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The Genocide in Srebrenica from July 11-19, 1995, and the Aftermath of the Genocide

Alptekin Tartıcı¹  ¹ Turkish National Defense University, Army War Institute, Faculty of Command and Staff Training, İstanbul, Türkiye

Abstract

In the final quarter of the 20th century, with the end of the Cold War, the conflict that took place in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995 represented one of the final chapters of suffering in the region since 1878 and marked a genocide unprecedented in human history. The world witnessed the genocide, which began in April 1992 with the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina over a span of 3.5 years. Yet, much like the situation in Gaza today, nations that define themselves as members of the civilised world remained silent, indirectly supporting this atrocity. The genocide that commenced in Srebrenica on July 11, 1995, culminating in the massacre of over 8,000 men and boys within a week, was judged by an international judicial body—the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia—as if it were an isolated incident of genocide confined to Srebrenica. Tragically, the tribunal treated these crimes as individual offenses rather than state crimes, convicting those involved on various charges but failing to address the full scope of the atrocity. While the world was introduced to the genocide and crimes against humanity in Bosnia-Herzegovina under the name of the Srebrenica Genocide, the Bosniak people continue to remember and hold fresh in their memories the inhumane crimes and genocide committed across all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The tribunal's failure to address the extensive genocide perpetrated by Serbs, Montenegrins, and Croats over more than three years, without specifying any country, has left the conscience of the Bosniak people unsettled. Today, as you travel through Bosnia-Herzegovina, you can frequently see the inscription “Don't Forget Srebrenica, 11 July 1995” on building walls, stones, and everywhere. The purpose of these inscriptions is to ensure that the suffering experienced is never forgotten by younger generations and to prevent such tragedies from occurring again in this region.

Keywords

Srebrenica • genocide • mass graves • UN Protection Force • safe area



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✉ Corresponding author: Alptekin Tartıcı alptekintartici@gmail.com



The Genocide in Srebrenica from July 11-19, 1995, and the Aftermath of the Genocide

"Never forget this, my child: The West has never been civilised, and its current prosperity is built upon the ongoing colonialism, the blood it has shed, the tears it has caused, and the suffering it has inflicted."

Aliya İzzetbegović¹

The spread of nationalist sentiments to Bosnia in 1992 also dragged the country into a 3.5-year-long war. The United Nations' and the European Union's contributions aimed at stopping the war during this period failed to persuade the parties involved, and the bloodshed could not be prevented. This war left behind more than two million refugees, 250,000 deaths, hundreds of thousands of injuries, and tens of thousands of rapes, marking a new shameful chapter in European history after the events of World War II.

This study examines, with a comprehensive approach, the genocide in Srebrenica and the aftermath; the escalation of the war between the parties starting from April 1992, and the international community's efforts to end this war; the path leading to the Srebrenica Genocide, significant developments before the genocide, the mass executions that began in Srebrenica on July 11, 1995, the mass graves found after the genocide, the concealment of genocide crimes, and the dismemberment and transfer of the bodies of murdered Bosniaks to different graves; the identification efforts of the genocide victims found in mass graves, the funeral and commemoration ceremonies held on July 11, the "March of Peace" (Marš Mira) held in honour of the genocide victims, and the capture and punishment of the genocide perpetrators.

The Intensification of the War and the International Community's Efforts to End the War and the Path to Genocide

The Bosnian War, which began in April 1992, became increasingly intense with each passing day. The suffering of the people living in Sarajevo, who were subjected to Serbian bombardment and sniper attacks, started to draw more attention from the international community through certain tragic events. On May 26, 1992, a mortar shell fell on people standing in a breadline, killing twenty-two (22) innocent people. On February 5, 1994, a mortar attack hit the Markale Market, killing sixty-nine (69) people and injuring hundreds (Burg, Shoup, 2000, pp.211-212). On August 28, 1995, a second mortar attack on the same market resulted in the death of thirty-eight (38) people and the injury of dozens more. These incidents suddenly made the international community aware of the atrocities occurring in Bosnia and the suffering and misery of the civilians in Sarajevo and other cities who were subjected to the bombardment by Serbian forces (Gallagher, 2003, p.120).

¹Aliya İzzetbegović's Historic Quotes, (online) <https://dogruhaber.com.tr/haber/301215-aliya-izzetbegovicin-tarihe-kazinan-sozleri/>, 12 October 2024.

