



## Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Short History

Thomas White | Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies | Keene, New Hampshire | twhite@keene.edu  
Hikmet Karčić | Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks | Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina | karcic@iitb.ba

### Overview

This is the history of an ideological narrative of grievance, of one group's superiority and possible "replacement" by inferior "others"; political leaders who develop a cult of followers by championing that narrative; the leveraging of media to build alternate truths; the spreading of hatred and escalation of racial violence through nationalist militias; the undermining of checks and balances of the federation of Republics; divisive nationalist identities, and corruption. In 1990, as Yugoslavia collapsed, the first multiparty elections were held. These elections created nationalist parties intent on perpetuating ethno-national identities and causes. By 1992, war was being imposed through Serbian and Croatian nationalists who were seeking to expand into "greater" national territory. In the coming years the perpetrators of "ethnic cleansing," displacement, mass atrocity, and genocide, were rewarded by the international community at the Dayton Accords in 1995. Dayton ended the war, but then imposed an ethno-nationalistic partitioned Bosnia. Three separate post conflict narratives (Serb, Croat, Bosniak) were reinforced by institutional and in collective memory. A "tycoon class" of nationalist leaders continues to enrich themselves through corruption supported by poverty, fear, insecurity, and the promotion of divisive ethnic identities.

The hate didn't exist before; it was artificially installed. It was all so unbelievable that at first, it seemed funny...The emphasis on ethnicity and exclusion was so strong that ethnic hatred became normalized...There is also the ideology of religion and nationality...Never has there been more religion and less faith...National and religious identities are openly used as weapons in the political arsenal."  
– Vedran Grahovac, Prijedor<sup>1</sup>

### Denial of Bosnian genocide is rooted in Serb and Croat religious nationalism and Islamophobia.

Unresolved and manipulated memory continue to haunt the Balkans. It is a fundamental mistake, however, to accept the narrative of "Balkanization" as an intractable "truth" of people living here. Balkanization implies that people are separated by exclusive group identities that make them prone to war and to live in perpetual hostility. This construct is an ignorant smokescreen articulated by 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist motives and reinforced during and after the world wars by corrupt leaders. One of the difficulties in learning about what happened here in the 1990s is realizing that this narrative was/is used to not only promote exclusive ethnic identities and destroy the multiethnic and pluralistic identities of Bosnia; it was/is also accepted as the justification for the world to turn away. Accepting a construct such as "Balkanization" reduces our understanding of what was and is possible. There are competing tensions between exclusive nationalism as well as the opposite; a respectful sharing of multi-ethnic and multicultural identities. As historian Noel Malcolm points out, the history of Bosnia shows that animosities and/or ethnic differences become violent only after outside agitation or interference. This essay should be read as an opening to further reading and inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Lippman, *Surviving the Peace: The Struggle for Postwar Recovery in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2019), 281.

## The Sarajevo Haggadah

Jews and Muslims share a history of targeting and persecution in the Balkans. In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled Jews and Muslims from the newly unified kingdom of Spain. During the expulsion Sephardic (Spanish) Jews escaped with a Haggadah (an illuminated manuscript contains the story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt — retold each year on Passover during the Passover Seder) that originated in Barcelona around 1350. It is one of the oldest Sephardic Haggadahs in the world. In the diaspora that followed, many Jews and Muslims made their way to Sarajevo.<sup>2</sup> Sarajevo became a haven for interfaith culture where the Haggadah was revered and protected. It was perhaps the only major European city never to have a ghetto for Jews. Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo are proud that they had a hand in preserving the Haggadah from Spain with its tolerant, cosmopolitan culture.



In modern times, Muslims rescued the book twice. In 1942, Sarajevo was under the heel of Nazi Germany and its ally, the Croatian Fascist Ustaše led by Ante Pavelić. Pavelić wanted his new Croatian state to be “cleansed” of Jews and Serbs.<sup>3</sup> When Nazi general Johann Fortner (who also commanded a vicious Croatian Fascist regiment known as the Black Legion) arrived and demanded that the manuscript be turned over, the National Museum's chief librarian, Derviš Korkut, risked his life and smuggled the Haggadah out of Sarajevo. It was believed to have been hidden in a mosque. In 1992 during the Bosnian War, Serb forces besieged Sarajevo and shelled the national museum intent on destroying the cultural heritage of Bosnia. The Haggadah was once again rescued by the city's Muslim population.

This interfaith, multiculturalism is precisely what nationalists abhor.

### “Christoslavic” Serb Ideology

The creation of national identities (who belongs and who does not) was a product of 19th century nationalism. The Serbian construct of its national identity began to fixate on a minor battle in Kosovo on June 26, 1389.<sup>4</sup> Serb intellectuals transformed the death of the historic Serb Prince Lazar (Lazarus) into a Christ-like myth representing the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the Serb nation. Lazar was captured during the battle and before he was killed he assassinated the sultan. This action became a guiding legend for the role of Serbs in their relationship with Slavic Muslims. Muslims were transformed in the Serb national narrative into “Turks,” the murderers of Lazar and the destroyers of Serbia. Muslims were seen as religious and race traitors, having “polluted” the Slavic “race.”<sup>5</sup> The Serb narrative did not accept Muslim identity and saw Muslims as weak cowards who had rejected their Serb identity. Serb nationalism would seek to punish Muslims in perpetuity in ways that echo the deicide myth of Christianity that condemned all Jews in perpetuity for the death of their fellow Jew Jesus. The deicide myth and the Serb myth would prove to have lethal consequences.

As part of the development of the Serbian national identity another myth was created that envisioned an ancient Serbia as a stable, uniform ethno-religious group. On June 28, 1892, St. Vitus Day became an official holiday, a scared day, in the Orthodox Church which allowed Serbs to reflect upon these new “truths.” “Christoslavic ideology” focused on the idea that a battle was looming to save Christian values and identity. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 solidified Serb national identity. Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro (encouraged by Russia) successfully attacked the declining Ottoman Empire. In 1913, the alliance turned on Bulgaria and Serbia was able to conquer Kosovo.

In this context, an ill-advised trip took place in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 by the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. It is coincidence of stupidity that the visit took place on the most sacred day for Serb nationalists. At least six assassins waited

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<sup>2</sup> Reneo Lukic and Allen Lynch, *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1996), 201.

<sup>3</sup> Geraldine Brooks, “The Book of Exodus: A double rescue in wartime Sarajevo”, *The New Yorker*, (December 3, 2007), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/12/03/the-book-of-exodus>.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Serbian national identity and Kosovo, see: Brainier Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, (New York: NYU Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 29-52.

along the published route before Archduke Franz Ferdinand ordered his driver to stop and make a turn directly in front of Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip. Although a pan Yugoslav, not Serb nationalist thinker, Serb nationalists were able to claim Princip's assassination of the Archduke as the act of a Serbian patriot. He is still revered as a hero in Serbia. This act eventually sparked World War I. Serb victory over the disintegrated Austria-Hungarian empire allowed for Serbs to dominate the newly created postwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929). The formerly independent Kingdom of Serbia's royal house became the Yugoslav dynasty. In the years leading up to World War II tensions grew between Serb centralists and Croatian decentralists. Bosnian Muslims were not particularly interested and instead increased and solidified their process of secularization.

## World War II

At least one million were killed mostly by Yugoslavs against Yugoslavs during World War II. In April 1941 Germany invaded Yugoslavia and created the state of Croatia which allied with Nazi Germany. Serbia was occupied and run by a puppet Nazi government. Serbia had a puppet Nazi regime which set up several camps for Jews and other minorities.<sup>6</sup> Ante Pavelić led the fascist Croatian Ustaše militias who carried out a Nazi agenda while being supported by the Catholic Church. One of their most notorious concentration camps was Jasenovac, an extermination camp established in Slavonia by the authorities of the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. The Jewish Virtual Library states that "the most reliable figures" estimate the number of Serbs killed by the Ustaše overall to be "between 330,000 and 390,000, with 45,000 to 52,000 Serbs murdered in Jasenovac."<sup>7</sup> The Ustaše sought to deal with the "problem" of Serb minorities in its territory and saw Jews and Roma as secondary threats. Muslims were not necessarily persecuted as they were seen as Croatian Muslims.

Two separate resistance groups emerged in Serbia and Bosnia. The Chetniks, led by Draža Mihailović, a Serb, was a Yugoslavian royalist and Serbian nationalist movement. They were loyal to the Yugoslavian government-in-exile and sought to preserve the prewar royalist order. Radicals within the resistance went further and sought "ethnic cleansing" of the Muslim and Croat populations. The Communist Partisans were led by Josip Broz Tito who was half Croat and half Slovene. Unlike the Chetniks, Tito sought a social revolution to destroy the old order and was loyal to Stalin.

