under the jurisdiction of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT).

Soon after its establishment, the court indicted the President of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, and the Commander of the VRS, Ratko Mladić, for genocide in Srebrenica. Karadžić and Mladić were arrested thirteen and sixteen years later respectively, after hiding for over a decade in Serbia and the RS. The Appeals Court found Karadžić guilty of genocide in Srebrenica and sentenced him to life in prison (March 20, 2019). Mladić is currently awaiting his appeal judgment, after also being sentenced to life in prison (November 22, 2017).

In May 1996 Dražen Erdemović was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment for violations of the laws and customs of war. This trial was a crucial source of momentum early in the charge to confront perpetrators and seek justice for the crimes committed in Srebrenica.

In 2001, the ICTY convicted General Radislav Krstić of genocide and sentenced him to 46 years imprisonment (a sentence which was reduced to 35 years imprisonment in 2005). This was the first judgment by the Hague Tribunal for genocide.

In June 2010, former RS Army officers Lieutenant Colonel Vujadin Popović and Colonel Ljubiša Beara were sentenced to life-imprisonment for the genocide of Bosniaks in Srebrenica, and later convicted on charges of conspiracy in a joint criminal enterprise. Five more RS army and police personnel subsequently received prison sentences for their involvement in the Srebrenica operation: In addition to the sentencing of five more RS army and police personnel: 2nd Lieutenant Drago Nikolić (35 years of imprisonment); former Deputy Commander of the Special Police Brigade of the RS, Ljubomir Borovčanin (17 years imprisonment); former commanding officer of the Zvornik Brigade, Vinko Pandurević (13 years imprisonment); former Chief of Operations and Training, and Deputy Chief of Staff, of the Main Staff of the VRS, Radivoje Miletić (18 years imprisonment); and former General Milan Gvero (5 years imprisonment).

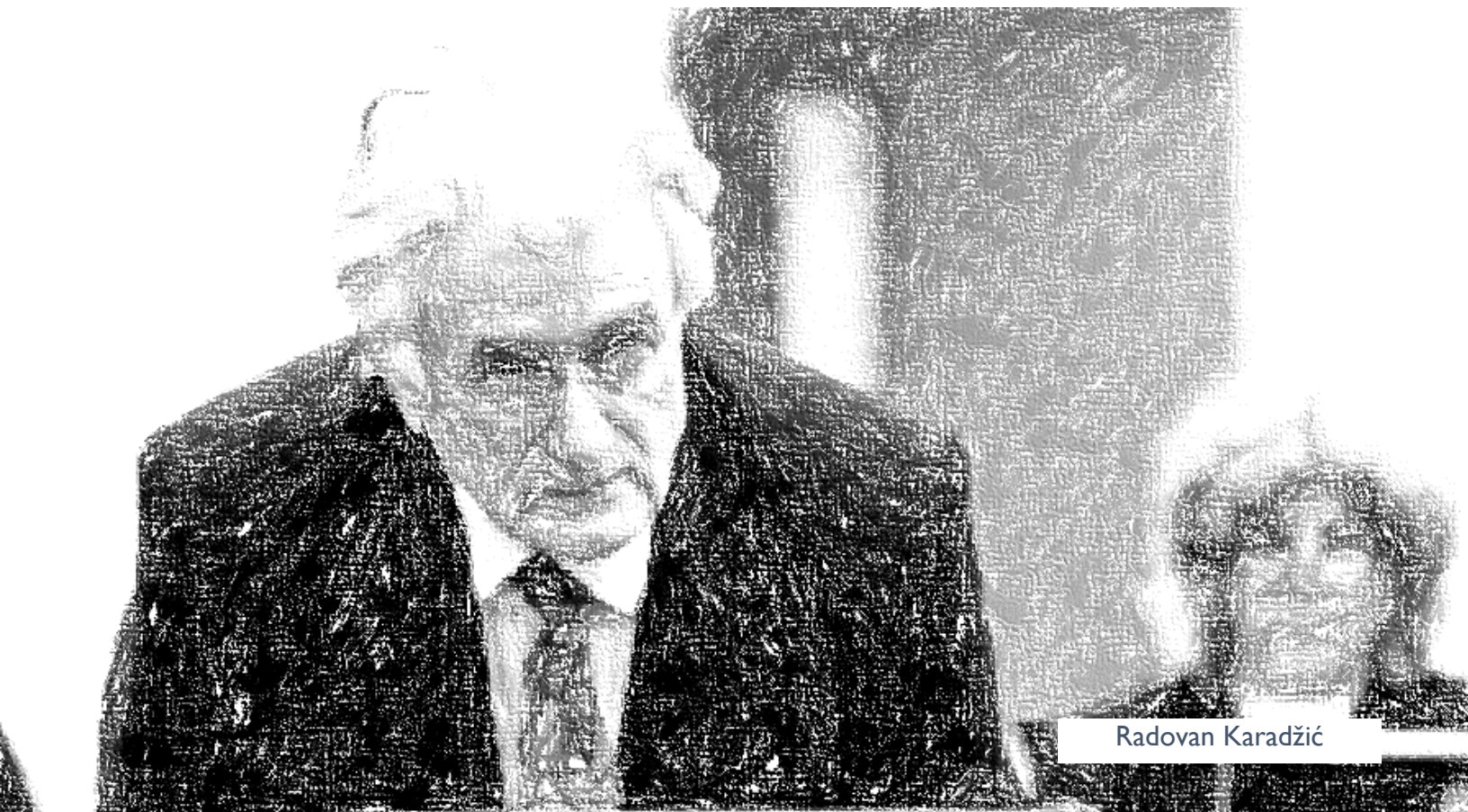


Ratko Mladić

In December 2012 the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia convicted General Zdravko Tolimir, ex-assistant to Ratko Mladić and War Chief of Intelligence Service of the RS Army Supreme Command, finding him guilty of genocide and sentencing him to life-imprisonment.

Subsequent convictions of RS officers for crimes in Srebrenica include: former Assistant Chief of Security and Intelligence for the Bratunac Brigade, Momir Nikolić (20 years imprisonment); former commander of the Bratunac Brigade, Vidoje Blagojević (15 years imprisonment); former VRS and JNA senior commander, Dragan Obrenović (17 years imprisonment); and former Chief of the Corps of Engineers in the Zvornik Brigade, Dragan Jokić (9 years imprisonment). The Bosnia and Herzegovina Court continued with the prosecution of their subordinates, the direct executors of crimes.

In the judgment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's action against then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at the International Court of Justice in The Hague twelve years after the crimes in Srebrenica, the ICJ also found that, with support of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, "Bosnian Serbs planned and executed the genocide in Srebrenica."





# POST-WAR GENOCIDE DENIAL



Genocide denial refers to any attempt to deny or minimize of genocide and is increasingly recognized as the final stage of genocide itself. As Richard Hovannisian writes,

Following the physical destruction of a people and their material culture, memory is all that is left and is targeted as the last victim. Complete annihilation of a people requires the banishment of recollection and suffocation of remembrance. Falsification, deception and half-truths reduce what was to what might have been or perhaps what was not at all.<sup>25</sup>

For the survivors of mass violence and the families of its victims, denial unleashes renewed anguish. Not only does it attempt to invalidate their past suffering, it targets the living memories of these traumas, which are integral to collective processes of identity rehabilitation as well as individual psychological reckoning. For victims and their families, the claims of deniers are a form of humiliation, particularly when they emanate from or are echoed by the upper echelons of society.

At this point, genocide denial becomes not just an indignation suffered by a historically persecuted group, but a potential threat. When the violence committed against this group garners political capital, it is impossible to dismiss the portent for renewed violence against the marginalized minority. Genocide denial invigorates and emboldens perpetrators; in the absence of a societal consensus on the historical fact and moral delinquency of past violence, the possibility looms ever more presently that this violence will be repeated.

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<sup>25</sup>Richard G. Hovannisian, *Remembrance and Denial* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 202.

# Agents of Denial

Despite incontestable forensic evidence and multiple conclusive rulings by the world's most esteemed international courts, denial of the Srebrenica genocide persists both locally in Serbia and the RS, and among sympathetic contingencies of the international community. Those responsible for peddling revisionist narratives of the genocide in Srebrenica include political actors at all levels of state and sub-state governments, as well as academics, journalists, and miscellaneous institutions.

For individuals acting within a cognitive matrix of genocide denial, the alternative narratives furnished by this form of illegitimate historical revisionism can help mollify cognitive dissonance between how one likes to imagine the character of oneself or one's national or social group, and the reality of which past crimes are indicative. Where denial has become a politically and socially fashionable position, failing to adopt this stance can also threaten one's material interests. The loss of social connections, social standing, and even job opportunities are all conceivable consequences for those who might push back against a dominant narrative of denial. For international actors who hold no stake in local or regional politics, who persist in denial outside of this dominant cognitive framework and against the grain of global consensus, the benefits of adopting such a position are less clear.

## Genocide Deniers in Bosnia and Serbia

Denial of the Srebrenica genocide plays a major role in the regional politics of the Balkans, particularly in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina where it is deeply intertwined with notions of responsibility. In 2002, the **Documentation Center of Republic of Srpska for War Crimes Research**, together with the **RS Bureau for Relations with the ICTY**, published the so-called "**Report about Case Srebrenica.**" Among the multitudinous outrageous claims contained in the report, it asserts that no more than 2,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed in Srebrenica, and that all of these were armed soldiers rather than civilians.

Referring to the genocide throughout as the "alleged massacre," the report accuses the International Committee of the Red Cross of fabricating its findings on Srebrenica. Condemned by both the United Nations and the International Crisis Group as an egregious case of historical revisionism, this report was merely the first in what would be an extensive series of official instances of Srebrenica genocide denial.

For a brief period in 2004, it appeared as though some progress had been made toward the acknowledgement of the Srebrenica genocide on behalf of the RS government. Albeit under pressure from the UN High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, an RS commission was established at the end of 2003 to conduct a new investigation into Srebrenica. Officially titled the Commission for Investigation of the Events in and around Srebrenica between 10 and 19 July 1995, the commission submitted its final report in June 2004, followed by an addendum in October of that year.

Although heavily criticized by nationalist elements of the RS government, the official report did acknowledge that VRS soldiers killed at least 7,000 men and boys in Srebrenica. Citing "limited time" and a need to "maximize resources," the commission also accepted "the historical background and the facts stated in the second-instance

judgment 'Prosecutor vs. Radislav Krstić', when the ICTY convicted the accused for 'assisting and supporting genocide' committed in Srebrenica."<sup>26</sup> Later that year, RS President Dragan Čavić personally issued an official apology on behalf of the RS government: "The report makes it clear that enormous crimes were committed in the area of Srebrenica in July 1995. The Bosnian Serb Government shares the pain of the families of the Srebrenica victims, is truly sorry and apologizes for the tragedy."<sup>27</sup>

This startling contrition in the upper echelons of the RS administration, however, was short lived. The nationalist elements of Bosnian Serb society which had been outraged by the report soon reasserted themselves as the leaders of the RS government. In March 2008, the RS began financing an NGO called **The Srebrenica Historical Project**, registered in the Netherlands. Speciously mimicking the language and practices of Western NGO's associated with transitional justice and reconciliation, the Srebrenica Historical Project has denied the judicially established facts of the Srebrenica genocide, and has sought to recast the events of July 1995 within a historically fraudulent narrative of Bosnian Serb victimhood.<sup>28</sup>

Consistent with this official realignment to the positions contained in the RS' First Report on Case Srebrenica, in April 2010 the RS government initiated a revision of the 2004 report, claiming that it had been the product of international pressures and grossly exaggerated the number of Bosniak victims in Srebrenica.