Map 1*Map of UN Protected Areas*

Source: UNSCR 836

The international community's efforts to end the war and establish peace were unsuccessful, leading the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to decide on creating safe zones. However, this decision, in reality, served the purpose of the Serbian aggressors by forcing the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to live in certain areas. Despite objections from Muslim Bosniaks, the UNSC, on June 4, 1993, passed the UNSCR 836, declaring *Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihać, Srebrenica, Žepa, and Goražde* as "safe zones". (UNSCR 836, 1993). Although this decision appeared to be appropriate, it has gone down in history as one of the "West's significant mistakes with deadly consequences," as stated in the report titled *Unfinished Peace*. The ineffective United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) failed to protect these safe zones, and the people in these areas became targets for the Serbian aggressors (International Commission on the Balkans, 1996).

In various regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, people were detained in prisoner and concentration camps, as well as other detention facilities (such as barracks, military installations, factories, hangars, schools, sports centres, health, entertainment, and dining facilities, police stations, prisons, churches, etc.), solely because they were Muslim. Subjected to inhumane conditions, left in hunger and misery, these people were forced to work in various tasks, and those who tried to escape were killed (Çekiç, 2018, pp.51-53). In detention facilities and camps, Bosniaks, as a national, ethnic, and religious group, were killed (both collectively and individually), severely injured, and subjected to conditions deliberately designed to cause physical destruction. Muslim women and young girls were subjected to rape, sexual abuse, and torture, leading to inhumane treatment, while also being forced to witness these acts, resulting in psychological torture. The available, reliable, and original information obtained from these concentration camps, along with indisputable evidence, confirms that all types of crimes against humanity, in violation of international law, were deliberately committed against Bosniaks in these camps. Therefore, all the essential elements required for the formation of genocide, as defined in Article II (a-e) of the *"Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,"* are present, including all acts (actus reus) considered to be genocide. All crimes committed in the concentration camps were carried out with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, and religious group, namely the Bosniaks, which proves and confirms that the crime committed was genocide.

Photo 1*Demolished Mostar Bridge*

Source: <https://sarajevotimes.com/anniversary-of-the-destruction-of-the-old-bridge-in-mostar-3/>

On the other hand, by November 1993, the ongoing conflicts in Central Bosnia, particularly in Mostar, had intensified significantly. The city of Mostar was almost completely destroyed, and the historic Mostar Bridge was demolished by a Croatian tank fire. These events caused great despair among those who were trying to preserve Bosnia and Herzegovina's pluralistic, multi-ethnic structure and achieve reconciliation (Çekiç, 2018, p.86)

While efforts to lift the siege of Sarajevo were ongoing, the United States was working to establish peace between Muslims and Croats in Central Bosnia. Through negotiations, both sides came to realise that they would benefit from a ceasefire between them. Both parties accepted the U.S.-mediated plan, and a ceasefire was signed on February 22, 1994. The Washington Agreement, which established the Bosniak-Croat Federation, was signed on March 1, and the agreement putting the Federation's Constitution into effect was signed on March 18, 1994. This agreement is significant as it demonstrated that the Croats officially abandoned their desire to divide Bosnia into three political entities. The Federation was to be composed of a certain number of cantons, with Mostar to be administered by the European Union (Sumantra, 2012, pp.106-116).

After the Washington Agreement, the United Nations became ineffective in using force against the Serbs due to opposition vetoes, leading to increased pressure on the United States to lift the arms embargo and use force. *The establishment of a Contact Group*, composed of American, Russian, French, German, and British representatives, and their direct negotiations with the parties also proved ineffective. Meanwhile, the stance of the major powers in seeking a solution to the conflict remained unchanged, with Russia strongly opposing the U.S. view that pressure should be applied to the Bosnian Serbs. (Çekiç, 2018, pp. 150-155)

The Bosnian government did not accept the partition proposal prepared by the Contact Group in July 1994, which allocated 51% of the territory to the Bosniak-Croat Federation and the remaining 49% to the Bosnian Serbs. However, the plan failed because the Bosnian Serb Assembly did not accept it.

Because of efforts by the former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Army of the Republika Srpska signed a ceasefire in the final months of 1994. However, after a four-month period, the conflicts resumed (Çikotić, 2010, p.96). In May 1995, Serbian attacks intensified, and the bombing of Sarajevo began again. Serbian militia forces took more than 350 UNPROFOR soldiers hostage, most of whom were French. (Öner, 2013, p. 63)

Significant Developments Before the Srebrenica Genocide

Especially after the capture of French soldiers, France increased its pressure on NATO to form a "*Rapid Reaction Force*" of 10,000 troops, and this proposal was supported by the UN and other Western countries. The U.S. also announced that it would contribute \$50 million to this force, which would consist of French, British, Dutch, Belgian, and German troops. While the formation of this force was underway, the Serbian Army began to gather its units around Srebrenica, one of the safe zones, and started preparations for an attack on the town (Öner, 2013, p.68).