Generally, three wars raged in Yugoslavia: Germany and its allies vs. Yugoslavia; Ustaše vs. Chetniks and Partisans; and the Partisans against the Chetniks, Ustaše, and Germans. In January 1942 Hungarian troops murdered 3,000 Serbs and Jews in Novi Sad, Vojvodina in what was known as "murder tourism". Loyalties sometimes shifted based on changing circumstances. For example, until 1943 the Germans deployed only four weak divisions and therefore were not always the primary target. Anticipating an Allied invasion of the Balkans the Germans deployed more troops to push the Partisans out of northwest Bosnia and away from the coast. The Chetniks welcomed an Allied invasion and wanted to help push the Communists back. Tito was prepared to fight with the Germans to stop a Chetnik victory if the Allies did land. The Serbs had reason to fear Croatian nationalists and Croatians disliked and distrusted the Serbs. On the other hand, Serb Chetnik forces committed genocide against Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sanjak region, with the aim of establishing an ethnically clean Greater Serbian state.<sup>8</sup>

Muslims fought on all sides and were killed by all sides as they tried to navigate ever changing circumstances. Initially many joined the Chetniks who welcomed them. This was made difficult by extremist Chetniks who wished to kill them. Many joined the Partisans and reinforced Chetnik hatred of them. Some reached out to the Germans who promised to help them to protect their local villages. Himmler even recruited a Muslim SS unit, the 13th SS "Handschar" division. Most Muslims believed they were training to protect their villages but were soon tasked with other duties expected of the SS.

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher R. Browning, "Sajmiste as a European Site of Holocaust Remembrance", *FILOZOFIJA I DRUŠTVO* XXIII (4), 2012., <http://www.doiserbia.nb.rs/img/doi/0353-5738/2012/0353-57381204099B.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> "Concentration Camps: Jasenovac," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jasenovac-camp>.

<sup>8</sup> See: Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943*, British Academy, 2007.

In 1943 Bosnian Muslim Handschar troops mutinied and killed their German officers in Villefranche-de-Rouergue, France. Their goal was to join the French Resistance. It was the only SS unit to mutiny. After the mutiny was crushed the unit was sent back to Bosnia where they perpetrated war crimes against Serbs. Soon thereafter the unit dissolved and many joined the Partisans.

Tito's Partisans gained the upper hand when Mussolini was removed in 1943 (and the Partisans gained weaponry and vehicles) and a shift in Allied policy to support them upon the recommendation of British officers who observed them in action.

### **Superordinate Identity | Post War Yugoslavia**

Marshal Tito had defeated other militias and the Germans with Allied help, and brutally imposed Communism on the postwar Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. It is estimated that his forces killed an estimated 250,000 in 1945-46 in shootings, camps, and forced marches.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Tito banned any objective historical analysis of World War II. The 1945 settlement did not reward Serbia for its sacrifices. Macedonia and Kosovo which had been part of Serbia (1912-13 war) were kept separate from the Serbian Republic and Vojvodina (less than 50% Serb) and Kosovo (with a large Albanian Muslim population) were made autonomous provinces in an attempt to protect the rights of people where no clear ethnic majority existed.<sup>10</sup> In 1963 the country was renamed again as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The six socialist republics that made up the country were the Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

Although people of the former Yugoslavia (with the exception of Albanians) shared a Slavic identity, ethno-religious identities, were problematic. Croats are Roman Catholic, Serbs are Orthodox Christians, and Bosniaks (a term adopted in 1993) are Muslims or those who identify as Bosnian. Tito subordinated these identities to the Yugoslavian ("land of the South Slavs") vision of "Brotherhood and Unity." Tito ruled with an iron hand, especially through his secret police, and "Brotherhood and Unity" really meant suppressing national identity through "divide and rule".<sup>11</sup> Serbia, however, continued to control the national narrative in schools and cultural events. Serbs nationalists spun conspiracy theories about Tito (the half Croat and half Slovene) attacking their aspirations. Croats resented the suppression of their national goals by Serbs. Bosnian Muslims had become increasingly secularized (a trend from the 1890s onward) tried to navigate the politics while examining their spiritual and religious identity (more a focus since the 1950s and 60s). In 1966 Aleksandar Ranković, Tito's brutal Serb security chief, was ousted. This began a trend of relaxing some of the persecution of non-Serbs.

The status of Muslims began to change. In the 1940s Muslims were considered either Croat or Serb. In 1974, constitutional reform allowed for more regional national autonomy and decentralization. A collective presidency of eight provisional representatives and a federal government with little control over economic, cultural, and political policy was created. Serbia, resenting that Vojvodina and especially Kosovo remained autonomous, rejected decentralized, and were especially angered that the 1974 constitution recognized Muslims as an ethnicity for the first time (a trend growing since the 1950s). It is important to note that the drive to recognize Muslims as a national entity came from Communists and not Islamic fundamentalists. Until then, the only choice Muslims were given in Yugoslavia when selecting ethnicity was to declare themselves "undecided" (*neopredjeljeni*). Marshal Tito died in May 1980.

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<sup>9</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 193.

<sup>10</sup> For more on identities in Yugoslavia, see: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Cornell University Press, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Zwaan, *Crisis and Genocide in Yugoslavia, 1985-1995*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 125.

## Destroying Multiethnic Culture: Manipulating Nationalism and Christianity



In 1986 a Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) advocated for the “complete national and cultural integrity of the Serbian people” and an end to ethnic Serb “victimization”. Serbs in Croatia in Kosovo were poor and the populist nationalists claimed a conspiracy was underway to hush up and ignore the crimes being committed against Kosovar Serbs.

Slobodan Milošević, a Communist party leader in Serbia adopted the memorandum and engineered the takeover of the Serbian Communist Party. He began replacing provincial leaders and local politicians with loyalists under the guise of “reform” (the “anti-bureaucratic revolution”). In 1987 Milošević claimed that Kosovo Albanians were “Ustaše” who were “ethnic cleansing” and raping Serbs! Church and Serb intellectuals support the lies as



WW 2 taboos disintegrated and code words were used to spur violence.

Slovenia was the first Republic to begin to break away from Yugoslavia after the death of Tito. Liberalization and democratic reforms increased its openings to the West. Milošević, began a campaign against Slovenia under the guise of a believer in “Yugoslav unity.” With control of the press, Milošević seized an opportunity to fulfill his own ambitions while also promoting the cause of Serb nationalism. Milošević coordinated a series of summer/fall protests for “constitutional changes” while targeting opponents with demonstrations he coordinated with supporters of Serb nationalism. He specifically targeted the communist leadership in Vojvodina, Montenegro, and Kosovo. The League of Communists of Serbia under Milošević began removing provincial leaders and local politicians in what became known as the “anti-bureaucratic revolution” and replaced them with Milošević loyalists.<sup>12</sup> The West feared ethnic wars in the Balkans and as Milošević began to cement his power base, Western powers welcomed his narrative that he was only seeking to hold Yugoslavia together. After all, Milošević was seen as trustworthy as he had been a banker with many friends in NYC. Despite CIA warnings, they saw him as Tito’s successor. He began to devise a plan for an expansion of a “Greater Serbia” wrapped in reformist garb of “rescuing” Yugoslavia. Under Milošević (Serbian President, 1989-1997 and President of the “Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,” 1997-2000) genocide would become a sacred act, a religious duty, worthy of communion and forgiveness of sins by a Church that would support his crusade.