In the intervening years, high ranking members of the RS government have continuously promulgated these revisionist narratives of the Srebrenica genocide. Most notably **Milorad Dodik**, the current Serb member of the BiH presidency, has called the Srebrenica genocide a "fabricated myth,"<sup>29</sup> as well as "the greatest deception of the twentieth century."<sup>30</sup> In addition to disavowing the 2004 report and apology to the families of Srebrenica's victims, Dodik has spearheaded the most recent pseudo-historical enterprises to re-write the Srebrenica narrative.

The current president of the RS, **Željka Cvijanović**, has supported him in these endeavors, including at a recent conference entitled "Srebrenica, Reality and Manipulation," where she argued that Srebrenica must be considered within the context of crimes committed by the RBiH army against Bosnian Serbs.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Republika Srpska Government, THE EVENTS IN AND AROUND SREBRENICA BETWEEN 10th AND 19th JULY 1995, (2002), 4, accessed at [https://web.archive.org/web/20110301032417/http://trial-ch.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/trialwatch/Srebrenica\\_Report2004.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20110301032417/http://trial-ch.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/trialwatch/Srebrenica_Report2004.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Bosnian Serb government apologizes for killings," *NBC News*, July 11, 2004, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6455646/ns/world\\_news-t/bosnian-serb-government-apologizes-killings/#.XjwXOTJKJIU](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6455646/ns/world_news-t/bosnian-serb-government-apologizes-killings/#.XjwXOTJKJIU).

<sup>28</sup> Lara J. Nettlefield and Sarah Wagner, *Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 280-281.

<sup>29</sup> Zamira Rahim, "Srebrenica Genocide is 'Fabricated Myth,' Bosnian Serb Leader Says," *Independent*, April 14, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/srebrenica-massacre-genocide-milorad-dodik-bosnia-myth-a8869026.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Katharina Bart and Maja Zuvella, "Bosnian Serb Leader: Srebrenica was 20th century's 'Greatest Deception,'" *Reuters*, June 25, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-serbia-arrest/bosnian-serb-leader-srebrenica-was-20th-centurys-greatest-deception-idUSKBN0P51OL20150625>.

<sup>31</sup> "Cvijanovic: View Everything that happened in Srebrenica as a Whole for Objective Picture," *SRNA*, April 4, 2019, <http://www.srna.rs/novosti1/683128/cvijanovic-view-everything-that-happened-in-srebrenica-as-a-whole-for-objective-picture.htm>.

The current mayor of the municipality of Srebrenica, **Mladen Grujičić**, is also an ardent denier of the 1995 genocide, rejecting the verdicts of the international courts and peddling conspiracy theories about those buried in the Memorial Cemetery in Potočari.<sup>32</sup>



Mladen Grujičić

Denial of the Srebrenica genocide is similarly en vogue among the Serbian political establishment. In a 2012 interview on Montenegrin State Television, **Tomislav Nikolić**, who was then president of Serbia, declared “there was no genocide in Srebrenica.”<sup>33</sup> Under his successor to the presidency, Alexander Vučić of the Serbian Progressive Party, the Serbian government still refuses to acknowledge the events of July 1995 as genocide, and freed war criminals are welcomed back to Serbia and given prominent roles in the country’s political and public life. On July 10th of last year, one day before the 24th anniversary commemoration of Srebrenica, Serbian

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<sup>32</sup> Igor Spaic, “Srebrenica’s Serb Mayor Repeats Denial of Genocide,” *BIRN*, April 13, 2017, <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/04/13/srebrenica-s-serb-mayor-repeats-denial-of-genocide-04-13-2017/>.

“Srebrenica 'not genocide' - Serbia's President Nikolic,” *BBC*, June 1, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18301196>.

<sup>33</sup> “Srebrenica 'not genocide' - Serbia's President Nikolic,” *BBC*, June 1, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18301196>.

parliamentarian **Vladimir Đukanović**, also from the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, tweeted: “I want to congratulate the Serbian people on the day of the liberation of Srebrenica. Thanks to General Ratko Mladić on the brilliantly conducted military operation.”<sup>34</sup> Just two days after this tweet, **Aleksandar Vulin**, Serbian Minister of Defense, stated “the Serbian people survived genocide rather than committed it.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition to these politicians and the media outlets which propagate them, denial of the Srebrenica genocide is widely peddled by religious, cultural, and educational institutions in both Serbia and the RS. The Serbian Orthodox Church has been actively stoking pernicious strains of nationalism in both Serbia and the RS, with the Serbian **Patriarch Irinej** even declaring that “Serbia is anywhere Serbs live.”<sup>36</sup> The construction of the Budak Orthodox Church in 2013 near the Srebrenica Memorial Cemetery and mass grave of Srebrenica’s victims, condemned as a “senseless provocation” by the wider international community,<sup>37</sup> is just one way in which the Orthodox Church has helped to assert the Serbs’ revisionist narrative in post-genocide Srebrenica. Similarly, in schools and cultural centers across Serbia and the RS, children are taught alternative historical accounts of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which either reverse the narrative of Srebrenica or else omit it completely.



<sup>34</sup> “Serbian Lawmaker Calls Srebrenica Massacre ‘Liberation,’ Thanks Mladic For ‘Brilliant Military Operation’” Radio Free Europe, July 12, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbian-lawmaker-calls-srebrenica-massacre-liberation-thanks-mladic-for-brilliant-military-operation-/30051351.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Milica Stojanovic, “Hague Prosecutor Criticises Serbian Politicians for Genocide Denial,” *Balkan Transitional Justice*, July 17, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/17/hague-prosecutor-criticises-serbian-politicians-for-genocide-denial/>.

<sup>36</sup> “Metropolitan Mihailo: It is a sin before God and people not to bow down before Srebrenica victims,” *Patria*, November 2, 2017, <https://nap.ba/news/40206>.

<sup>37</sup> Elvira M. Jukic, “Church Accused of ‘Senseless Provocation’ in Srebrenica,” *BIRN*, April 18, 2013, <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/04/18/orthodox-church-urged-to-end-construction-in-srebrenica/>.

## Genocide Deniers in the International Community

Outside the milieu of regional Balkan politics, a number of international actors are also engaged in denying the Srebrenica genocide. In 2015, **Russia, China, Angola, and Venezuela** voted in the UN Security Council to reject a resolution that would formally recognize the events of July 1995 in Srebrenica as genocide.

While all of these governments should be recognized for this reprehensible act of political cowardice, the **Russian Federation** has done more than any other foreign state to bolster genocide denial and Serbian nationalism in the Balkans. Russia has long attempted to undermine the legitimacy of the ICTY by echoing Serbian accusations that the tribunal harbored an anti-Serb bias. Among other complaints, Russia has called the ICTY's sentencing of notorious Bosnian-Serb war criminals Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić “politicized.”<sup>38</sup>

Russian state actors employ narratives of long-standing historical, cultural, and Orthodox kinship with the Serbian people in order to expand their influence in the Balkans as part of their broader geopolitical confrontation with Western powers. To this end, Russia not only contributes to the historical revisionist efforts of Serbian nationalists and political agents engaged in denying genocide, but also provides funding, armaments, and military training to paramilitary and police forces in Serbia and the RS—the aspiring perpetrators of the next genocide.

In the West, where both the geopolitical interest and the ‘historical-cultural’ kinship with Serbia are lacking, denial of the Srebrenica genocide persists mainly in extreme leftist academic circles and media outlets. Perhaps the most famous of these Western revisionists is **Noam Chomsky**, who voiced strong opposition for the NATO intervention which ended the Bosnian War. Chomsky has also argued that the Bosnian-Serb concentration camps, where Bosniak prisoners were killed, tortured, and raped, were merely run-of-the-mill “refugee camps.” Chomsky penned the forward for a book called *The Politics of Genocide*, written by fellow revisionists **Edward Herman** and **David Peterson**, which denied the genocide in Srebrenica based on the outrageous claim that the Bosnian Serbs only killed Bosniak men of military age.<sup>39</sup>

Herman has additionally written numerous revisionist articles such as “The Politics of Srebrenica”, and “The Srebrenica Massacre was a Gigantic Political Fraud,” which was co-authored by **John Robels**. Other prominent revisionists in this left-wing intellectual camp of genocide deniers include **John Pilger, Michael Parenti, Jared Israel, Tariq Ali, Mick Hume, and Diana Johnstone**.

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<sup>38</sup> “Russia Calls Karadžić's Conviction 'Politicized,’” *Radio Free Europe*, March 25, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-calls-Karadžić-conviction-politicized/27635412.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Oz Kateriji, “The West's Leftist 'Intellectuals' Who Traffic in Genocide Denial, From Srebrenica to Syria,” *HAARETZ*, November 24, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-west-s-leftist-male-intellectuals-who-traffic-in-genocide-denial-1.5626759>.

# Talking Points and Tactics

There are a number of discursive strategies common to most instances of genocide denial throughout history and across the world. One pervasive tactic is to attempt to minimize the accepted death toll of an atrocity with allegations that the reports of mass killings are exaggerated and politically motivated, and that photographs and video footage from these incidents have been staged.

Additionally, deniers frequently invoke the narrative of self-defense, going to great lengths to portray the victim group as ‘rebels,’ ‘terrorists,’ or at the very least, equally well-equipped combatants engaged in mutual violence in the course of generalized warfare which may have featured ‘atrocities on all sides.’ In a similar vein, revisionists often attempt to deny any central direction or genocidal intent, exploiting the ambiguities of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Frequently, these arguments are buttressed by a full-scale reversal of events, in the form of a narrative which attempts to locate the perpetrators as the actual victims of mass violence and conspiracy. All of these tactics and more are regularly deployed by deniers of the Srebrenica genocide.

## **Disputing the Number and Identities of the Victims**

At present, more than 6,600 Bosniak victims of the Srebrenica genocide are buried in the Srebrenica Memorial Cemetery adjacent to the former UN base in Potočari. Near the entrance to the cemetery, the names of these victims as well as those of over 1,700 more whose remains have yet to be found or identified are inscribed on the semi-circular Memorial Wall. Nearby, a stone bears the number of the victims known to have perished in the July 1995 genocide: 8,372. Despite these facts having been established through meticulous investigation underpinned by more than two decades of DNA analysis, typical strategies of Srebrenica genocide denial dispute the number of victims known to have perished in July 1995, the circumstances of their deaths, and their very identities.