In line with their aggressive aims, the Serbs continued to besiege Srebrenica on April 16, 1993, despite the United Nations declaring it a safe area. The Bosniak civilians living in and around Srebrenica, which was designated as a "Safe Area," were under the protection and assurance of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). However, a Dutch battalion which was responsible for the region was tasked for this protection and assurance mission. The two-year-long siege starting from 1993 was marked by the incompetence and irresponsibility of the Canadian unit and then the Dutch unit, which failed to appropriately report developments in the area to the UN Headquarters. As a result, the Bosnian Serb forces could cause the fall of Srebrenica on July 11, 1995 (Karçiç, 2022, p.48).

Photo 2

Dutch UN peacekeepers sit on top of an armoured personnel carrier as Muslim refugees from Srebrenica gather in the nearby village of Potocari in July 1995



Source: <https://catstevens.com/the-srebrenica-massacre/>

Muslim Bosniaks, who were viewed as lacking the capability to be a people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, were condemned to mass deaths because of the brutal actions carried out by Orthodox Serbs. While these acts were being committed, nearly 400 Dutch soldiers under the command of the United Nations

The Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Srebrenica did nothing to prevent the situation and merely observed.

In 1992 and the mid-1993, due to the failure to carry out the plan to eliminate the safe areas of Bosnia and expel the Bosniak population from these lands, on June 28, 1995, the war criminals Radovan Karadžić and Momčilo Krajišnik held a meeting with the war criminal Radislav Krstić at the Drina Corps (DK) Command in Vlasenica. They decided to eliminate the safe areas of Srebrenica, Žepa, and Goražde. The reason was that Bosnia and Herzegovina's most valuable underground resources and mines were located in these areas,

ARBiH launched a counterattack, briefly forcing the Serbs to retreat to their initial positions. However, their success was short-lived. As part of this operation, the encircling Serbs attacked the observation posts of Dutch soldiers in the UN peacekeeping force and took about 30 Dutch soldier. The situation in Srebrenica was very tense on the morning of July 10. General Mladić issued an order of July 10 for the mobilisation of all available troops.

On July 11, troops under General Ratko Mladić advanced towards Srebrenica, which had been declared a safe area by the United Nations and had been disarmed by the UN peacekeepers, and occupied the city. The Dutch military forces responsible for the security of Srebrenica did not prevent the entry of the Bosnian Serb military forces. Following orders from French General Bernard Janvier, the Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force, they did not take any action, fearing harm to the 30 Dutch soldiers who had been taken by the Serbs. They did not fire a single shot at the attacking Serbs and withdrew from the base area in Srebrenica to the Potočari camp at 14:30 on July 11. Thus, the Muslim population in the area was left unprotected.

On July 11, General Mladić entered Srebrenica with his troops and, in front of a group of journalists, made a statement for the cameras: *"Today is July 11, 1995. We are in Serb Srebrenica before celebrating the anniversary of a sacred day for the Serbs. We dedicate this city to the Serb nation. In memory of our uprising against the Ottomans, the time has come to take revenge on the Turks."* (By "Turks," he was referring to the Bosniak Muslims, of course.)²

Map 3

The Route of Death March



Source: <https://srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/history/column>

On the night of July 11, approximately 15,000 Bosniak men set out from the Sunsnjari and Jaglic regions through the forests to reach the free zone. This journey, which would come to be known as the *"Death March,"* was undertaken by Bosniak civilians trying to escape the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995. The route used by these Bosniaks to reach the safe area of Tuzla from the eastern Bosnian forest path is shown on the map.

²On July 11, 1995, General Mladic walks through the empty streets of Srebrenica, boasting that the enclave has been liberated for the Serb people, and the time has come to "take revenge" against "the Turks." "The Mladic Files: Mladic Entering Srebrenica" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfInjNoT4Q&t=16s> (dated Sept 5, 2024)

The Serbian forces³ killed two-thirds of those who undertook this journey.