### 1989 | Kosovo & Montenegro

It was Milošević’s wife Mirjana who suggested to him that, “The time has come to back Kosovo Serbs.”<sup>13</sup> In 1989 Milošević began a crackdown on Albanians (Muslims) living in Kosovo. Kosovar Albanians had been facing repression since 1981. Utilizing the Christoslav national narrative of victimhood, the Serb media began to talk about an ‘international Muslim conspiracy with genocidal goals’ for Serbians living in Kosovo. This claim, by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, was supported by the Vatican and Germany.<sup>14</sup>

On January 11, 1989, after two days of Serb-sponsored protest, the leadership of Montenegro stepped down. Serbs began to draft a new Yugoslavian constitution that would take away Kosovo autonomy and make it part of Serbia. On February 19, 1989, Kosovo miners went on hunger strike and much of the province joined the miners in protest.<sup>15</sup> The protest gained support in Slovenia and Croatia. On February 27, 1989, 1,500 federal police troops under Serbian leadership began a

<sup>12</sup> Laura Silber, Allen Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, (TV Books, 1996), 62.  
<sup>13</sup> Josip Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 22.  
<sup>14</sup> Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, 65.  
<sup>15</sup> For more on what lead to the break-up of Yugoslavia see: Branka Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the break-up, 1980-92*, (New York: Verso, 1993).

campaign of oppression of Kosovo Albanians. On February 28 Milošević blamed the strikes on popular Kosovar Albanian leader, Azem Vlasi and leaders of Slovenia. Serb TV stoked anger and Belgraders took to the streets shouting, “We want weapons!! We’re going to Kosovo!”<sup>16</sup>

On March 9, more strikes and arrests mark the start of a long period of passive resistance by the ethnic Albanian majority before a guerrilla war broke out in 1998-99. On March 15-16, Lawrence Eagleburger, George HW Bush’s Secretary of State stated: “There is no question in my mind that Milošević is in terms of economics a Western market-orientated fellow... [who] is playing on and using Serbian nationalism, which has been contained for many years, in part I think as an effort to force the central government to come to grips with some very rough economic problems.”<sup>17</sup>

On March 28, the Serb National Assembly ratified a new constitution after interrogating and threatening Albanian representatives. (Only 10 of the 190 voted against.) The ceremony was attended by Western ambassadors.

### International Context

Yugoslavia was seen as a buffer during the Cold War. As part of the nonaligned movement Yugoslavia was not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. When Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 he attempted to modernize the Soviet Union with *Perestroika* (reform) and *Glasnost* (openness). It was a thawing of the Cold War and it was seized upon by Western countries hoping that Gorbachev’s reforms would reduce tensions. The position of the United States was to support Gorbachev and help him to prevent chaos if the Soviet Union began to unravel. Yugoslavia lost its importance as a Cold War buffer. As Yugoslavia began to break apart after the death of Tito, United States policy remained consistent. It would support the continuation of a “unified” Yugoslavian state. This played right into the hands of Milošević despite the dire warning of an October 18, 1990 National Intelligence Estimate by the CIA:

Yugoslavia will cease to function as a federal state within a year, and will probably dissolve within two. Economic reform will not stave off the breakup. [...] a full-scale interrepublic war is unlikely, but serious intercommunal conflict will accompany the breakup and will continue afterward. The violence will be intractable and bitter. There is little the United States and its European allies can do to preserve Yugoslav unity.<sup>18</sup>

### Back in the USSR | Tblisi, Georgia, USSR

To keep the Soviet Union together soviet leaders had to use force. Gorbachev was no exception. As republics clamored for independence, Gorbachev clamped down. On April 9, 1989 Soviet troops were ordered by Gorbachev to ruthlessly crush a peaceful protest in Tblisi, Georgia. Twenty-one people were killed, dozens were injured, and hundreds suffered from tear gas. As the U.S. policy was to keep stability in the USSR by supporting Gorbachev, the U.S. did not support the pro-democracy demonstrators and Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor signaled U.S. acquiescence, “We have no dog in this fight.”<sup>19</sup>

Events in the USSR would shape events in Yugoslavia. The lack of a U.S. reaction to the protest in Tblisi gave a clear signal to Milošević who wanted to deal with Kosovo. On May 8, 1989, Milošević became President of Serbia. On June 28, 1989, he conducted what, can best be described as, a medieval passion play stoking Serb nationalism at the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Over 1,000,000 Serbs went to Kosovo on a national pilgrimage and heard Milošević give his nationalist vision for a “Greater Serbia.” Church iconography was ever-present. By mid-1989 Kosovo and Vojvodina were reintegrated into Serbia and the Montenegro leadership was replaced by Milošević allies. In



<sup>16</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1990-10-01.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 170.

1989, the Berlin Wall fell and communist dictatorships were toppled. With the fall of Communism, elections would be held that would bring nationalist parties into power.

### **Weapons**

The Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) was seen as an institution that melded Yugoslavian identity together. In 1988, Serbs pushed through unconstitutional reforms restructuring its command and deployment and placed command in Belgrade. The army was dominated by Serbs (Bosniaks could not train as pilots for example) and purges began to reshape the army from the peoples' army to a more nationalist force. A majority of the officers were Serb. Serb officers who rejected the reshaping of the army were murdered. The JNA was not yet loyal to Milošević, but with Serb intentions clear, Catholics and Muslims no longer wanted to serve and were allowed to leave. With the history of slaughter in Bosnia during World War II and due to its central location, large installations and supply depots for the JNA were located in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Weapons and military training were also available in the Territorial Defense Forces. Each Republic had trained militias with separate command structures and stockpiles of weapons organized to conduct guerilla warfare if Yugoslavia was ever invaded. When the country fractured, each Republic would have easy access to weapons.

### **Genocide's Early Warning Signs**

Sheri P. Rosenberg rightly pointed out that "Genocide is a process, not an event."<sup>20</sup> There are a number of risk factors that contribute to a country's leadership choosing to use genocide to meet its goals. Often it is in moments of transitional political instability where new power bases try to replace the old. Risk factors increase if exclusionary ideology exists, a state is isolated, and minority elites manipulate ethnic and religious cleavages. All of these were present in Yugoslavia in 1989. Elections from failing states can also create a genocidal dynamic. In Bosnia, people gravitated to parties that represented their ethnicity exacerbated by growing Serb nationalism. For electoral purposes, each party told its own story of collective victimization and injustices – which is where the memories of World War II could be usefully exploited. In Bosnia, three parties emerged: The Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) led by Radovan Karadžić; the (Muslim dominated) Party of Democratic Action (SDA) led by Alija Izetbegović; and the Croatian Democratic Alliance (HDZ) led by Franjo Tuđman.

### **1990 Elections in Croatia and Slovenia**

As the first multiparty elections approached they were declared illegal by Jović, the Yugoslav president, as they were, in his view, seeking to break up the federation. Regardless, people gravitated to a Party that represented their ethnicity and articulated tales of victimization, past injustices, and future greatness. Franjo Tuđman became the president of Croatia. An historian, Croatian religious nationalist and antisemite, he dreamt of a "Greater Croatia" perhaps cleansed of Bosnia Muslims and Serbs. "Thank God, my wife isn't Jewish or Serbian"! He was pragmatic, paid attention to what the international community thought (and allowed), and tried to separate Croatian independence from Ustaše history. The Catholic Church supported this Croatian nationalism.

Alija Izetbegović, who had written about Muslim renewal throughout the world in spiritual and communal ways (not Islamic fundamentalism) became president of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He defended the idea of a pluralistic, multi-national and multi-religious republic. He tried to navigate the politics: "Choosing between Milošević and Tuđman is like choosing between leukemia and a brain tumor".

Milošević, meanwhile, continued to enflame Serb nationalism by encouraging Serb enclaves throughout Yugoslavia. This growing tension spilled over into Croatia where Serb tourists clashed with Croatians on Dalmatian coast.

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<sup>20</sup> Rosenberg, Sheri P. (2012) "Genocide Is a Process, Not an Event," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1: Article 4. Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol7/iss1/4>.

On May 14, the day before the newly elected parliament would convene, the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) confiscated Slovenia and Croatia's Territorial Defense Forces (TO) weapons. Again, this was inspired by the actions of the USSR when they had done this in Lithuania in March/April. Slovenia was able to salvage nearly a third of its weapons, but Croatia was caught unprepared and was effectively disarmed. That is, with the exception of Serb-populated areas in Croatia that got to keep their weapons and were even given more by the JNA. On May 19, 92% of Croatia voted for independence after Milošević refused to accept a Croat as next (automatic rotation) federal president.

As Serbia acted aggressively to undermine other republics, Milošević continued to portray himself as a man of ethnic reconciliation, protector of Serbia and Yugoslavia, who was promoting economic stability and peace. "With us there is no uncertainty"<sup>21</sup> he claimed. Some Serbs may actually have believed this and saw outsiders as meddling in internal Yugoslavian affairs.

### U.S. is Focused Elsewhere

In August 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait and U.S. policymakers shifted their attention to stopping Iraqi aggression. CIA predictions about the growing danger of Milošević were ignored. As violence grew in Croatia, President Bush ignored overtures from Croatian leaders while listening only to the Serbs.