Historical revisionists often claim that the total number of victims murdered in Srebrenica is drastically lower than the judicially affirmed death toll of 8,372. Bosnian Serb leaders like Milorad Dodik frequently cite arbitrary figures as low as 2,000 victims and deploy numerous conspiracy theories to explain the discrepancy between their calculations and the international consensus.

One common narrative alleges that many of the names listed on the cemetery’s Memorial Wall are in fact persons who have emigrated from Bosnia and are alive and well, living in Germany and elsewhere abroad. Others claim that many of the bodies buried in the Memorial Cemetery actually belong to Serbs killed by Bosniaks in Srebrenica, who were interred under Muslim names as part of a broader conspiracy. Although entirely baseless and easily disproved by the readily available forensic evidence, these narratives are widely disseminated within the entity of Republika Srpska.

In the event that genocide deniers concede the number of Bosniak victims killed in Srebrenica to be closer to the international consensus, they frequently dispute the circumstances of the victims' deaths and their civilian identities.

Echoing claims made in the first RS report on Srebrenica, they assert that many of the Bosniaks buried in the Memorial Cemetery died of causes such as exhaustion, and that the majority were in fact killed in combat, as soldiers or terrorists, rather than unarmed civilians. Another common discourse which negates the identity of the victims and is deeply ingrained in the historical ideology of Serbian nationalism, argues that Bosniaks are not in fact a legitimate people, and thus by definition cannot be targeted by genocide.

This opprobrious narrative is rooted in centuries of historical revisionism, stretching back to the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in the Balkans, and is based on the illegitimate claim the Bosnian Muslims are actually just Serbs whose ancestors betrayed the Orthodox Church by converting to Islam under the Ottomans.

This long-standing historical narrative underscores the bigotry and self-contradiction inherent in Serbian ethno-nationalist ideology, which at once asserts the genetic inferiority of Bosniaks as *untermensch*, while simultaneously insisting that Bosniaks are actually, at the end of the day, merely the descendants of traitorous Serbs.

## Theories of International Conspiracies and Questioning the Courts

Another ubiquitous discourse of denial which is often used to buttress the aforementioned revisionist narratives casts the international judicial consensus on the Srebrenica genocide as part of a malign international conspiracy against the Serbian people. The standard version of this narrative contends that the events in Srebrenica in and after July 1995 were staged by pro-Muslim, anti-Serb, Western powers. Epitomized by the words of Milorad Dodik, deniers insist that the Srebrenica genocide was “a staged tragedy with an aim to satanize the Serbs.”<sup>40</sup> Operating under this paradigm of genocide denial, revisionists accuse meddling foreign powers of orchestrating everything from the war itself and the burial of the bodies to the annual commemoration in Potočari, which many claim Western actors pay people to attend.<sup>41</sup> Within this frame, the evidence submitted before the ICTY and ICJ is dismissed as having been staged in order to demonize Serbs, and the findings of the world's most esteemed legal institutions are conveniently rejected on the basis of an imaginary anti-Serb bias.

An additional tactic used to undermine the international judicial proceedings which established, beyond a reasonable doubt, the facts of the Srebrenica genocide, attempts to exploit perceived ambiguities in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Under the aegis of this approach, mediocre academics and local politicians masquerade as scholars of international law; the collective narcissism of red-handed perpetrators is thus pitted against the assiduous deliberations of the world's most astute legal minds and based on evidence collected and vetted by the world's most venerated investigative bodies.

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<sup>40</sup> “Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik disputes 1995 Srebrenica genocide,” *DW*, August 14, 2018, <https://apnews.com/b76aa3d8b227474aa065ce3464dca714/Bosnian-Serb-leader-denies-scope-of-Srebrenica-massacre>.

<sup>41</sup> David Rhode, “Denying Genocide in the Face of Science,” *The Atlantic*, July 17, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/srebrenica-massacre-bosnia-anniversary-denial/398846/>.



One of the most common points of departure with the international judicial consensus is the issue of genocidal intent—that is, the intent to destroy a group in whole or in part—which was thoroughly substantiated during the ICTY and ICJ proceedings by material evidence and witness testimony. Deniers also attempt to dispute findings of the central organization of the genocide operation as well as the criminal complicity of the Serbian government, both of which are also irrefutably proven by the existing evidence. The previously discussed contention which negates the authentic group identity of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) as a means of disqualifying them as a legitimate victim group in an instance of genocide also falls within the category of these spurious rhetorical arguments.

## **Triumphalism and Nationalist Historical Revisionism**

Denial of the Srebrenica genocide is intricately interwoven with the broader historical revisionist enterprise in Serbia which seeks to recast the events of the latter half of the twentieth century in order to create a sustainable foundation for Serbian nationalist ideology. This grand revisionist project, dating back to at least the nineteen-eighties, revolves heavily around the rehabilitation of the Serbian Chetnik movement. During the Second World War, the term Chetnik originated to describe Serbian fighters who collaborated with Nazis against the Yugoslav Partisans and allied forces. The mantle of Chetnik was proudly reclaimed by Bosnian Serb nationalists when they began killing their Bosniak neighbors in the nineteen-nineties following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Since that time, the rehabilitation of the Chetniks and glorification of war criminals from both the Second World War and the most recent conflict has been a mainstay of the Serbian revisionist enterprise buttressing denial of the Srebrenica genocide.

Role reversal is a central component of this revisionist discourse. In the same way that Serbian nationalist historians have recast the Chetniks as protagonists in the Second World War and the victims of the Tito regime's subsequent persecutions, they have glorified the Chetniks of the Bosnian war, constructing a narrative of Serbian victimhood in which Srebrenica is presented as a "war of liberation." The mainstream embrace of Chetnik identity and ideology and the denial of the Srebrenica genocide are mutually reciprocal discourses in both Serbia and Republika Srpska. Criminals convicted of war crimes are exalted, including Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, the men chiefly responsible for the Srebrenica genocide. Those who are still alive and not serving prison sentences, such as self-described "Chetnik duke," **Vojislav Šešelj**,<sup>42</sup> are welcomed back into Serbian society and given roles of political and social prominence. In schools, Serbian children are taught these alternate nationalist narratives of twentieth century history, which glorify Chetniks and deny the genocide which took place in Srebrenica.

These practices constitute the cultural component of the genocidal policies enacted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and have been accurately termed triumphalism. Within RS institutions, triumphalism takes many forms: from the construction of Orthodox churches in Muslim communities to public commemorations including marches and demonstrations in celebration of war-time atrocities and the official observation of holidays like RS day which was proscribed by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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<sup>42</sup> Ivana Nikolić, "How Serbia Changed its Mind about World War II History," *BIRN*, February 6, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/06/how-serbia-changed-its-mind-about-world-war-ii-history/?fbclid=IwAR1dfuLDy-7FwqBSAXVlyAAceO7pWfYxEjqgLL2-Yx1Y5f0F0lybR2Y7D8>.

In popular culture, triumphalism is ubiquitous in Serbian television, music, and even sports stadiums. Milomir Marić, a popular television host in Serbia, has interviewed numerous convicted war criminals including Vojislav Seselj and Vinko Pandurević as well as fugitives charged with war crimes such as Tomo Kovac. In November 2018, a particularly tasteless broadcast featured Ratko Mladić, calling into the show from his jail cell at the Hague. Marić and Seselj, who was also in the studio, joked with Mladić on live television, before Mladić signed off by offering the viewing audiences “kisses” from “Grandpa Ratko.” War time pop music hits by artists such as Baja Mali Knindža as well as new recordings which celebrate war crimes committed against Muslims in Bosnia continue to be an integral part of the Serbian music industry. As well as celebrating atrocities, the lyrics of these songs often dehumanize Muslims women, a practice which began in the 1980s and contributed to normalizing the systematic rape of Muslim women and girls throughout the Bosnian war. These themes are often preserved by supplanting folk songs with new lyrics, such as "O Fatima, where are your pants, on the Chetniks, around his cartridge belts." These abhorrent cultural and institutional practices have allowed triumphalism to be passed down to post-war generations of Serbian society. "Knife, Wire, Srebrenica" has become a ubiquitous chant and banner slogan in sports stadiums across Serbia and the RS as well as among the Serbian diaspora. The glorification of war criminals and the celebration of genocide through institutions and pop culture has transformed the legacy of genocide into an inherited cultural asset in the perpetrators' communities.



Milorad Dodik

## THE YEAR IN DENIAL

A number of alarming developments in the denial of the Srebrenica genocide have unfolded in recent years. Amidst escalating tensions and fears of renewed violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the persistent denial of the Srebrenica genocide obstructs processes of post-war reconciliation and exacerbates the climate of political instability. More importantly, in light of threats of secession and the amassing of arms building its capabilities in the RS, it is portentous of future violence against the already victimized Bosniak community. The following case studies and publications have been highlighted in order to illustrate particularly pernicious and prevalent trends in Srebrenica genocide denial both locally and around the world.

# Case Study I: New Investigative Commissions

On August 14th, 2018, the RS National Assembly annulled the 2004 report on Srebrenica which acknowledged the findings of the ICTY in its judgment of Radislav Krstić. It subsequently called for the establishment of a new commission to reinvestigate the events of July 1995 in Srebrenica and to publish a revised report. In February of last year, at the initiative of Milorad Dodik and the SNSD party, the RS announced the establishment of the **Independent International Commission for Investigating the Sufferings of all Peoples in the Srebrenica Region in the Period from 1992 to 1995**, as well as another commission with a mandate to investigate the wartime suffering of Serbs in Sarajevo.

The establishment of these new commissions has provoked strong condemnation within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the international community. In a statement following the announcement of the project, the US embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina cautioned against any attempt to deny the judicial conclusions reached by the ICJ and ICTY, advising Bosnian Serbs to “respect court decisions and bravely face and accept the truth, regardless of how painful it was.”<sup>43</sup> An open letter signed by thirty-one international experts on the conflict in former Yugoslavia says the commissions “represent the culmination of more than a decade of genocide denial and historical revisionism by the SNSD government in the RS.”<sup>44</sup>

According to **Milorad Kojić**, director of the **RS Center for the Research of War, War Crimes and the Search for the Missing**, “the accusations that the Republika Srpska government wants to minimize the crimes in Srebrenica are meaningless.”<sup>45</sup> This sentiment has been echoed by RS authorities throughout the RS who insist that these commissions’ only objective is to uncover the truth, and that they will not be engaged in any form of illegitimate historical revisionism. While the activities and research methods of the commissions are still a matter of speculation, RS officials point to the international scholars which comprise the commissions, including two Israeli Holocaust historians, as proof of their impartiality.