When the soldiers of the Bosnian Serb Army arrived to take control of the UN base in Potočari, they encountered no resistance from the Dutch peacekeeping forces. Potočari became extremely overcrowded, with more than 6,000 civilians inside the compound and an additional 20,000 people taking refuge in the surrounding buildings. The Bosniaks gathered in Potočari⁴ had become easy targets for the Serbs, who were waiting for an opportunity.

Bosnian Serb commanders demanded that Muslims surrender their weapons. (Some Bosniaks had small-scale light weapons to defend themselves and their families.) Conditions within the town of Srebrenica were horrific. In addition to food and water shortages, the Bosniak population in Potočari faced indescribable abuses by soldiers of the Bosnian Serb Army, including torture, beatings, rape, and murder.

Those who sought refuge with the Dutch soldiers realised what awaited them after the first night in the old battery factory. The Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) units soon began separating Bosniak men and sons over 14 years old from their families. On the night of July 11, Serbian soldiers entered the factory, conducted identity checks, and arbitrarily took away some men and sons, while the screams of women separated from their husbands or sons echoed off the walls of the battery factory.

The night of July 11 was an extremely difficult one for the Bosniaks and their families gathered in and around the battery factory in Potočari. To summarise a few incidents that occurred during this night filled with uncertainty will provide a clearer understanding of the stress they endured.

It has been reported in an interview with a Bosniak man named Esnaf Avdić⁵, who personally experienced these events, that some Bosniak mothers, in an attempt to prevent their sons from being taken by Bosnian Serb soldiers, dressed their sons in their daughters' clothing, covered their heads with headscarves, and tried to make them appear as if they were their daughters and sleeping. This tactic successfully saved their sons twice as the soldiers moved through the factory, randomly rounding up Bosniak men and boys.

On the other hand, a Bosniak father expressed that he would shoot the Bosnian Serb soldiers who wanted to take his young daughter to abuse her, using the pistol he had hidden, and that he did not want to live through this pain, intending to use the remaining bullets on his daughter and himself. However, after his wife's pleas, the father hid the pistol, and by pretending that their daughter was asleep, they avoided any negative incident. However, the Serbian soldiers took their father in the middle of the night. The small boy, who witnessed these events, broke into tears while recounting what happened that night and said he never saw his father again after that night. He was finally able to embrace his father's remains in 2010, approximately 15 years later, when his coffin was filled with body parts collected from five different mass graves.

More than 25,000 women, children, and elderly people were forcibly put on buses and driven to Kladanj, while men and boys were taken to detention centres in the nearby town of Bratunac and its surroundings.

³In memory of the Bosniaks who fled more than 100 kilometres on foot towards Tuzla along the route known as the "Path of Death," thousands of volunteers participate in the "Peace March" every year, walking for three days and attending the ceremonies held at the Potočari Cemetery.

⁴Potočari is a village located 5 km northeast of Srebrenica. During the war, the battery factory in the village was used as a base by the Dutch UNPROFOR battalion. When the Bosniaks were attacked by Serb forces, they sought refuge in this base. The Srebrenica Martyrs' Memorial and Cemetery are located in Potočari. Since 1996, the remains found in mass graves have been identified through DNA testing, and each year on July 11, memorial and burial ceremonies are held. The Potočari cemetery currently contains the graves of 6,765 victims.

⁵An interview with Esnaf Avdić. (Bosniak man), serving in the Armed Forces of Bosnia Herzegovina as a major, as of July, 2024. On July 11, 1995 he was 14 years old, and almost all of his boy friends were taken by the Bosnian Serbian soldiers. No news was taken by the families of these young boys, some whose bodies were found in different graves.

The Serbian forces killed most of these more than 8,000 men and boys, and their families would never see them alive again.

Mass Executions in Srebrenica

Taking advantage of the situation, the Serbs, between July 11-18, 1995, separated men aged 14 to 65 (and even some older) from the group of 20,000-25,000 people they had captured (excluding women and small children) and massacred between 8,000 and 12,000 Bosniak men and boys by shooting, burning, slitting throats, and torturing them in various regions. (Karçiç, 2022, p.43-53)

Additionally, many women and young girls were raped. The Serbs carried out this brutality in front of the eyes of UN officials and Dutch soldiers, who were responsible for protecting the safe areas, and sometimes even with their approval.

Photo 3

A scene from the killed Bosniaks during the Death March on July 12-13



Source: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=killed+bosniaks+death+march+in+bosnia

On the morning of July 11, while the people of Srebrenica were in a state of great fear and anxiety about their future, at 11:00 a.m., two 155-mm artillery shells directly hit the area around the hospital, where approximately 2,000 civilians had gathered for shelter, killing six civilians and injuring hundreds of people (Avdiç, 2023).