Because of the invasion of Kuwait, companies in Bosnia Hercegovina (BiH) faced a crisis as they relied on trade with Iraq and Kuwait. An economic crisis ensued in Yugoslavia. BiH and Macedonia continued to contribute to the Yugoslav federal budget, but Milošević, the self-proclaimed Yugoslavian patriot, did not. In December, Milošević illegally appropriated money from Yugoslavia to pay for costs of the summer elections and to prepare for war.

The Croatian leader Tuđman saw another opportunity to promote his vision of a "Greater Croatia" and called BiH an "artificial colonial creation"<sup>22</sup> which he hoped to divide between Croatia and Serbia. He began to reach out to Milošević.

On January 13, 1991, Soviet forces killed and wounded hundreds in a crackdown in Lithuania. On January 16, Milošević met with Western ambassadors to announce his goals for a greater Serbia to include BiH. The U.K. and France supported the plan.

On January 17, the U.S. began bombing Iraq during the first Gulf War. Everything seemed in place for Milošević. And yet, things began to unravel. In the spring of 1991, the Serbian economy was in trouble. Violence in Croatia between Serb and Croat radicals increased as JNA tanks moved through BiH towards Croatia. As war seemed imminent, Germany shifted dramatically, condemned Milošević and Serbia for radicalizing things, and put their support behind Croatia. Milošević had run Serbian economy into crisis and students in Belgrade protested against him.

### Wars to create a "Greater Serbia"

On June 25, 1991 Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence. Slobodan Milošević now shifted his policy from trying to centralize power through the system to engaging in three wars in an attempt to create a "Greater Serbia." He would fight Slovenia (June 27 – July 7, 1991), Croatia (May 1991 – Dec. 1995), and Bosnia & Hercegovina (April 1992 – Dec. 1995). The West, in pursuit of stability, either openly or tacitly supported and rewarded Milošević's wars of aggression.

<sup>21</sup> Blaine Harden. "Yugoslavia Facing Economic Collapse." The Washington Post [Washington] March 7, 1991. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/03/07/yugoslavia-facing-economic-collapse/6ca2e395-e681-4330-bb4c-31db71c6de3f/?utm\\_term=.586f52f7f913](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/03/07/yugoslavia-facing-economic-collapse/6ca2e395-e681-4330-bb4c-31db71c6de3f/?utm_term=.586f52f7f913).

<sup>22</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 103.



On June 22, Slovenia and then Croatia on June 25, 1991 declared their independence.<sup>23</sup> Milošević decided to attack Slovenia. The War with Slovenia lasted from June 27 – July 7, 1991. It was a fiasco for the JNA and Milošević. The army was not prepared and Slovenia won the public relations war by presenting itself as a “democratic victim of a Communist attack.” Slovenia would soon become independent in part because of its successful defense, but also because Milošević could let it go as it did not have a substantial Serb population. In this mist of these disasters, both economic and military, Milošević was rescued.



Milošević once again played the role of the “last hope” to keep Yugoslavia unified. As Slovenia broke away he sowed fear in the West by describing the violence as “ancient hatreds” (Serb national myth) that he was working to contain. The U.S. supported this and stated that ‘those Balkan people are irrational’. Focused on Iraq the U.S. turned the problem over to the European Community (E.C.). The E.C. responded by condemning the Croats and Slovenes for unsettling things. Milošević got exactly what he wanted, a strong public statement in favor of “Yugoslavia” integrity.

By now Milošević had developed a blueprint for mass atrocity. He was able to radicalize Serbs with nonstop misinformation through media control and fear-mongering by local politicians. He had reduced all Croats to “Ustaše” and all Muslims are “Islamic fundamentalists” and “Turks”. He had militarized Serb enclaves by supporting or initiating an incident (such as shooting police) which invited a crackdown. He was able to arm locals and their leaders warned them that police were coming to get them. It was not difficult to spark violence. After any violent incident, he would ask the Army (dominated by Serbs) to intervene as “impartial arbiters”.<sup>24</sup>

On July 5 1991, Germany pushed E.C. ministers to suspend financial aid and institute an arms embargo. On September 25 the U.N. instituted an arms embargo on Yugoslavia.<sup>25</sup> This was an attempt to stop the flow of weapons into the Balkans with the belief that this would curtail the violence. Their actions would unwittingly secure Milošević’s position. He was the first to praise this ‘move towards peace’ and raise his profile as a ‘peacebuilder.’ In reality, he had saved the JNA image from the fiasco of the Slovenian War, won the army’s loyalty, and, most importantly, ensured that the JNA now had all the weapons.

#### **A (failed) Coup in USSR | War in Croatia | August 1991**

On August 19 1991, a Soviet military coup seized power and arrested Gorbachev. The plotters then approved of a Serb invasion of Croatia in support of their ally Milošević. For once the E.C. was upset by Serb actions, or more specifically, Milošević’s support of the coup against Gorbachev.

On August 26, 1991, a gleeful Milošević ordered the JNA to attack Croatia with a goal of ethnic cleansing of Croatian populations in order to recognize Serb enclaves and shift the border. Ethnic cleansing began in eastern Slavonia. Slovenia remained on the sidelines and awaited the independence that Milošević had told them he would support.<sup>26</sup> The E.C. denounced “elements” of the JNA and “Serbian irregulars” for the war, but not Milošević.

On October 6 the Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegović declared BiH neutral and called for Bosnians not to respond to the JNA call up. The JNA failed to mobilize new troops in Montenegro or BiH and started to lose the war in Croatia. Yugoslavians were shocked when the Serbs shelled the Adriatic port of Dubrovnik that was a favorite vacation spot. Meanwhile in the north the city of Vukovar became a symbol of Croatian resistance.

<sup>23</sup> Little, Silder, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm, 217.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations. (1998). *Security Council imposes arms embargo on Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Pending Action to Resolve Kosovo Crisis*. [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/1998/19980331.SC6496.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 133.

### A Perfect Storm Grows: Genocide Warning Signs

As the Serbs attacked Croatia, Croatian nationalists began to fight for a “Greater Croatia.” “Ethnic cleansing” would soon become part of the lexicon. Fueling the violence was a lack of international political will or cohesion in facing the crisis. The U.S. was distancing itself, but supported the U.K. policy of working with the U.N. to preserve Yugoslavia. There were still lingering effects from World War II as the U.K. was wary of getting involved in another European conflict and did not trust the Germans who were once again supporting Croatia. Ironically, as the West supported Serbia, Germany was working through the E.C. to find a road to peaceful dissolution of Yugoslavia. Germany was acutely aware of its recent history and worked to avoid a repeat of it in the Balkans. The Germans also worked to further human rights in Croatia. A final factor for Western apathy was its willingness to accept the Serb narrative of Islamophobia. Fear of Muslims was a powerful force (then and now) in interpreting what was happening. Muslim Bosniaks were marginalized and degraded as “other” and the West accepted the Serb myth that they were radical, fundamentalist Muslims seeking to overthrow Christian Europe. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was true that a small force of radical fighters entered Bosnia later in the war. The main reason for their being there was their exploitation of the desperate Bosniaks who were isolated and denied the right to defend themselves because of an arms embargo.

On October 1991 U.N. envoy Cyrus Vance, former Secretary of State, left Belgrade convinced that Milošević was someone he could trust. He warned the E.C. to back away from threatening Milošević. He argued that singling out Serbia for blame and punishment was unjustified and counterproductive.<sup>27</sup>

Plans for a war for “Greater Serbia” in Bosnia developed as Bosnia prepared to declare its independence. On October 12, 1991 an irate phone conversation between the founders of the Serb Democratic Party (Republika Srpska) took place about the potential independence of Bosnia.



Gojko Dogo (left), a famed nationalist poet and reportedly an unofficial Bosnian Serb representative in Belgrade spoke to Karadžić (right):

Dogo: “Burn everything and good bye! ... Up north of Dubrovnik River kill everybody.”

Karadžić: “In two-three days Sarajevo will disappear, and there’ll be 500,000 dead. In a month, there will be no more Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina.”

Dogo is heard commenting, “They should all be slaughtered. All of them.”<sup>28</sup>

According to the judgment of the ICTY Appeals Chamber in 2013: “...in meetings with Karadzic ‘it had been decided that one third of Muslims would be killed, one third would be converted to the Orthodox religion and a third will leave on their own’ ...”

At the same time (October 1991) NATO commander General Galvin stated: “I am convinced that the Serbs could have been stopped in October 1991 with three ships, three dozen planes and about three thousand men deployed in Dubrovnik and Vukovar...”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 244.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. (2013). Appeals Chamber reverses Radovan Karadžić’s acquittal for genocide in municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina {Press Release}. <http://www.icty.org/en/press/appeals-chamber-reverses-radovan-karadzic-acquittal-genocide-municipalities-bosnia-and-herzegovina>.