Many have expressed doubts as to the objectivity and credibility of the international academics known to be taking part in the project, however. The previously mentioned open letter claims that the commissions are comprised of “individuals who do not represent either the consensus views of the academic or legal communities, and who appear handpicked to produce narratives that will advance the revisionist politics of the current RS government.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, many of the commission members have expressed deeply problematic views on the Bosnian genocide, including **Raphael Israeli** from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who stated in 2011 that “the only proven genocide is the Holocaust.”<sup>47</sup> Other members have been accused of harboring pro-Serb or

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<sup>43</sup> “US Embassy and OHR condemn the formation of commission for Srebrenica,” *N1 Sarajevo*, February 8, 2019, <http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a314842/US-Embassy-and-OHR-condemn-the-formation-of-commission-for-Srebrenica.html>.  
“Bosnian Serb War Commissions ‘Seeking to Revise Truth,’” *Canadian Institute for Research of Genocide*, February 22, 2019, <http://instituteforgenocide.org/?p=15099>.

<sup>44</sup> “Bosnian Serb War Commissions ‘Seeking to Revise Truth,’” *Canadian Institute for Research of Genocide*, February 22, 2019, <http://instituteforgenocide.org/?p=15099>.

<sup>45</sup> Albina Sorguc, “Bosnian Serbs’ War Commissions: Fact-Seeking or Truth-Distorting?” *BIRN*, February 25, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/25/bosnian-serbs-war-commissions-fact-seeking-or-truth-distorting/>.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Gordy, et al., “Truth and Revision in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” accessed at [https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RS\\_Commission\\_FINAL\\_II.pdf](https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RS_Commission_FINAL_II.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Наташа Јовановић, “RAFAEL IZRAELI Podrška islamu je ubistvo hrišćanstva,” *Pecat*, July 7, 2011, <http://www.pecat.co.rs/2011/07/rafael-izraeli-podrška-islam-u-ubistvo-hrišćanstva/>.

anti-Muslim biases, including **Adenrele Shinaba**, a Nigerian expert on the Boko Haram terrorist organization, and former French Army officer **Patrick Barriot**. Barriot testified at the Hague in the defense of Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, and has called the international criminal proceedings an “indictment of the Serbian people.” He has also expressed the view that during the Bosnian War, Serbs were merely defending themselves from radical Islamic terrorists.<sup>48</sup>

The reports of the new RS commissions are expected to be released sometime this year. In the meantime, there are additional rumors of a potential joint diplomatic initiative between Belgrade and Banja Luka to launch yet another international commission to investigate the war in Bosnia and the events in Srebrenica.<sup>49</sup> The primary justification for this commission is the so-called “**British Archives**,” a collection of documents<sup>50</sup> recently declassified by the British Defense Ministry which are lauded in the Belgrade press as vindicating the Serbs of Genocide in Srebrenica.

This is hardly the case, however. The most controversial argument being made based on the reports, that the Bosnian Serbs lacked an overarching plan to capture the safe zone of Srebrenica, has already been sufficiently discredited by the international courts. The information contained in the British documents is not particularly novel, and there is no reason to believe that had this information been available earlier, it would have significantly affected the outcome of the trials. Nevertheless, revisionists in Serbia and Bosnia have capitalized on the release of new information to bolster their latest assaults on the truth of the Srebrenica genocide, and to legitimize the establishment of the latest investigative commissions.

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<sup>48</sup> Sorguc, “Bosnian Serbs’ War Commissions,” February 25, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> “Novosti: International Commission on Srebrenica?” *B92*, January 8, 2020, [https://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2020&mm=01&dd=08&nav\\_id=107753](https://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2020&mm=01&dd=08&nav_id=107753).

<sup>50</sup> These documents are available for download from the website of the National Archives of the United Kingdom, and can be found at the web address <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/prime-ministers-papers-from-1996-released/?fbclid=IwAR1tMLz0icA0ud7FuzJ3TA5h-4w-jW6vXhy-9CMdBWAVh9ZHsadVQ5UjpAl>.

# Case Study 2: The Municipality of Srebrenica

Incidents which have unfolded in the municipality of Srebrenica in recent years are indicative of those taking place throughout the wider territory of the RS. The 2016 election of the **Mladen Grujičić** as the first Serb mayor of post-war Srebrenica has emboldened nationalist Serb elements engaged in genocide denial within the community. Grujičić himself has proved to be a divisive figure and has publicly denied the Srebrenica genocide at every opportunity, employing all of the staple talking points. In addition to refusing to accept the rulings of genocide in Srebrenica upheld by international courts, Grujičić has repeatedly questioned the number of victims from the Srebrenica genocide, alleging that many of the graves in the Memorial Cemetery in Potočari are fake.<sup>51</sup>

He has publicly lauded convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić as a hero,<sup>52</sup> and has joined in the Serbian nationalist chorus which attempts to exonerate the fascist Chetnik movement.<sup>53</sup> Grujičić was just one of many prominent Serbian attendants at a book launch which took place in Srebrenica last March for a revisionist work entitled *The Battle of Srebrenica: War for Civilization* (see subsequent section on publications). Others in attendance included Vice President of the Assembly **Radomir Pavlović**, president of the local SDS chapter **Momčilo Cvjetinović**, the Srebrenica parish priest, and the abbot of the Karno monastery.

Last June, in the run-up to the 24th anniversary commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, an activist association called **Eastern Alternative** installed a plaque in Srebrenica bearing the inscription “in memory of the innocently killed Serbs of the Podrinje and Birac area in the period 1992-1995, committed by Muslim hordes.” While the plaque has since been removed, this same association has been responsible for putting up posters around Srebrenica featuring the image of General Ratko Mladić alongside the words “There was no genocide” and “Live and be healthy.” The faces of war criminals like Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić are frequently encountered in and around Srebrenica, on flags, banners, and t-shirts that the town’s Bosnian Serb inhabitants, proudly display.

On Orthodox Christmas Eve this year, a convoy of around 20 vehicles drove through Srebrenica and the Memorial Center complex in Potočari, waving Serbian flags, shooting firearms, and blaring nationalist Chetnik music. A clear attempt at intimidation, this incident is currently under investigation by Bosnian authorities.<sup>54</sup> A similar incident took place the previous year on Orthodox Christmas Eve, when in addition to the nationalist caravan, individuals distributed pig entrails at the Memorial in an Islamophobic gesture intended to desecrate the sacred resting place of thousands of Bosniaks. Employees of the Srebrenica Memorial and Bosniak residents of Srebrenica report feeling unsafe in this environment, with some drawing parallels between these aggressive nationalist provocations and those which were made before and during the 1992-1995 war.

An incident at Srebrenica’s First Primary School this year highlights the divisive strains of ethno-nationalist ideology being fostered at all levels of this community. An incendiary photograph taken in a religious education

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Osborne and Alastair Sloan, “Massacre of Muslims: a town still in denial,” *Middle East Eye*, July 6, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/node/64514>.

<sup>52</sup> BBC News Insight, “Srebrenica massacre: A survivor’s fight for justice,” May 5, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxq4DhazATQ&list=PLJxnQXiytA\\_SvdTdlurjLOU3IjdwdBRhr](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxq4DhazATQ&list=PLJxnQXiytA_SvdTdlurjLOU3IjdwdBRhr).

<sup>53</sup> “Gradonačelnik Srebrenice, Srbin Grujičić podržao genocid: ‘Vrijeđa li to nekoga?’” *Direktno*, January 30, 2020, <https://direktno.hr/eu-i-svijet/gradonacelnik-srebrenice-srbin-grujicic-podrzao-genocid-vrijeda-li-to-nekoga-180875/>.

<sup>54</sup> Emina Dizdarevic, “Bosnia Probes Christmas Eve ‘Intimidation’ by Celebrating Serbs,” *BIRN*, January 8, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/08/bosnia-probes-christmas-eve-intimidation-by-celebrating-serbs/>.

classroom at the school emerged on social media, showing nine students displaying symbols of Serbian nationalism under the caption “Chetnik Brothers.” The school’s largely Serb administration not only failed to condemn the disturbing photograph, but in some cases expressed explicit support for the students' open display of dangerous ethnic-supremacist ideology.

Following condemnation and protest from the Bosniak parents and students which received national support, the administration grudgingly took disciplinary action against the students who took part in the provocative photo. In RS media and social network portals however, the narrative of this incident has been distorted and used to foment further anti-Bosniak sentiment. Serbs accuse Bosniak parents of targeting Serb school children for political purposes, despite the fact that all identifying information about the students was removed and concealed by the members of the Bosniak community who reported the photograph.

## Case Study 3: Peter Handke and the Nobel Prize



Peter Handke

One of the most aggressive attacks on the truth of the Srebrenica genocide this year came not from nationalist officials in Serbia or the RS, but at the hands of the international community. In October 2019, the **Swedish Academy** announced its decision to award the world's most prestigious literary accolade, the Nobel Prize in Literature, to avowed genocide denier Peter Handke. A native of Austria, Handke spent much of the eighties and nineties cavorting with the likes of war criminals, most notably Slobodan Milošević. The deep friendship which Handke cultivated with Milošević is evidenced by the long list of decorations and privileges awarded Handke by the Milošević regime for his service to the Serbian cause, including the Order of the Serbian Knight and a secret Yugoslav passport—which at the time was a privilege only bestowed on citizens of Montenegro and Serbia.<sup>55</sup> Milošević reportedly requested that Handke be allowed to testify in his defense at the Hague Tribunal, where

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<sup>55</sup> Aleksandar Hemon, "The Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists," *New York Times*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/opinion/peter-handke-nobel-bosnia-genocide.html>.



Milošević was on trial for abetting genocide and myriad other war crimes. After Milošević died of a heart attack in his prison cell at the Hague in 2006, Handke delivered a eulogy at his funeral.

The works for which Handke was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature this year were true testaments to his commitment to Milošević and the genocidal cause of 'Greater Serbia.' Some of his 'literary' claims include that the Serb bombing of the Markale market in Sarajevo was actually the work of Muslims; that pictures of Muslim victims from the war were staged; that the Bosnian Muslims somehow brought the slaughter of more 8,000 men and boys in Srebrenica on themselves; that it is unfair to refer to the Serbs as the "aggressors" in the conflict; and that Bosnian Muslims are not in fact an actual people. Peter Handke's appalling views are obviously nothing new. Rather, it is the decision of the Swedish Academy to award him the 2019 Nobel Prize in literature "for an influential work that with linguistic ingenuity has explored the periphery and the specificity of human experience," which represents an alarming expansion of genocide denial within the upper echelons of Western intellectual society.

In response to the outrage which the announcement of Handke's nomination evoked from genocide survivors, historians, journalists, and investigators with firsthand experience of the violence in Bosnia, the Swedish Academy only doubled down on its position. In a letter addressed to Bosnian publishers on November 15th, **Ander Olsson**, chair of the **Nobel Committee for Literature** wrote, "The Swedish Academy believes that in an open society there must be room for different opinions about authors and that there must be space for different reasonable interpretations of their literary [sic] works." In many ways, this is the most damnatory statement of the Swedish Academy in the Handke affair. Setting aside the ironic misspelling of the word literary by a representative of one of the world's most prestigious academic institutions, this declaration does not, as one might expect, simply reiterate the literary merits for which the Swedish Academy saw fit to award Handke the Nobel Prize; rather, it openly endorses Handke's political stance in denial of genocide as one of many valid "different opinions" on the established facts and judicial rulings of the highest international courts.