On the evening of July 11, about 15,000 Bosniaks gathered near the villages of Jagličići and Šušnjari and around midnight they set out northward, through a minefield, towards the free zone controlled by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBIH) via Cerska, Kamenica, Crni, and Baljkovica. On July 12 and 13, Serbian forces ambushed and killed the Bosniaks who were moving in a convoy towards Tuzla through intense artillery fire and ambushes. More than two-thirds of those who set out lost their lives. Some were killed on the road, while others were killed after surrendering. During the Death March, the VRS used chemical warfare agents that caused hallucinations among the members of this march (Karçiç, 2022, p.49).

On July 12 and 13, as women, small children, and the elderly were boarding buses and trucks in Potočari, men and boys were separated from their families and taken to nearby houses where they began to be killed. During the sound of gunfire, families were forced into vehicles and sent to other areas. One of these houses, known as the "white house," was located about 250 metres from the entrance of the Dutch Battalion base, approximately 20 metres from the main road in the direction of Srebrenica (Avdiç, 2023). The first large-scale

execution took place on July 13, 1995, in the Cerska Valley. The victims, men aged between 14 and 50, were forced to line up on one side of the road as the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) soldiers opened fire on them. Nearly all of the victims were wearing civilian clothing, and many were killed with their hands tied behind their backs. Their bodies were buried where they fell. (ICTY, 2001, p.71).

On the afternoon of July 13, Bosnian Serb Army soldiers used grenades, rifles, and anti-tank weapons to kill more than 1,300 men in a warehouse in Kravica (ICTY, 2001, p.72). Most of these victims had been captured in a field in Sandici, where 200-300 men had been killed shortly before. Some of these men also had knife wounds.

The buses used to forcibly deport Bosniak women and children from Potočari stopped in the town of Tisca, where the women and children were forced to continue on foot towards Kladanj. The men who managed to board the buses where they were separated from the women were bound at the wrists with a telephone wire and systematically executed (Avdić, 2023).

Early on the morning of July 14, Bosnian Serb Army soldiers took about 1,000 prisoners to the town of Orahovac. The captives were held in the overcrowded gymnasium of the Grabavci school without food or water and were told they would be handed over to the UN as part of a prisoner exchange. Instead, the men's eyes were blindfolded, and they were taken to an execution site one kilometre from the school, where BSA troops lined up and shot them. The execution site consisted of two adjacent areas, so when one area was filled with bodies, the firing squads simply moved to the other. It was reported that General Mladić himself was present at many of these executions (ICTY, 2001, pp.77-80).

Between July 14 and 15, BSA soldiers detained another 1,000 people under similar unbearable conditions at a school in Petkovci. The prisoners were subjected to horrific physical abuse and, due to heat and dehydration, often resorted to drinking their own urine. The BSA soldiers tied the prisoners' hands behind their backs before taking them out in small groups and transporting them to a nearby dam, where they were lined up and shot. (ICTY, 2001, pp.81-83).

On July 14, around 1,200 Muslim Bosniak men and boys were transferred to an overcrowded sports hall in the village of Pilica. Many of them reportedly died of thirst because Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) soldiers did not give them any water. After being held under these inhumane conditions for two days, the BSA troops tied the men's hands before transporting them to the Branjevo Military Farm. The soldiers continued to be beat and humiliate the men before mowing them down with machine guns. The massacre of the prisoners at the Branjevo Military Farm continued into the next day. Those not killed instantly suffered long, agonising deaths from their wounds (Karçiç, 2022, p.51). After these executions were completed, the BSA troops moved on to the Pilica Cultural Centre, where they killed another 500 people with grenades and rifle fire.

Map 4*The map of Srebrenica Genocide*Source: <https://www.srebrenica-mappinggenocide.com/en/10/13/>

Between July 15 and 16, the final mass execution occurred along the Drina River, near the village of Kozluk, at the Branjevo Military Camp, where approximately 1,000 people were massacred. The dismembered bodies of the murdered Bosniaks were dumped in dams near Petkovci, Orahovac, and Glogova. However, smaller-scale executions continued, including the killing of ten Bosniak men near Nezuk on July 19 and the murder of another 150 people in Macesi on July 20 (Karçiç, 2022, p.51).