### Turning Point – Vukovar

On November 18, 1991, Vukovar fell to the Serbs and faced a murderous rampage by Serbian-led military and paramilitary forces like the Serbian Volunteer Guard led by Arkan, a mafia-style thug wanted by Interpol for killing Yugoslav émigrés. Germany pushed for recognition of an independent Slovenia and Croatia. The U.K. and the U.S. worked to use the U.N. to halt E.C. (German-led) initiative. On December 4, Germany won recognition for the independence of Slovenia and Croatia by correctly arguing that the Yugoslav War was a war of Serb conquest, not a civil war. Germans helped Croatia to craft constitutional law based upon human and minority rights hoping that the Croats will follow it. In January 1992, French President Mitterrand (who had ironically worked for Vichy and refused to apologize) argued: “Croatia belonged to the Nazi bloc, not Serbia.”<sup>30</sup> Regardless, in January 1992, a ceasefire went in place and international recognition was won for the two new republics. Germany would pay a high price for this success as it was effectively removed from influence and future negotiations.

Milošević’s plan was crumbling especially with new E.C. talk of recognizing BiH. Milošević was a failure! His mobilization efforts in Serbia had failed and Serb lines were stretched against the highly motivated Croats. Milošević was anxious for U.N. troops to insert themselves on the Croatian border.

### 1992

1992 was the critical year in the unfolding atrocity. Radovan Karadžić, leader of the Serb Democratic Party in the Serb autonomous regions of Bosnia, established the autonomous state of “Republika Srpska” in northern and western Bosnia. He armed paramilitaries in preparation to fight for Milošević and began a campaign of “ethnic cleansing.” He threatened to bring the same “road to hell” in BiH as in Croatia



Ratko Mladić, Bosnian Serb military leader and Radovan Karadžić

### Krajina (Croatian Serbs)



In January 1992 Krajina Serb leaders established the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) within Croatia. To protect them Milošević called for U.N. help. Milošević worked to secure a U.N. peacekeeping force in order to stop Croat advances. In February 1992, the U.N. supported Milošević’s plan to put peacekeepers in four regions of Croatia. A U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was deployed to Krajina. The E.C. proposed a deal to appease the Serbs for a co-federalization of BiH into three ethnically divided states (Serbs, Croats, Muslims). The idea was supported by Tuđman (Croatia). There was hope (which proved to be false) that Serbs would be satisfied with the proposed 43.8 % of Bosnia. In Gow’s *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, he called this the “Charter for Ethnic Cleansing.”<sup>31</sup>

Izetbegović, the Bosniak leader, noting the obvious problem, asked Cyrus Vance for a limited U.N. deployment along Bosnia’s borders with Croatia and Serbia. This would have been a major check on Serbian preparations to invade. Vance rejected the idea mistakenly believing that he needed Milošević to get the peacekeeping operation going in Croatia.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Mark Almond. *Europe’s Backyard War: The War in the Balkans*. (Mandarin, 1994), xii.

<sup>31</sup> James Gow. *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, (New York: Columbia University, 1997), 235.

<sup>32</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 273-277.

On March 1, 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muslims and Croats) declared independence with 99.7% in favor and apply for E.C. recognition. The Bosnian Serb party (SDS) boycotted the referendum.

#### War in Bosnia & Herzegovina | April 1992 – December 1995

On April 2, 1992, Bosnian Serbs, Serb Special Forces (“Tigers” and “White Eagles”), and the JNA attacked BiH. This continued the pattern where the JNA would intervene “to restore order” after Serbia ordered its paramilitaries to act. The war soon spread across the country, accompanied by the ethnic cleansing of the Bosniak and Croat populations, especially in eastern Bosnia.

On April 7, 1992, the U.S. recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia. It was too late and not enough. The delay in recognizing Bosnian independence, the failure to monitor the borders of BiH, and its support of Milošević were huge misjudgments.

On April 6, 1992, the shelling and siege of Sarajevo began. It would last for three and a half years. Of the half million inhabitants, more than 12,000 would die in the forty-three month siege. The Serbs, driven by their exclusive ethno-religious nationalism also sought the cultural annihilation of Bosnia. Like elsewhere in Bosnia, Serb targets in Sarajevo included museums, mosques, schools, art, and historical cultural treasures that debunked the Serb myth of separate ethno-religious identities. Once again, a CIA study reported that the bulk of Serbian artillery and armor around Bosnian cities were so vulnerable to air attack that 95% could have been taken out in a single day.

The E.C. response to the siege was to travel to Sarajevo to convince Izetbegović to surrender. Lord Carrington (U.K.): “You, Mr. Izetbegović, are not aware who you are dealing with. They have several thousand tanks, several hundred military planes, between two and four thousand artillery weapons, stocks of ammunition and weapons, are you aware of it? How do you think you can resist?”<sup>33</sup> After years of supporting and encouraging Milošević the E.C. solution was to bully Izetbegović. The E.C. did not change their approach during the summer 1992 even as ethnic cleansing and genocide was reported.

On May 2, 1992, Serb forces cut off Sarajevo and attacked vital parts of the city including the Presidency building. The next day, May 3, 1992, Bosnian forces stunningly beat the Serbs back. The Serbs had arrested Izetbegović at the Sarajevo airport, but had put him in an office with a functioning phone. He was able to call his deputy who hastily arranged the defense of the city.



#### Six Strategic Objectives of the Serbian people in BiH<sup>34</sup>

The genocidal policy that developed for Bosnia and Herzegovina was not an ad hoc project. It was crystallized as policy in response to the shock of the failure in Sarajevo (the Serbs thought they could take Sarajevo in days from the poorly armed Bosnians). The Bosnian Serbs, on May 12 constructed “Six Strategic Objectives of the Serbian people in BiH” (Bosnian Serbs). This “project” was supported and financed by Belgrade, using the so-called Republika Srpska as its proxy to achieve its territorial objectives of a “Greater Serbian” state. The goals included: separation of ethnic communities in the country, establishment of the borders of “the Serb people’s territories” between the Drina, Una and Neretva rivers, erasing the Drina river as the border between the Serb part of Bosnia and neighboring Serbia. One of the goals was the division of Sarajevo. It was a warrant for genocide. On the same day, Ratko

<sup>33</sup> Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, 300.

<sup>34</sup> Hikmet Karčić. “Blueprint for genocide: the destruction of Muslims in Eastern Bosnia.” *openDemocracy*, May 11, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/about>.

Mladic was appointed the commander of the newly formed Bosnian Serb Army. Mladic accepted the charge of the six strategic goals and its genocidal intent by saying, “people are not keys or coins to move from one pocket to another.”<sup>35</sup>

The majority of the territory targeted by the six objectives was populated by Bosnian Muslims. Occupation was only one of the goals. *Očistiti* (to clean up) was a term first used by Yugoslav military officers in 1992 in reference to their Bosnian Muslim neighbors. Based on the systematic abuse, humiliation, rape, torture, and murder that followed, the aim went beyond removal of unwanted populations and focused on the annihilation of Bosniak culture at the micro level as well. The anti-Muslim bigotry was not aimed at all Muslims, but only at Slavic Muslims. This would be a campaign to “cleanse” a new homogeneous Serbian state. The document was used to convict Karadžić in his later trial at the ICTY. Karadžić’s goal: “We are on both sides of the Drina and our strategic interest and our living space are there.”<sup>36</sup> One of the goals was to eliminate the Drina River as a border and annihilate the non-Serbs living there.

### Demographic Engineering

The twentieth century is full of studies of state-forced resettlement policies and the targeting of minorities to achieve ethno-national homogeneity and “security.” Sometimes ethnic groups were offered incentives to resettle, but more often, these resettlements were violently executed and fueled by real or imagined threats. Demographic engineers sought to reinforce ethnic divisions and differences. The Six Strategic Objectives was yet another in a long line of “ethnic cleansing” projects. In 1928, for example, paragraph 55 of the Yugoslav Citizen Act regulated the relocation of unwanted non-Slavic citizens to Turkey.<sup>37</sup> The intended targets were mostly Albanian Muslims. The Turks were skeptical that the Albanians could be assimilated. In 1934, Turkish authorities enacted Settlement Law No. 2510 that specified how immigrants and refugees would be assimilated into the Turkish nation. In 1935, the “Inter-Ministerial Conference on the Resettlement of the Non-Slavic Element from Southern Serbia” between Yugoslavia and Turkey targeted which ethnic groups would be expelled and resettled in Turkey. In 1935, the Yugoslav authorities were impressed by the Turkish-Romanian agreement on the resettlement of Romanian Muslims in Turkey. The Nazi project of the “Final Solution” (the Holocaust/Shoah) was rooted in the demographic engineering plans of the SS and the German government that were radicalized in Poland in 1939-1941. These projects were fresh in the memories of Serb and Croatian planners. In 1937, Vaso Čubrilović, a member of pre-World War I Young Bosnia Slavic student group and participant in the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, wrote a pamphlet entitled ‘The expulsion of the Albanians.’ He later became a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His pamphlet emerged again in the 1980s when Serb nationalists were focusing on Kosovo.