While the committee responsible for selecting the Nobel laureate in literature is only comprised of eighteen individuals, a far larger segment of Western society is complicit in this act of denial. This includes everyone in attendance at the Nobel Award Ceremony in Stockholm on December 10th of last year, who stood and applauded as **King Carl XVI Gustaf** of Sweden presented Handke with the Nobel medal; it includes the Swedish monarchy itself; it includes every member of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra who failed to lay down his or her instrument in protest. Most importantly, it includes the vast majority of the Western intellectual establishment who either openly endorsed or failed to speak out against Handke's shameful nomination.

# Recent Publications

Since the end of the war in former Yugoslavia, a proliferation of books has been published which endeavor to rewrite the history of the war and of the genocide in Srebrenica. In fact, many war criminals have even authored books themselves. Former Serb paramilitary leader **Milan Lukić**, Bosnian Serb official **Biljana Plavšić**, member of the wartime RS parliament **Momčilo Krajišnik**, and **Radovan Karadžić** are all published authors, in addition to being convicted war criminals. As well as publishing his own manifesto, Karadžić has been the subject of numerous fawning attempts to rewrite the history of Srebrenica and his criminal legacy, as has **Ratko Mladić**. These works deserve to be recognized for their nefarious contributions to the denial of genocide and glorification of war criminals which fuel ethnic divisions across the former Yugoslavia. The following titles represent the most influential of these recent publications.

## **“There was no Genocide in Srebrenica/U Srebrenici nije bilo genocida” (2018)** **By Vojislav Šešelj**

Spanning three volumes and over 3,300 pages, this recent publication by Serbian politician and convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj partakes in all the major discourses of Srebrenica genocide denial. Šešelj argues that genocide was not committed in Srebrenica because the women and children were not killed but deported, an argument which has been thoroughly debunked by international scholarship on gender and genocide. He also puts the number of Muslim prisoners of war executed by Bosnian Serbs at between 1,000 and 1,200 individuals.

During the book's promotion in Belgrade, six human rights activists, including Natasa Kandic, the 2013 recipient of the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award, were physically assaulted and forcibly removed from the premises. The activists were from the Humanitarian Law Center, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and Forum ZFD, and had come to the public event in order to stage a peaceful protest and distribute their own publication on crimes committed against Croats in the territory of Vojvodina. On the orders of Šešelj himself, the activists were verbally abused, pushed, hit, and kicked, before being violently forced out of the public hall by members of Šešelj's radical party. Despite the fact that the attack was carried out on the public premises of Belgrade's Stari Grad municipality, no municipal staff or security personnel attempted to intervene to stop the violence.<sup>56</sup>

## **“The Battle of Srebrenica: The War for Civilization/ Bitka za Srebrenicu: rat za civilizaciju” (2019)** **By Dušan Pavlović**

In *The Battle of Srebrenica: The War for Civilization*, Serbian political economist Dušan Pavlović engages in many of the classic discourses of genocide denial which underpin the Serbian nationalist political movement. Pavlović alleges that as many as 5,500 of the Bosniak men killed by Serb forces during the Srebrenica Genocide were not unarmed victims of systematic large scale executions; rather, he claims that most of these men were armed soldiers killed in open combat with Serb forces or internal conflicts. Pavlović argues that other Bosniak men died as a result of suicides or land mine explosions. According to Pavlović, the book is the product of more than seven

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<sup>56</sup> “Attack Against Civil Rights Defender of the Year Recipient Natasa Kandic in Belgrade,” *Civil Rights Defenders*, February 6, 2020, <https://crd.org/2020/02/06/attack-against-civil-rights-defender-of-the-year-recipient-natasa-kandic-in-belgrade/>.

years of research and relies on various sources, including the testimonies of Muslims in the convoy to Tuzla. Pavlović's work has also been cited by RS officials as a partial impetus behind the previously discussed investigative commissions charged with the revision of the 2004 report on the Srebrenica genocide.<sup>57</sup>

## **“Srebrenica: Reality and Manipulation” Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference (2019)**

**Edited by Milovan Milutinović**

Published by the **Organization of Commanding Officers of the Army of the Republic of Srpska** in cooperation with **Banja Luka Independent University “Apeiron”** and the **Institute for research on suffering of the Serbs in XX century Belgrade**, this nearly 800-page document is a cornucopia of classic revisionist narratives. The authors of the individual conference papers include convicted war criminals, their defense counsels, and Serbian nationalist war-mongers, in addition to a number of two-bit regional and international academics. The most prestigious contributor, an American leftist intellectual in the spirit of Noam Chomsky, died several years before he had the opportunity to attend the 2019 Banja Luka conference. While it is impossible to dissect all forty-nine of these papers in the limited space allotted in this report, the underlying themes can be adequately summarized, given that they are both predictable and redundant.

The foundational motif which unifies all of the papers in the proceedings is naturally the complete role reversal of victim and perpetrator in the case of the Srebrenica genocide. The authors go to great lengths to establish a narrative of Serbian victimhood, invoking grievances from bygone eras, including the Middle Ages and the Second World War. Apocryphal and wholly irrelevant interpretations of historical events dating back decades and even centuries before the conflict are inconceivably used to set the stage for the violence which took place in July 1995. From here, the next logical step is to distort the number as well as the identity of the Bosniak victims. The unarmed men and boys who were detained, abused, and systematically executed in Srebrenica are described as military combatants, terrorists, and criminals. The death tolls cited in the proceedings tend to fall within the vicinity of 2,000 victims—roughly 75% less than the judicially established number of Bosniak fatalities. Furthermore, these deaths are attributed to a range of causes, most commonly mutual combat with Serbian armed forces, but also disease, malnutrition, exhaustion, and infighting. The preposterous notion of a legitimate Bosniak threat from the enclave is fabricated through outlandish exaggerations of the conflict prior to July 1995. Some authors are so far divorced from reality as to engage in outrageous characterizations of genocide or ethnic cleansing perpetrated against Serbs in the Podrinje by Bosnian Muslims. Thus, the Serbs are presented as hapless victims, and Bosniaks as legitimate military targets. The ludicrous finale of this narrative depicts the exhumation and reburial of bodies in far-off locations, which was usually undertaken in the dead of night by military personnel disguised as civilians, as not a deceptive cover-up operation, but rather as a matter of hygiene—nothing more than customary post-battle sanitation, standard operating procedure undertaken out of concern for public safety.

Additionally, all of the conference papers in the proceedings take aim at the international courts established to adjudicate the crimes committed in former Yugoslavia in the nineteen-nineties. Some authors take arrogant jabs at the basic competence of these investigative and judicial bodies, while others display their ignorance of legal

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<sup>57</sup> “Book ‘Battle for Srebrenica-War for Civilization’ Basis for work of International Commission,” *SRNA*, September 28, 2018, <http://www.srna.rs/novosti/631534/book-battle-for-srebrenica---war-for-civilisation--basis-for-work-of-international-commission.htm>.

scholarship and genocide theory with sophomoric attacks on the characterization of genocide. By far the most ubiquitous strategy used to undermine these courts however is to accuse them of being biased, one-sided, and engaged in an international anti-Serb conspiracy. Many of the publication's authors indulge in the most extreme facets of this discourse, characterizing not only the judicial proceedings but the entirety of the violence in Srebrenica as stage-managed Western conspiracy intended to provide a pretext for NATO intervention and the subsequent vilification of the Serbs. In short, these proceedings constitute a textbook case study of Serbian genocide denial, manifesting all of its classic discourses.

## **“My War Criminal” (2020)**

**By Jessica Stern**

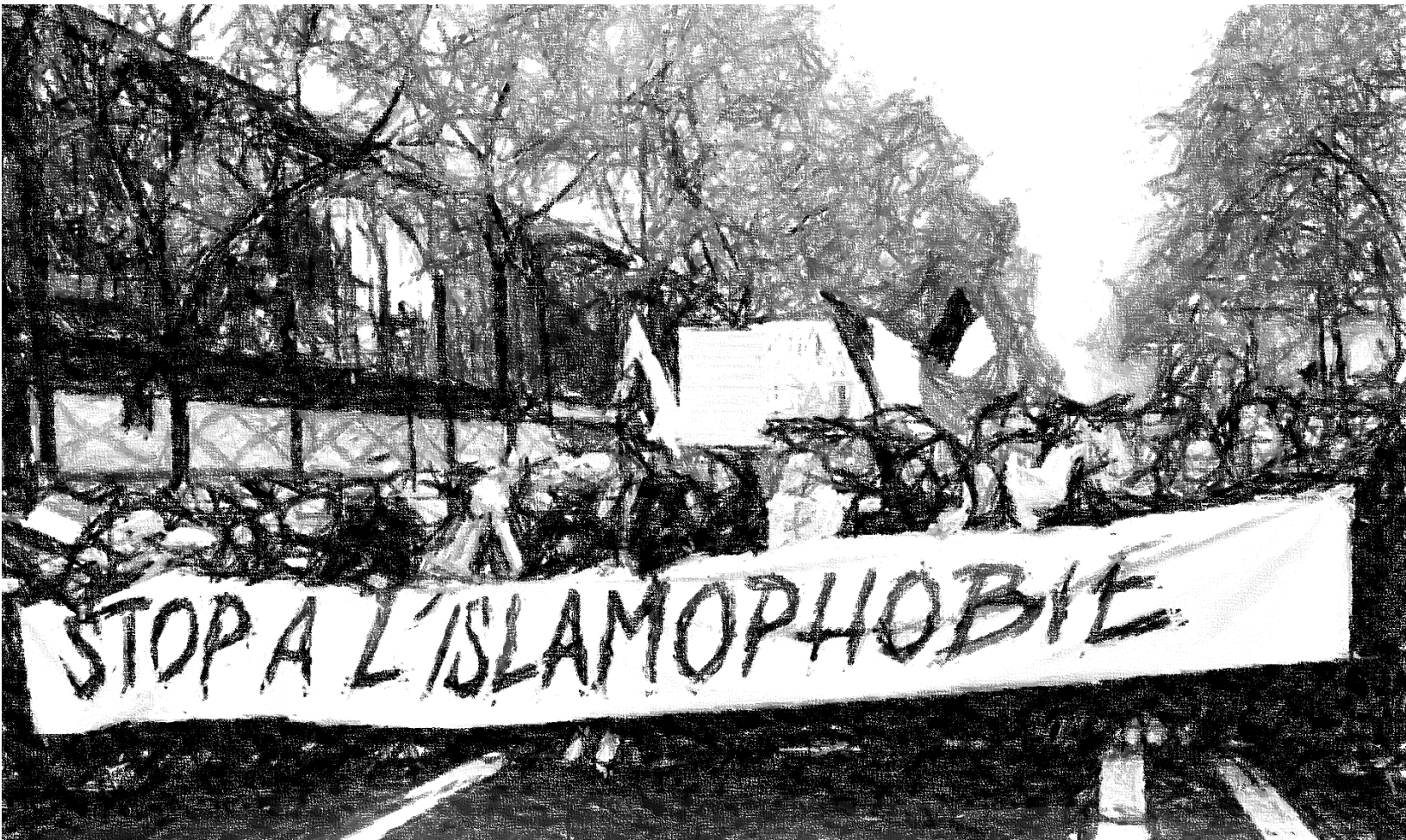
American scholar and terrorism expert Jessica Stern is not your typical revisionist historian or genocide denier. Indeed, she accepts the verdicts reached by the ICTY, and has even spoken out in condemnation of Srebrenica genocide denial, such as the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Peter Handke. In her most recent publication however, bearing the unpalatable title *My War Criminal*, Stern indulges in a unique strain of historical revisionism, and one that has become alarmingly commonplace within the international intellectual community. The product of years of interviews with Radovan Karadžić during his detention for war crimes at The Hague, *My War Criminal* is a flagrant attempt to humanize one of the Srebrenica genocide's most unrepentant perpetrators. As the title suggests, Stern's work paints a grotesquely romantic and august portrait of Karadžić, whom she refers to affectionately throughout the piece as Radovan. Along with indulging in uncomfortable physical descriptions of his height and supposed good looks, Stern goes to great lengths to characterize her subject as both a gentleman and a scholar—presenting him as at times a poetic genius, a tragic hero of his own mythology, and even something resembling an intimate friend.

The majority of its reviewers have recognized *My War Criminal* for exactly what it is: a personal enterprise rather than a scholarly one. A poignant review by Rafia Zakaria describes the work as “the efforts of a late-career academic whose flagging relevance muddies and misleads, all the while selling moral confusion as psychological complexity.”<sup>58</sup> Stern is certainly not the first tone-deaf Western intellectual to play into the hands of genocide deniers out of myopic naiveté, or to capitalize on the suffering of Srebrenica's victims to further her academic career. At best trivializing genocide and at worst engaging in outright denial, Stern's work is an invaluable contribution to the revisionist narratives of the Bosnian Serbs and situates her firmly within their global community of genocide apologists.

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<sup>58</sup> Rafia Zakaria, “Empathy For the Devil,” *The Baffler*, February 21, 2020, <https://thebaffler.com/alienated/empathy-for-the-devil-zakaria>.

# GLOBAL TRENDS



Genocide denial is deeply entrenched with a number of concurrent phenomena including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and radical right-wing terrorism, which pose a direct threat of violence to minority communities across the globe. Denying the historical collective trauma of marginalized groups emboldens their oppressors and reinforces their marginalization, putting them at greater risk of future discrimination and violence. This vulnerability is compounded by the proliferation of radical right-wing ideology in the United States and across Europe.

In what many see as a response to globalization facilitated by the rise of the internet as a means of spreading ideology and influence, radical right-wing ideas are reaching ever wider audiences. As extreme ideology becomes increasingly mainstream, the mainstream itself is moving further and further in the direction of extremism. Leaders elected to high political office in many Western countries openly espouse racist and anti-Semitic views, employing the rhetoric of invasion and infection to refer to religious and ethnic minorities. History has shown that this type of incendiary language, coupled with the legitimization of mainstream political leaders, serves as a catalyst for violence against targeted groups. These processes can currently be witnessed in the dramatic upsurge in terrorist attacks committed under the auspices of ethno-nationalism and white supremacy.

The dramatic global surge in prejudice and violence against religious minorities in the West is indicative of this trend. A rise in anti-Semitic attitudes and violence against Jewish communities has accompanied the resurgence of Holocaust denial worldwide. In both Europe and the United States, this is manifest in the proliferation of anti-Jewish propaganda on the internet as well as vandalism, threats, and violent attacks against Jewish individuals and communities. Muslim minorities in the West have also been similarly victimized. Like anti-Semitism, prejudice against Muslims has existed for centuries, but has been galvanized by various outgrowths of globalization and the global economic crisis. Incidents of discrimination, harassment, and violence against Muslims have sky-rocketed in recent years in both Europe and America. The most commonly reported anti-Muslim hate crimes include attacks against mosques, community centers, and Muslim homes, as well as attacks against covered women, who are often the most visible members of the Islamic community.

Genocide denial and historical revisionism are integral components of the supremacist ideologies motivating attacks against both Jewish and Muslim minorities. A recent survey in the United Kingdom found that a staggering 5% of adults in the United Kingdom do not believe that the Holocaust took place, and one in twelve adults believes the scale of the violence has been grossly exaggerated.<sup>59</sup> Similar trends can be observed throughout the West, and the implications of such findings are far graver than mere historical illiteracy. Seventy-five years since the liberation of Auschwitz, the anti-fascist consensus which emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War is crumbling, giving rise to a global Neo-Nazi movement which feeds off Holocaust revisionism and the symbolism of the Third Reich. The memory of the horrors of the Holocaust served to discredit Nazism for the latter half of the twentieth century, preventing any such ideology from gaining traction in the West. The fading of this historical memory, however, has led to widespread ignorance of the realities of the Holocaust; this in turn has created a breeding ground for Holocaust revisionism, and for the proliferation of violent anti-Semitic ideology.

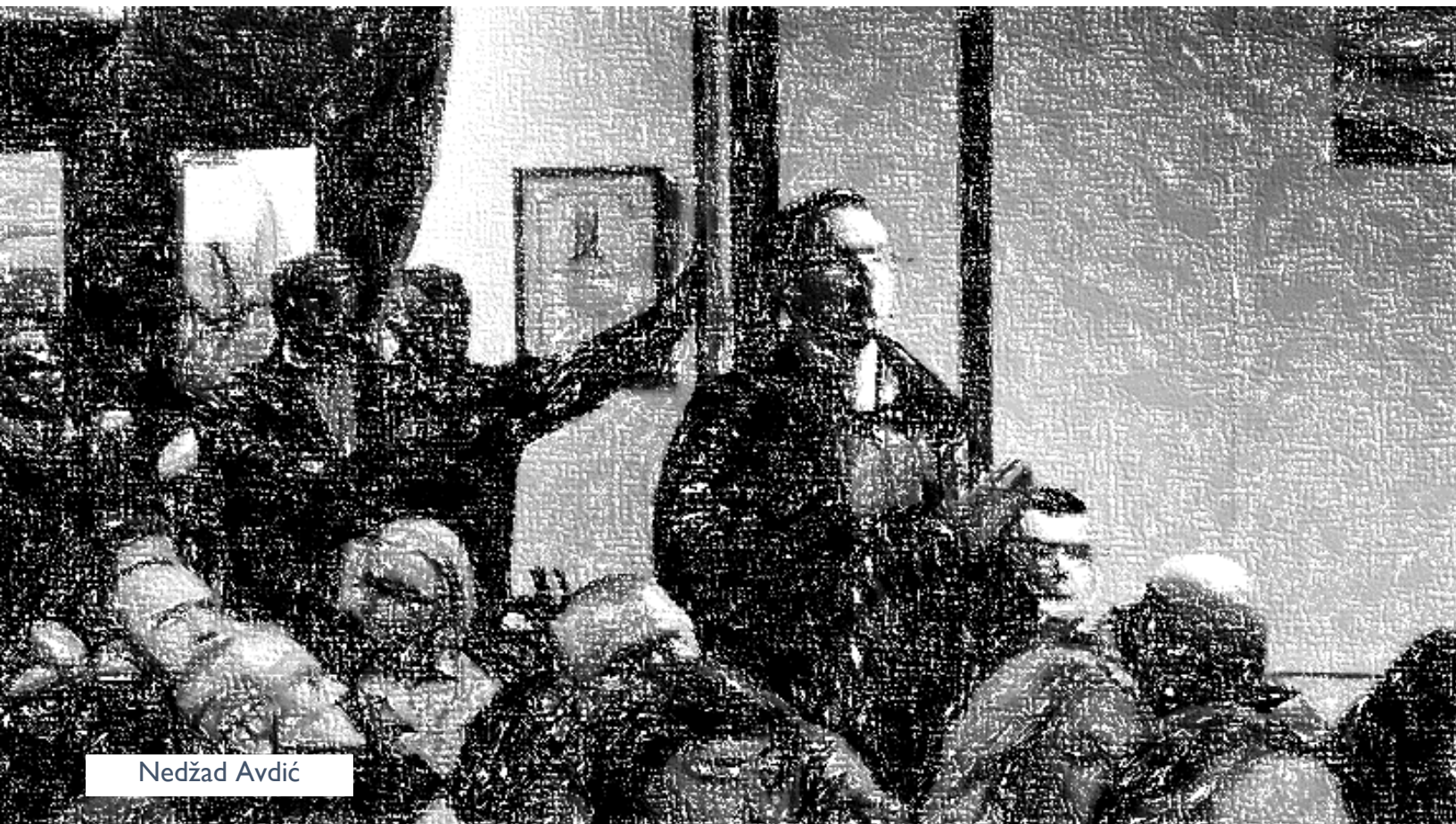
In the same way that Holocaust denial fuels right-wing violence against Jewish communities, historical revision of the genocide against Bosnian Muslims mobilizes anti-Islamic elements of the global far-right. The genocide against Bosnian Muslims has been a source of inspiration in some of the most violent right-wing terror attacks in recent history. The twenty-eight-year-old white supremacist who murdered 51 Muslim worshipers last March in Christchurch, New Zealand had the names of Serbian nationalists inscribed on the rifle he used to carry out the attacks. In the livestream video of the attack he uploaded to Facebook, he can be seen listening to a Chetnik war song glorifying Radovan Karadžić immediately before the first shooting. The genocide against Bosnian Muslims in the nineteen-nineties was also a source of inspiration for the Norwegian extremist who gunned down 77 people in a 2011 shooting spree.

These are only the most horrific examples, but they illustrate the enhanced threat posed by genocide denial in the era of globalization. In the age of the internet, violent ideologies which are allowed to fester can reach untold corners of the world, finding strength and legitimization in other strains of the same virus. It is more important now than ever to stem the miasma of genocide denial which is fueling radical right-wing terrorism across the globe.

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<sup>59</sup> "Holocaust Memorial Day: 'Shocking' levels of denial remain," *BBC*, January 27, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47015184>.

# COMBATTING DENIAL



Nedžad Avdić

In light of the alarming and widespread developments discussed in this report, the fight against denial of the Srebrenica genocide can seem like a Sisyphean task. Denial has followed every instance of genocide in human history, and its persistence in spite of overwhelming evidence is nothing short of demoralizing. While it may be impossible to eradicate denial completely, we all bear a collective responsibility to the victims and survivors of mass political violence to stem the tide of this insidious poison. In this endeavor, we can draw strength and inspiration from numerous courageous acts undertaken on the frontlines of genocide denial in the former Yugoslavia.