In May 1992, the Serbs began to segregate Bosniak and Croats in northwest Bosnia and sent Bosniaks to concentration camps. The Western press got news out about Serb concentration camps (around 3,000 were killed in the Prijedor camp alone). Dozens were killed daily in the Omarska camp. Sadism ruled as recreation. Prisoners were forced to beat each other when



the guards tired and there were beheadings by chainsaw. Satko Mujagić, a survivor of the Omarska Concentration Camp remembered, “There is a certain way that people scream when they know they are going to die.”<sup>38</sup>



Mitterrand called the Serb offensives, “unfortunate initiatives” while Serb propaganda continued to portray Bosniaks as Islamic fundamentalists who wished to establish a Muslim state in the Balkans. Other, smaller scale, yet brutal camps emerged amongst

<sup>35</sup> Radosa Milutinovic, “Ratko Mladic: Genocidal Criminal or Innocent Protector?”, *Balkan Insight*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/ratko-mladic-genocidal-killer-or-innocent-protector--11-20-2017>.

<sup>36</sup> Krajisnik Trial Transcript, ICTY, 13 June 2006, <http://www.ictytranscripts.org/trials/krajisnik/060613IT.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Schad (2016), From Muslims into Turks? Consensual demographic engineering between interwar Yugoslavia and Turkey. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 18:4, 427-446. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2016.1228634>.

<sup>38</sup> Lippman, 324.

Croats and Bosnians. Often these camps were developed at the local level on individual initiative as hostage-taking centers with the goal of exchanging prisoners for family members interred in Serb camps.

Genocide is the destruction of social identities and the reduction of identity. By now Muslim identity was reduced to two questions: Are you circumcised? Do you have a Muslim name? Bosnian Serb nationalists, JNA, paramilitaries, and “weekend warriors” conducted “ethnic cleansing” including curfews, forced relocations, rape, castration, imprisonment in concentration camps, and killings. Journalist Mark Danner describes the Serbs’ plan of attack as:

1. Concentration – urge Serb residents of the city to leave, while surrounding the town and bombarding it with artillery fire.
2. Decapitation – execute the leaders and intelligentsia of the town.
3. Separation – separate the women, children, and old men from the men of “fighting age.”
4. Evacuation – move women, children, and old men to concentration camps or national borders.
5. Liquidation – execute the men of “fighting age.”<sup>39</sup>

The Serbs conducted systematic rapes in rape camps (often schools) as a tactic of “ethnic cleansing.” It is estimated that a minimum of 20,000 rapes (female mostly, but also male) took place from 1992 and 1995 in Bosnia.<sup>40</sup> Towns and villages throughout the country were attacked and destroyed by Bosnian Serb Military and Police forces, committing genocidal massacres.<sup>41</sup> The victim’s bodies were dumped into hidden mass graves. Hundreds of mosques and other Islamic religious sites were destroyed, erasing all physical memory of Bosniak presence in these lands.

In the fall of 1992, the world ignored a desperate appeal by the International Committee of the Red Cross to stop the atrocities. Instead, the West kept its arms embargo in place – a violation of Article 51 of U.N. Charter which guarantees that every recognized nation has the right to defend itself. In October 1992, a “no-fly zone” was declared over Bosnia, but for months the West ignored its own declaration. The Bosnians were not asking for any troops to intervene to save them. They just wanted arms to defend themselves.

### Mostar

The city of Mostar on the Neretva River was a symbol of tolerance: a shared life of Jews, Christians (Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats) existing side-by-side with the Bosniaks-Muslims for more than four centuries. This was intolerable for Serb and Croat religious nationalists.



The city suffered through two sieges. The first began in the spring of 1992 when Serb forces attacked. Croats and Bosnians beat them back. In the spring of 1993, Croat nationalists, seeing Serb atrocities going unpunished and rewarded in international peace negotiations, decided to attack BiH. This time Mostar was besieged by Croats and the Serbs. Each fought the other while the Bosnians tried to hold onto the city from both attackers. Most of the city was destroyed and on November 9, 1993 (ironically, the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi pogrom), the Croat army destroyed the Stari Most bridge, the symbol of multicultural life and hope. Before the war Mostar’s population had lived together with one-third being Croat, one-third being Muslim, and one-third being other Yugoslavians. After the war, Croats lived west of the bridge and Muslims to the east of the bridge.



<sup>39</sup> Bosnian Genocide, *World Without Genocide*, Retrieved from: <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/bosnian-genocide>

<sup>40</sup> David L Richards and Jillienne Haglund. *Violence Against Women and the Law*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 11.

<sup>41</sup> See: Edina Becirevic, *Genocide on the River Drina*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

## Srebrenica

On January 7, 1993, Bosniak forces under the command of Naser Orić launched military incursions into Serb villages around Srebrenica. Bosnian forces attacked Kravica and killed civilians and Serb paramilitary. Orić was in charge of protecting the enclave that had been besieged by Serb troops for over two years. The U.N. had declared these eastern Bosnian enclaves (Srebrenica, Zepa, and Gorazde) “safe havens” in 1993, to be disarmed and protected by international peacekeeping forces. Towns in eastern Bosnia remained under the control of the Bosnian government. By 1995, Srebrenica (12,000) had swelled with 40,000 refugees. In March 1995, Orić was ordered away from Srebrenica. The Serbs began to plan their attack.



In April 1995, after Mladic had failed to seize other Bosnian towns, Serb forces blocked the entry of supplies to Bosnian civilians in Srebrenica. Conditions deteriorated quickly and the Bosnian force was ordered to leave. The Bosnian Serbs updated their six strategic objectives. The Serb strategic plan is ‘upgraded’ by Directive 4 and Directive 7 issued by Srpska President Karadžić to the Bosnian Serb Army several weeks before Srebrenica and Zepa fell. Radovan Karadžić added Directive 7: “By planned and well-thought out combat operations, create an unbearable situation of total insecurity with no hope of further survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica.” According to General Ratko Mladic, “The time has come to take revenge on the Turks of this region.”<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the Dutch battalion guarding Srebrenica (Dutchbat) had been actively working to undermine Bosnian defenses. In some cases, they even filled in defensive trenches Bosnian troops had dug.

On July 11, 1995, Serb forces under General Ratko Mladic took Srebrenica. The U.N. commander, Dutch General Karremans, befriended Mladic and ignored what was unfolding. Hasan Nuhanović, the Bosnian translator for Dutch forces in Srebrenica brought his family into the U.N. base to protect them. About 20-25,000 Bosniak refugees fled from Srebrenica towards the nearby town of Potocari. Some arrived outside the U.N. compound. On July 12, 1995 Mladic began the “evacuation” of Srebrenica refugees. He promised them safe transport and assured them not to be afraid, but he had no intention of protecting them. What followed was indeed sinister. Women and children were separated from the men and older boys. This was done with the help of some Dutchbat troops. The women were bussed to sites where many were raped or assaulted. The men and boys who remained behind were killed or bussed to sites where they were tied up and shot. 15,000 tried to escape into the hills. To avoid the minefields the Serbs have put down, the column had to march in single file. Some would survive the minefields and Serb ambushes. Others did not.

On Thursday, July 13, 1995, Ramo Osmanovic was captured with hundreds of exhausted men trying to flee over the mountains. The Serbs forced him to call his son, Nermin, telling him they would be exchanged for Serb prisoners. The father’s call to his son was recorded by the Serbs. Both father and son were later discovered in a mass grave.<sup>43</sup> No one who surrendered to the Serbs survived. In nearby Kravica village, hundreds of prisoners were packed into a warehouse where they were slaughtered by gunfire and grenades. 8,372 people were murdered in the Srebrenica genocide. Of the 15,000 who fled on the “march of death” only 7,000 survived.<sup>44</sup> After the



“Nermin Corina”  
by Miroslav Kraljic

“evacuations” from Srebrenica the Dutch commander Karremans forced Hasan Nuhanović – UN translator’s - family to leave the U.N. compound.<sup>45</sup> Hasan stayed behind. His family was later



Hasan Nuhanović, Bosnian translator  
for Dutch forces in Srebrenica.