One notable example comes to us from the center of Belgrade, on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide last year. Dozens of human activists took to the streets of the Serbian capital to protest the existing culture of denial. Holding banners with the words ‘Responsibility’, ‘Solidarity’ and ‘We will never forget Srebrenica genocide’, as well as pieces of paper bearing Srebrenica’s death toll, 8,372, these courageous activists held their ground despite threatening counter protests and widespread hostility to their demonstration.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Milica Stojanovic, “Serbian Activists Commemorate Srebrenica Anniversary in Belgrade,” *BIRN*, July 12, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/12/serbian-activists-commemorate-srebrenica-anniversary-in-belgrade/>.

The story of Nedžad Avdić, a genocide survivor and resident of Srebrenica, is an inspiring account of individual bravery in the fight against genocide denial. At a promotional event for Dušan Pavlović's revisionist work which was held last March in the very center of Srebrenica, Avdić waited patiently through a barrage of lies and hatred, as the various speakers at the event took turns denying the violence which he had directly experienced. When he was at last afforded the opportunity to speak, Avdić rose calmly and addressed the adverse and potentially belligerent crowd:

First of all, I would like to greet you all. I am Nedžad Avdić. I am a direct victim of genocide. As a seventeen-year-old, first-year high school student in Srebrenica, I survived the shooting in July 1995. Let me just tell you that I am not here to deny and insult Serb victims, nor will I ever do that, because in this war there were terrible things, but you are not talking here about Serb victims, but rather you are denying Bosniak victims.<sup>61</sup>

These heroic acts of protest, undertaken in hostile environments and at considerable personal risk, epitomize the bravery with which we urge all individuals and organizations to join in the fight against genocide denial. Combatting denial of the Srebrenica genocide is not only in the interests of those immediately impacted by the horrific violence of July 1995, or of those with a direct stake in the peace and stability of post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina. The protection of human dignity is inseparable from the preservation of peace and security; the fight against genocide denial, therefore, is an integral part of the universal struggle for truth and justice, and reconciliation.

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<sup>61</sup>“Dragan Bursać: Govor Nedžada Avdića!” *Oslobodjenje*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/dragan-bursac-govor-nedzada-avdica-442404>.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

No matter where we are or what our position in society, we can all contribute to the fight against denial of the Srebrenica genocide. Ordinary citizens have access to an ever-widening range of public and private platforms through which to take a principled stance against denial and raise awareness about the genocide in Srebrenica. We are all empowered to champion truth and justice, whether through traditional sources of influence like vocational or community leadership roles, or modern communication technology and social media networks. Within these venues, the word genocide must not be trivialized or substituted for milder, more ambiguous terminology like “massacre” or “ethnic cleansing.” Our immediate response to genocide denial must always be fervent condemnation. In addition to these universally actionable principles, there are numerous ways to combat denial through legislature, education, and political action. The Srebrenica Memorial makes the following recommendations to political and civil society actors in Bosnia and abroad on how to best confront the pernicious scourge of Srebrenica genocide denial plaguing our global community.

## **To the International Community and Policy Makers Abroad:**

The international community has a moral obligation to combat denial of the Srebrenica genocide. In what is widely regarded as the greatest failure of international peacekeeping in human history, the world stood by in July 1995, as more than 8,000 men and boys were slaughtered in the UN ‘safe zone’ of Srebrenica. While it is impossible to atone for the tragic loss of life which resulted from this shameful dereliction of duty, the international community is beholden to the survivors of the Srebrenica genocide and to the memory of its victims. In learning from the mistakes of the past, the world bears a solemn responsibility to preserve the historical memory of the Srebrenica genocide and to ensure the accountability of its perpetrators. Foreign governments and officials as well as transnational bodies and NGO’s can all contribute to the fight against genocide denial and by extension, the prevention of future violence.

### **Legislate Against Denial.**

A number of countries have successfully passed legislation banning genocide denial, including Switzerland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia, Luxembourg, Latvia and Lithuania. While such laws can be a source of controversy given their interstice with freedom of speech, the 2008 EU Framework Convention on Racism and Xenophobia offers an actionable model for striking the delicate balance between protection from hate speech and protection of the freedom of expression. This piece of legislation endorses the notion of an overall ban of genocide denial but limits the persecution of this crime to expressions which “are likely to incite violence or hatred.” Legislation passed last year by the Belgian Parliament sets a laudable example. An expansion of a previous prohibition on Holocaust revisionism, this new legislation additionally outlaws denial of the Rwandan and Srebrenica genocides in Belgium. A similar law which would criminalize denial of the Srebrenica genocide was also introduced last year in the Canadian legislature. Such concrete measures to combat denial are worthy of worldwide emulation.

### **Educate the Public.**

There are a number of ways international actors can raise awareness about the Srebrenica genocide in their home countries and communities. Local and national governments are encouraged follow in the footsteps of the

European Parliament, which in 2009 declared July 11th a national day of remembrance for the Srebrenica genocide. In the United Kingdom, Srebrenica Memorial Day is commemorated in cities across the country, with hundreds of events designed to engage and educate the public about the genocide which took place in Srebrenica. At the municipal level, mayors of four Canadian cities set a commendable example last year by similarly declaring July 11th the Remembrance Day of the Genocide in Srebrenica.

While the observation of this official holiday provides a meaningful opportunity for international governments to raise awareness about Srebrenica, these initiatives need not be limited to a single week in July. Government and non-government organizations as well as educational institutions are encouraged to organize Srebrenica related events year-round. Speaking engagements which give genocide survivors and experts the opportunity to share the story of Srebrenica with foreign audiences are a valuable resource in the global fight against genocide denial. In January of this year, the government of Scotland invited genocide survivor Hasan Hasanović to address a special session of the Scottish Parliament and thousands of students from Edinburgh and Glasgow on the occasion of International Holocaust Memorial Day. Along with the Srebrenica Memorial, international institutions can partner with victims organizations and diaspora communities across the globe to organize similar events.

Schools and universities are especially empowered to educate the public about the dangers of genocide denial. In addition to incorporating the Srebrenica genocide into classroom instruction, educational institutions are encouraged to engage with the myriad organizations both near and abroad to increase global literacy about the Srebrenica genocide. Programs like Summer University Srebrenica and the Graduate School of Social Work and Global Practice at the University of Denver are excellent examples of ways the Srebrenica genocide can be integrated into higher education. These programs supplement classroom instruction on the Srebrenica genocide with first-hand experiences by bringing dozens of students from around the world to visit the Srebrenica Memorial and Cemetery each year.

### **Take a Stand in World Forums.**

There are myriad opportunities for countries to take a principled stance against genocide denial on the world stage. We encourage global political actors to prioritize genocide acknowledgment as a prerequisite for international cooperation, and to disincentivize denial in interstate interaction. International actors are urged to avoid complicity in genocide denial through the selective application of political support and influence. In this way, the leadership in places like Republika Srpska will come to understand that international isolation is a direct consequence of genocide denial. Furthermore, for Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina who aspire to integrate into transnational structures like the European Union, genocide denial can thus be understood as a significant obstacle to prosperity and opportunity for future generations. Vocal support for domestic courts and international institutions engaged in the prosecution of war crimes like the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals is also a critical component of this endeavor and can be similarly leveraged to the same end. Symbolic gestures condemning denial of the Srebrenica genocide are also important. Recent examples include support for the 2015 resolution in the United Nations Security Council to formally acknowledge the Srebrenica genocide, and the decision of Turkey, Albania, and Kosovo to boycott last year's Nobel Ceremony in which the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to genocide denier Peter Handke.

In addition to explicit condemnation and disincentives for genocide denial, we urge international actors to vocally ally themselves with groups targeted by insidious historical revisionism and political violence. Vulnerable communities across the globe, including political activists, must be protected from violence and discrimination. Foreign governments and international actors are thus urged to make the protection of human rights a top

foreign policy priority. The most effective means of preventing genocide denial is naturally to prevent the perpetration of genocide in the first place. The failure of the international community to protect the population of Srebrenica in July 1995 should be preserved as a painful historical lesson on the catastrophic consequences of collective inaction.

## **To Political and Civil Society Actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

For policy makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fight against genocide denial can often feel like an uphill battle. The precarious structure of the post-war government is inhospitable to the policies, laws, and structural reforms which would allow the country to effectively confront its recent past. Nationalist political actors exploit animosity and suffering left in the wake of ethnic violence for their own ends, at the dire expense of justice and reconciliation. Denial can no longer be allowed to function as the natural law of co-existence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To those domestic political actors already engaged in the war against denial, we thank you, and ask that you not be discouraged. To those who have hitherto been silent, we hope that you find the courage to defy the status quo and ask that you join the struggle for truth and lasting peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Adjudicate War Crimes and Legislate Denial.**

The judicial process is paramount in the fight against genocide denial in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not only is it the means by which historical fact and culpability are established, the unrelenting pursuit of legal justice is the only way to restore equality and promote healing in Bosnian society. Following the closure of the ICTY and given the limitations of the IRMCT's mandate, this burden largely falls on the domestic judicial system. Despite the ethnic divisions paralyzing much of the Bosnian government, several genocide convictions have been handed down in trials by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The sentencing of people like Milorad Trbić by local courts provides much needed domestically sourced judicial affirmation of the Srebrenica genocide. It is thus imperative that local judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers remain committed to upholding the rule of law and delivering justice in an independent and impartial manner.

Criminalizing genocide denial is an important subsequent step on the road to justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A resolution brought before the Bosnian Parliament this year, despite being rejected by nine of the fifteen members of the House of Peoples, offers an ideal model for such legislation. Had it been passed, this law would have imposed a prison sentence of up to five years for the public denial of genocide or other judicially established war crimes.

The same sentence was also envisaged for the glorification of war criminals in Bosnian society, to include granting them awards, and naming public spaces after them. This was not the first piece of anti-denial legislation to be voted down by the Bosnian parliament in recent years. Despite this lack of success however, we urge policy makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue to advocate for such legislation. Not only do these measures hold promise of justice and security for Srebrenica's survivors, they crucially reaffirm the central authority of international judicial bodies to determine historical fact. If adopted, such a law would have a decisive impact on the political climate and future direction of the country.

### **Advocate for Educational Reform.**

The Srebrenica genocide is widely excluded from textbooks and school curricula in Bosnia, depriving generations of youth access to information about the crimes which were recently committed in their own communities.

Segregation in schools and the persistence of alternate historical curricula which excludes accurate accounts of war-time violence against Bosniaks are some of the most formidable obstacles to peace and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Political actors should advocate for educational reform and the implementation of a standardized curriculum which includes the judicially established factual narrative of the Srebrenica genocide. In addition to these far-reaching initiatives, genocide denial in schools can also be addressed at lower levels of the education system. The Srebrenica Memorial stands ready to assist policy makers, local school administrations, and teachers to educate Bosnian students about the Srebrenica genocide.