<sup>42</sup> Tom Gjelten. “Remembering The ‘Monstrous’ Legacy Of Ratko Mladic.” *NPR*, November 22, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/11/22/566024325/remembering-the-monstrous-legacy-of-ratko-mladic>.

<sup>43</sup> Saliha Osmanović. Remembering Srebrenica, <https://www.srebrenica.org.uk/survivor-stories/saliha-osmanovic/>.

<sup>44</sup> David Rohde. “Bosnian Muslims Retrace Final Day of ‘95 Victims.” *New York Times*, July 11, 2005, Europe.

<sup>45</sup> Eyewitness Testimony: Hasan Nuhanović, USHMM, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AepwHsBaws>.

discovered in numerous mass graves. Hasan wearing his father's glasses discovered in a mass grave (right).

## Rwanda

Elsewhere, other unfolding atrocities did not cross the threshold of concern. Hutu leaders, the ethnic majority in the east-central African nation of Rwanda, received the message loud and clear: Genocide pays off and the world does not care. The Rwandan genocide took place from April to July 1994. The Hutus murdered as many as 800,000 people, mostly of the Tutsi minority.

## Remembrance | Memory | Memorialization

There are no memorials marking the mass graves in Republika Srpska. In Prijedor (RS) where approximately 100 Serb soldiers died, at least 60 memorials to the "Serb defensive-liberation war." At Trnopolje concentration camp (20,000 non Serbs held) near Prijedor, monument: "to the fighters who built their lives into the foundation of the Republika Srpska." In Kravica the memorial cemetery for the Srebrenica genocide has a competing Serb memorial falsely claiming "3267" Serb killed in Kravica. Total Serb casualties around Srebrenica were 2,385; 1974 were soldiers, 387 civilians.<sup>46</sup> Serbs continue to deny the Srebrenica genocide despite the forensic and real time U.S. intelligence imagery. An estimated 1400 mosques and religious administrative buildings (birth, property records...) were destroyed by Serb and Croat forces.<sup>47</sup> Cultural annihilation impacted the perpetrators as well – depriving them of evidence of five hundred years of interreligious and multi-confessional culture. "Kill the Turk!" and "Knife, wire, Srebrenica!" ("Nož, žica, Srebrenica!") are common chants at sporting events by Serb fans.

## Ending the Bosnian War

U.S. President Bill Clinton authorized a private company to use retired U.S. military personnel to train the Croatian army. Croatian forces took Krajina with little resistance. The U.S. also made a key shift in policy to conduct air strikes against the Serbs if they continued to threaten the Bosnian safe areas or refused to negotiate a settlement. In February 1994, four Serb aircraft were shot down in the no-fly zone around Sarajevo. It was NATO's first-ever use of force. In May 1995, NATO conducted air strikes on the Serb stronghold of Pale. In July 1995, after the Srebrenica killings, the Dole-Lieberman bill required the U.S. to lift the arms embargo.<sup>48</sup> The isolationist and nationalist wing of the Republican Party opposed lifting the embargo and President Bush argued that more guns would only fuel the violence. In August 1995, after Serbs refused to comply with a U.N. ultimatum. After Serb units shelled the Sarajevo marketplace in late August, NATO conducted three weeks of air strikes on Serb positions.

In autumn Karadžić and Milošević agreed to enter negotiations. The Serb economy was crippled due to U.N. sanctions. The Croatian army, Bosnian army and Bosnian Croat militias were ordered to stop their advance on the request of President Clinton in order to create a ceasefire. On September 1, 1995, U.S. special Balkan envoy Richard Holbrooke announced that all the parties would meet in Geneva for talks. When the Bosnian Serbs did not comply with all of NATO's conditions, NATO air strikes resumed. On September 14, Holbrooke succeeded in getting an agreement signed by Karadžić and Mladić, the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, to end the siege of Sarajevo, laying the framework for the Dayton peace talks in November.

The war ended just as Bosnian and Croatian forces had turned the tide with a successful offensive that reversed territorial gains in a matter of weeks. The U.N. actually backed down to a Milošević threat that he would step up vicious attacks (that he was denying doing) unless there was intervention. On November 21, 1995, Holbrook, fearing a refugee crisis that might

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<sup>46</sup> Lippman, 241.

<sup>47</sup> Nadzida Cano. "Bosnian Muslims Sue Serbs Over Destroyed Heritage." *Balkan Insight*, April 10, 2008, Analysis.

<sup>48</sup> Elaine Sciolino "Conflict in The Balkans: In Washington; Defiant Senators Vote To Override Bosnian Arms Ban", *New York Times*, July 27, 1995 <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/27/world/conflict-balkans-washington-defiant-senators-vote-override-bosnian-arms-ban.html?pagewanted=all>.



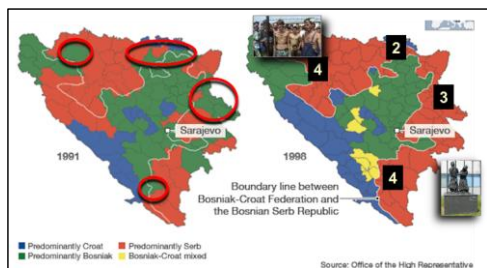
destabilize Serbia, threatened Izetbegović, the Bosnian leader, with NATO airstrikes if the Croat-Bosnian offensive against the Serbs continued.

### The Dayton Accords

Bosnia was divided, not by citizens, but by ethnic identities. Three presidents were created in a power-sharing agreement. One would be a Serb, one Croat, and one Bosnian. There would be three separate armies, police forces, and political ethnic constituencies. Dayton required the withdrawal of all foreign military. A few hundred foreign Muslim volunteers (as mujahideen) of the 3-4000 remain, blended in, and would soon agitate against Croatian separatists to prevent any cooperation or reconciliation. Corruption was institutionalized. People were pushed into ethnic/religious identities and leaders had learned that the way to keep power was by promoting victimization, fear, and exaggerated ethnic collective identity. The international community dealt with leaders who are criminals, war criminals, or extreme nationalists.



“Thanks to Dayton, Karadžić’s Serbs snatched a victory from the jaws of defeat, the Republika Srpska was consolidated and Bosnia was condemned to permanent dysfunction.”<sup>49</sup> - Marko Attila Hoare



Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) became a sovereign state with two entities: Republika Srpska: largely Serb and largely autonomous and the cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: largely Croat-Bosniak. Dividing Bosnia into cantons added another layer of bureaucracy and corruption. The Serbs were rewarded with territorial gains they had won through ethnic cleansing. Many of their Six Strategic Goals had been achieved. Republika Srpska was carved out of Bosnia through atrocities and was awarded international recognition.

The deal imposed no direct obligation on the NATO-led peacekeepers to arrest war criminals. Bosnia was divided between a separate Croat-Bosniak federation (51%) and a Serb republic (Republika Srpska) (49%). Milošević was called the “savior of Dayton.” The accord did stop the fighting.

### Kosovo War: March 5, 1998 – June 11, 1999

The Kosovo Liberation Army (K.L.A.) formed in 1991 had been fighting Serbs and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) since 1995.

Having lost three wars and hurt the economy, Milošević worried about his legacy. To save it, he decided to at least take back Kosovo. He attempted to “ethnically cleanse” Kosovo in 1998. In March 1999, after Serb forces had killed Albanian civilians, NATO issued an ultimatum demanding that the Serbs leave Kosovo.<sup>50</sup> Milošević ignored NATO the demand and NATO forces bombed Kosovo to protect the Albanian population. In response, Milošević ordered the Serbian army to attack Kosovo creating a mass expulsion of Kosovar Albanians. The Serbs conducted a campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo as NATO bombed Yugoslavia for 78 days (March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999). This NATO bombing marked the second major combat operation in its history, following the 1995 campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In June 1999, Milošević finally gave in and was arrested for war crimes. Kosovo was divided between its various populations with



A father from Mitrovica in Kosovo shows pictures of his two children he fears to have been killed by Serbs during the war in Kosovo, 1999

<sup>49</sup> Julian Borger, “Bosnia’s bitter, flawed peace deal, 20 years on,” *The Guardian*, 2015, Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/nov/10/bosnia-bitter-flawed-peace-deal-dayton-agreement-20-years-on>.

an international force keeping the peace. This international intervention at a very early stage of the ethnic cleansing prevented much larger atrocities and massacres.

### Justice?

CBiH (Sarajevo) and ICTY (the Hague)

The Tribunal has indicted 161 individuals. While most of cases were against Serbs or Bosnian Serbs, charges were also brought against defendants of other ethnic groups, including Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Kosovo Albanians for crimes committed against Serbs. Some of the convictions include:

- November 1996: Dražen Erdemović, a Croat who fought for the Serbs and took part in the Srebrenica massacres, was the first person to be convicted. He was sentenced to five years in prison.
- April 2001: Slobodan Milošević, President of Serbia was arrested and extradited to the ICC in the Hague. He was accused of involvement in the genocide in Bosnia and war crimes in Croatia. Before the end of the trial, Milošević died from health complications.
- 2001: Serbian General Radislav Krstić, who played a major role in the Srebrenica massacre, was convicted of genocide and sentenced to 46 years in prison.
- 2012: Zdravko Tolimir, Assistant Commander of Intelligence and Security for the Bosnian Serb Army, was found guilty of removing Bosniaks of Eastern Bosnia and was convicted in 2012 and sentenced to life imprisonment on six counts: Genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, extermination, murder, persecution on ethnic grounds and forced transfer.
- 2016: Radovan Karadžić, President of Republika Srpska was sentenced to 40 years for the Srebrenica genocide and other crimes.
- May 2011: Ratko Mladić arrested in Serbia after years of hiding in Srpska. His capture was considered to be one of the pre-conditions for Serbia being awarded candidate status for E.U. membership. On November 22, 2017, Mladić, the “Butcher of Bosnia,” after raging at the Court and being forcibly removed, was convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment.
- November 29, 2017: Slobodan Praljak, the Bosnian Croat general who destroyed the Mostar bridge and inflicted other atrocities in an attempt to create a homogeneous “Greater Croatia”, after hearing The Hague Court verdict confirming his 20-year prison term for war crimes, defiantly shouted, "Slobodan Praljak is not a war criminal. I am rejecting your verdict with contempt." He then committed suicide in the court by taking poison.

Commented [WT1]:

Commented [WT2R1]:

In 2007, the International Criminal Court in The Hague decided to define the Srebrenica massacre as genocide and declared that Serbia had violated its responsibility to prevent genocide.<sup>51</sup> Despite the numerous statements of intent (explicit and inferred by the execution of genocide in Prijedor, Bosnia) and overwhelming evidence, judges ruled that Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladic (Republika Srpska) were not guilty of genocide in Prijedor because: they “intended to destroy the Bosnian Muslims in those Municipalities as part of a protected group,” but the victims “formed a relatively small part of the protected group.” This ruling of course violated the genocide convention.

### Denial

These convictions are important as it makes denial more difficult. However, in that the Croats and Serbs have generally been rewarded for their “ethnic cleansing” there is still room to maneuver as a nationalist.<sup>52</sup> Unable to deny the crimes, they blur reality and distance themselves from agency by claiming victimhood and celebrating the perpetrators as heroes.

<sup>51</sup> Case Concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ON THE PREVENTION (Bosnia AND Hercegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro), Judgment of 26 February 2007, <http://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/91/091-20070226-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Florian Bieber, “A Poisonous Week at the Hague Tribunal,” 2017, *Balkan Insight*, <https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/a-poisonous-week-at-the-hague-tribunal-11-30-2017>.

This is a widespread phenomenon and continues to include the government and the churches. Catholic priests organized a prayer meeting for the six Croat war criminals on trial in The Hague and the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church called the sentencing of Mladic diabolical.<sup>53</sup>

The Croatian daily *Jutarnji List* put it best with the headline: “We don’t deny the crimes of the HVO [the Croatian Defense Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina], but they weren’t committed intentionally.”<sup>54</sup> Bozo Ljubic, a deputy in the governing Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ, described Praljak’s suicide as a heroic act. Serbia continues to be reluctant to hand over war criminals.

### Rebuilding After Dayton?

Twenty years after the start of the war in Bosnia, deep physical and psychological divisions remain throughout society. Many Bosnian schools are ethnically segregated and the country is divided into cantons. It is rare for Bosniaks to learn about the genocide, other than through family. Schools that were used as killing centers were cleaned up and reopened for the next school year. Neighbors had killed neighbors. The majority of the perpetrators went back to the lives that they had led before the war. Corruption and distrust is rife. The economy is struggling to provide jobs. Croats have rejected 30 agreements seeking to reunify Mostar.



Former Yugoslavia has become ripe for plunder by international corporations in collusion with domestic profiteers. Corrupt officials use denial, commemorations and monuments as propaganda, glorify war criminals, use low-intensity terror, advocate extreme nationalism and separatism, militarism, and manipulate elections. Many are leaving or considering emigration while others have to try to navigate the corrupt systems. With the rise of right-wing chauvinistic nationalism in the U.S. and Europe (Bosnia) domestic leaders are no longer looking to the West for help and stability. Instead, they are turning to authoritarian regimes. President Trump’s administration is supporting authoritarians like Dodik; the Serbs and Croats have turned to Putin; and the Bosniaks look to Turkey, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

And yet, UNESCO money is coming in to support the Bosniaks. In once thriving Muslim villages, mosques are being rebuilt – mostly as assertions of life. Despite the difficulty, there is a sense of hope. In 2004, the Old Bridge and much of the Old Town of Mostar were restored with the contribution of an international scientific committee established by UNESCO. Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS) has criticized President Trump’s stance, arguing for the need to shift focus away from corrupt leaders to the Bosnian people. He has helped to keep U.S. sanctions on Dodik. Croatia no longer supporting Croat separatists in Bosnia. The 2005 release of *Scorpion* film showing the executions at Srebrenica has impacted many Serbs. There are ongoing local initiatives focusing on the right to return, human rights activism (especially among the young), and a variety of other grassroots initiatives. One such initiative is the Center for Peacebuilding from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sanski Most. Building on local tradition of activism and led by two survivors of the genocide, Vahidin Omanovic and Mevludin Rahmanović, their mission is “To rebuild trust and foster reconciliation among the people of Bosnia—Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, and others—as well as support peace processes in other countries that have suffered from violent conflict.”



<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Florian Bieber, “A Poisonous Week at the Hague Tribunal,” 2017, Balkan Insight, <https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/a-poisonous-week-at-the-hague-tribunal-11-30-2017>.

As we study crimes of mass atrocity and the genocide in Bosnia we have much to reflect upon. We need to examine where our policies went wrong and explore all the opportunities that were missed to intervene to stop the trajectory. How do we make a difference before, during, and after atrocity?

In August 2011 President Obama's Study Directive brought genocide prevention to the forefront of U.S. policy. For the first time in U.S. history, preventing mass atrocities and genocide became a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the U.S. We must recognize that genocide prevention is a national security interest and that nationalism, apathy, and isolationism are not.

As we move forward we must continue to work to hold the perpetrators accountable. Justice, truth, and memory lie at the heart of prevention strategies.

We must recognize and begin to address Christian, U.N., and the West's complicity. Religious organizations must use this history to actively reflect on a religious identity that is insular and promoted as "superior." When Catholic pilgrims come to Medjugorje in Hercegovina they cannot be limited to seeing only their religious site. As crosses dominate the landscape often overlooking annihilated Muslim villages, no Christian should leave Bosnia without touching upon the history of the genocide. We must seek the best in religious traditions and that can only be accomplished if those traditions are open to self-reflection, openness, and engagement of other traditions.

We must find a readiness to work with and learn from others and not fear plurality. We must increase our capacity for empathy and compassionate action and discover what is good in our different faith and ethnic traditions. We must ask, "how does your tradition help us build peace?"

We must recognize and respond to attempts to marginalize and villainize Bosnia. We cannot accept the myth-makers who would explain away genocide through the false narratives of "Balkanism": "civil war," "blame on all sides," "age-old antagonisms," or "protecting Europe from radical Muslims." We must recognize that Islamophobia undermines us all.

We must tell the story of the Sarajevo Haggadah as a counter-narrative to "Balkanization."

We must support and fund Bosnian national memory and education.

We cannot recognize territories won through mass atrocity.

We cannot support corporate profiteering taking place on the regional and international level nor allow people to accumulate their wealth by working with criminals who keep their people in poverty, fear, and division.

Instead, we need to support grassroots initiatives that undermine these institutionalized forces of exploitation.