We recommend that students not only confront the Srebrenica genocide in a classroom setting but participate in activities and fieldtrips which are designed to make knowledge of the Srebrenica genocide a deeply personal experience. In the last two years, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of the Sarajevo Canton has pioneered such an initiative, allocating funds in its annual budget for secondary students to visit the Srebrenica Memorial. In addition to class trips to sites and museums dedicated to preserving the memory of genocide, the organization and participation in commemorative events which honor genocide victims can help make learning about Srebrenica an immersive and integrative experience for students of all ages.

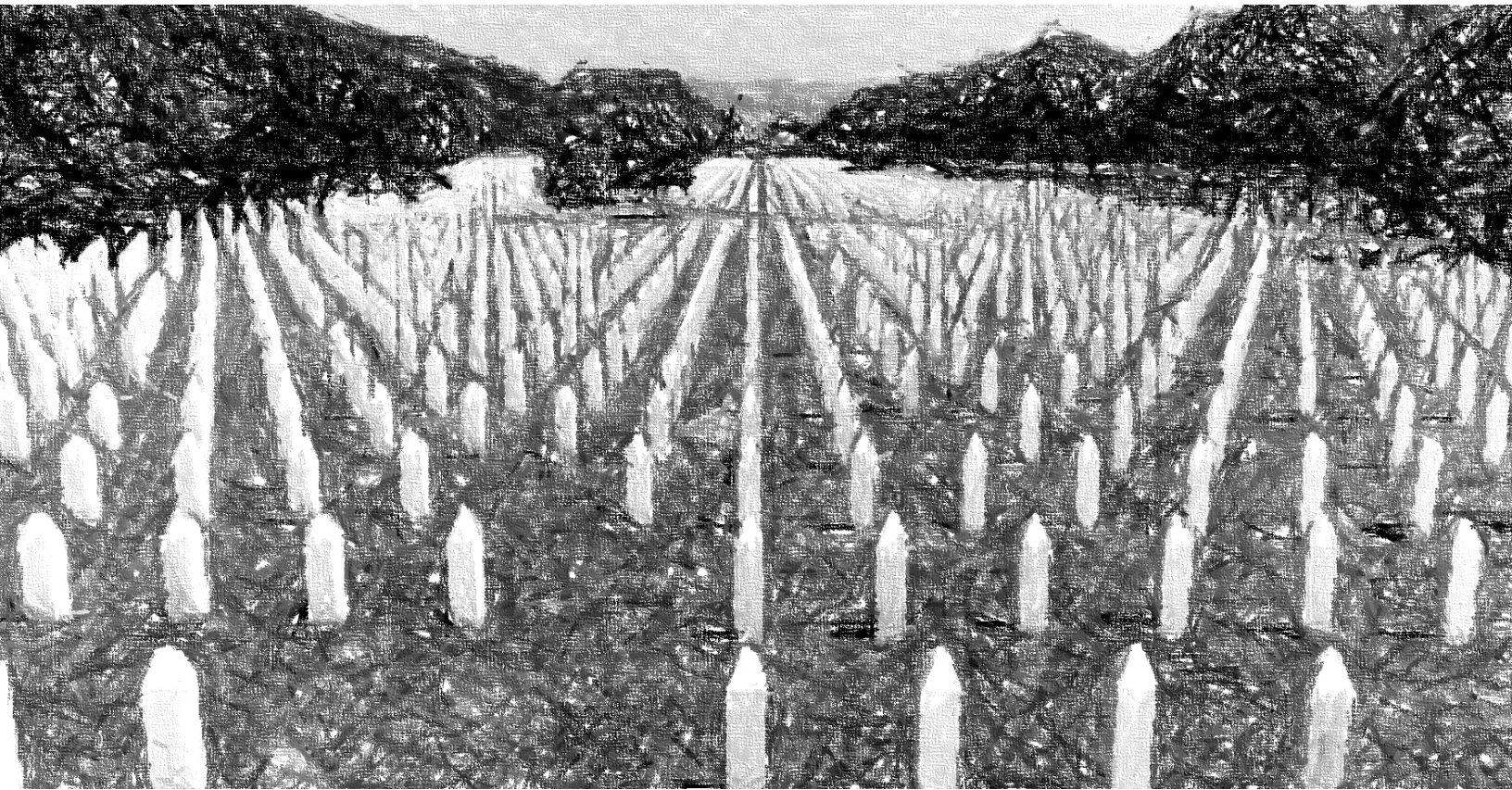
### **Speak Out Against Denial.**

It is understandable then that many survivors are skeptical of political gestures when it comes to acknowledgement of the Srebrenica genocide. Nonetheless, we urge political and civil society actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to use their public influence to champion the truth about Srebrenica and to condemn genocide denial at every opportunity. Politicians, academics, journalists, NGOs, and religious authorities must overshadow the lies and misinformation peddled by revisionists. The recent developments enumerated in this report call for renewed vigor on this front of the war against denial.

The media has an important role to play in exposing those who perpetuate division and hatred in Bosnian society and must be firmly committed to truthful reporting and countering false narratives. Politicians and other community and religious leaders must dedicate themselves with greater fervor to the fight against denial and must come to understand the vocal and relentless championship of truth as one of the most urgent responsibilities of public service.

This entails not only speaking out in public condemnation of historical revisionism and divisive actions, but also supporting those individuals and organizations firmly entrenched in the war against denial. Associations of victims and their families have been by far some of the most courageous and proactive forces combatting genocide revisionism in Bosnian society. The success of these and other organizations dedicated to the preservation of truth and dissemination of justice depends on meaningful and steadfast support from large segments of Bosnian society, including other agents of political and social influence.

# CONCLUSION



In July of 1995, VRS forces with the support and participation of military and government actors in Belgrade committed genocide in the UN safe-area of Srebrenica. In just over one week, more than 25,000 women and children were forcibly deported; more than 8,000 men and boys were detained, often tortured, and then systematically executed. These facts have been established beyond a shadow of a doubt by the most esteemed investigative and judicial bodies in the world. Nevertheless, denial of the Srebrenica genocide persists in the locality of Srebrenica, in the region of former Yugoslavia, and around the globe.

There are several primary discourses of Srebrenica genocide denial. Some of the most ubiquitous tactics involve disputing the number of Bosniaks killed in the course of the genocide, the circumstances of their deaths, and their identities. Revisionists claim that the death toll from July 1995 is lower than half the figure of 8,372 which has been substantiated through DNA evidence and judicial investigation. They also argue that rather than being unarmed victims of systematic executions, those who did die in Srebrenica died as armed combatants in a military conflict, or of things like exhaustion. These claims are entirely baseless and are thoroughly refuted by mountains of forensic evidence and witness testimony which has been meticulously vetted and corroborated in the course of impartial international criminal proceedings.

Attempts to delegitimize these court proceedings constitute yet another staple discourse in the denial of the Srebrenica genocide. Deniers lobby all manner of outrageous charges against the courts in an effort to undermine their credibility and cast doubt on their rulings. These endeavors are generally interwoven within a discourse of

wider international conspiracy: powerful Western countries are portrayed as having orchestrated not only the criminal proceedings themselves, but the genocidal violence which took place in Srebrenica and the subsequent cover-up operation. In other instances, revisionists attempt to refute the international legal and scholarly consensus by disputing findings of central direction and genocidal intent in the case of Srebrenica.

Another facet of the Serbian campaign of genocide denial relies on complete role reversal in the Srebrenica narrative. Twentieth century history is thus reinterpreted through the lens of Serbian nationalism which portrays Serbs as the piteous victims of a fictitious Muslim campaign of aggression. Within this historically counterfeit paradigm, Serbian war criminals are glorified as national liberators, the Srebrenica genocide is denied, and fascist Chetnik ideology is rehabilitated in order to provide a stable foundation for the nationalist political project of Greater Serbia.

These tactics have manifested in a series of disturbing developments in recent years, not just locally and regionally but internationally as well. The government of Republika Srpska has successfully established an international commission to negate the known facts of the Srebrenica genocide and further the specious narratives which predicate the expansion of the Serbian nationalist project. Developments in the municipality of Srebrenica can be seen as a microcosm of the revisionist onslaught being carried out across Bosnia. Here, on the very soil where genocide was committed in 1995, the architects of genocide are celebrated as heroes and appalling displays of violent ethno-nationalist ideology have become commonplace. The decision of the Swedish Academy last year to award genocide denier Peter Handke the Nobel Prize in Literature fuels this very triumphalism among revisionist forces in Bosnia, and demonstrates an unsettling degree of complicity on the part of the Western intellectual community in the Serbian campaign of genocide denial.

These developments are consistent with broader patterns which are currently playing out across the globe. The rise of right-wing extremism and ethno-nationalist movements bolsters the concurrent phenomena of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and Holocaust denial. The relationship between deniers of the Srebrenica genocide and right-wing extremist actors abroad is one of mutual reciprocity, with each finding inspiration and championship in the others' actions and ideology. The denial and trivialization of historical genocides serves as a catalyst for present and future violence and institutionalizes the rhetoric of hatred which threatens marginalized communities.

In light of these distressing circumstances, the fight against denial of the Srebrenica is more exigent than ever. Genocide denial not only magnifies the pain and suffering endured by survivors, it is a means by which these survivors and their families are made vulnerable to future violence. Ordinary citizens as well as political and civil society actors must do everything in their power to counteract these malevolent forces of hatred and historical revisionism. The Srebrenica Memorial calls upon our domestic and international community of supporters to employ every resource and platform at their disposal to raise awareness about Srebrenica and combat the forces manufacturing fraudulent narratives. Acts of solidarity and protest, as well as concrete measures in the spheres of legislation, education, and international relations, are just some of the weapons in our communal arsenal against genocide denial.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide is a poignant reminder of our collective responsibility to defend human rights and human dignity from every form of malice and abuse. As we honor the memories of the victims of genocide, we must draw inspiration from the resilience of their surviving loved ones; we must commit ourselves with renewed vigilance to preserving the historical memory of the genocide in Srebrenica. The

evidence of the atrocities committed by VRS forces in July 1995 establishes the truth of the Srebrenica genocide beyond any doubt and will prevail over the vainglorious political machinations of its unrepentant perpetrators. It is only through holding these perpetrators to account that we can achieve justice and rehabilitation for the families of their victims. Where denial is allowed to prosper justice is abased, and the victims of yesterday's genocide are vulnerable to renewed violence. The world has seen the carnage that results from radical hatred time and time again, and at every opportunity, has vowed to never let such horrors be repeated. The only way to make "never again" a reality, however, is to protect the truth of these tragedies from revisionist forces who not only seek to deny the historical fact of their existence, but who would all too gladly see these genocides reiterated.

# AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

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“We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

**Elie Wiesel**



Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery  
for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide  
(institution established by the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

**SREBRENICA  
MEMORIAL**

This document is an official Report made on behalf of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide.

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