In just over a week, Bosnian Serb forces deported more than 25,000 women and children and systematically massacred over 8,000 Bosniak men.

Between July 11 and 19, the massacre of thousands of Bosniak men in Srebrenica, which had been declared a safe area by the United Nations in 1993, heightened criticism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Following the mortar attack on the Markale market in central Sarajevo on August 28, which resulted in the deaths of 43 people, NATO broke its long silence. On August 30, 1995, NATO launched "Operation Deliberate Force" against Serbian targets in Bosnia. The operation ended on September 21, 1995, during which numerous Serb targets were struck, involving around 400 aircraft and 5,000 soldiers from 15 countries (Owen, 2000, p.53).

NATO's intervention disrupted the balance in the war, leading to the Serbs being convinced to sit at the peace table. A war marked by numerous massacres, genocide, and crimes against humanity unfolded in the heart of Europe, during international indifference, lasting for 3.5 years. The war ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995.

Mass Graves Discovered After the Srebrenica Genocide

In the aftermath of the genocide, extensive efforts were made to locate and exhume the mass graves where these victims were buried. The discovery and examination of these mass graves have been crucial in uncovering the extent of the atrocities and providing evidence for war crimes prosecutions.

Since 1996, the Bosnian Federal Commission for Missing Persons along with the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) uncovered 94 different mass graves and 336 surface sites connected to the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide, containing

the skeletal remains of those killed in the genocide. (BIRN, 2019). The remains of 6,974 victims have been recovered from these graves. Even after 29 years, new mass graves continue to be uncovered. The remains of more than 1,900 potential victims have yet to be found. The bodies of genocide victims were discovered in 570 different locations throughout the country (ICMP, 2016).

Discovery and Exhumation of Mass Graves

Primary Mass Graves:

Like the executions themselves, the burials of the victims were well-planned and organised. Immediately following the genocide, Bosnian Serb forces (VRS) used industrial machinery to bury the victims' bodies in a hidden area near the execution sites. These mass graves were called primary mass graves. These graves were often hastily dug, with many victims buried in large numbers.

Secondary and Tertiary Graves:

On August 1995, The U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright presented at the close-door meeting with the UN Security Council aerial photographs of the mass graves around Srebrenica (Kempster, 1995). This led to a sophisticated effort to further cover up the crimes; the perpetrators later exhumed bodies from the primary graves and reburied them in secondary and tertiary graves. This process involved dismembering and scattering the remains across different locations to make identification more difficult. Under the command of the VRS main staff, the engineering units of the Zvornik and Bratunac brigades carried out this elaborate cover-up operation. In addition, civilian personnel and infrastructure, including private sanitation companies from both Zvornik and Bratunac, were engaged in the process (Suljagić, 2017 pp. 30-31) The goal was to obscure the true number of victims and prevent the identification of individuals.

Identification Efforts of the Genocide Victims Found in Mass Graves

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), along with local and international forensic experts, has played a crucial role in identifying the victims. DNA analysis has been the primary method used, allowing for the identification of victims even when only small fragments of remains are available.

The ICMP established a DNA laboratory in Tuzla, Bosnia, where samples from recovered remains were matched with DNA provided by surviving family members. This process has led to the identification of thousands of victims, although many remain unidentified.

Photo 4

Identification Efforts of the Genocide Victims at DNA Labs in Tuzla



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66603902>

Following the Srebrenica genocide, extensive efforts have been undertaken to identify the victims found in the mass graves. These efforts involve meticulous forensic work, including DNA testing, which is primarily conducted in advanced laboratories, such as the one in Tuzla, Bosnia. The process begins with the exhumation of the remains from the numerous mass graves scattered across the region.

The victims' skeletal remains are often fragmented due to the attempts by the perpetrators to hide their crimes by moving and reburying the bodies in secondary and tertiary graves. Despite these challenges, forensic experts worked diligently to match the bone fragments with DNA samples provided by surviving family members. This painstaking process allows for the identification of victims, even when only a portion of their remains are recovered.

Once identified, the remains are returned to the families for proper burial. Each year, on July 11, a mass burial ceremony is held at the Potočari Memorial Cemetery in Srebrenica, where newly identified victims are laid to rest. This solemn event is attended by survivors, the families of the victims, and international dignitaries, serving as both a commemoration of the lives lost and a reminder of the atrocities committed during the genocide.

Despite the passage of nearly three decades since the genocide, the identification process continues as new graves are discovered and more victims are identified. However, the process is slow and challenging due to the condition of the remains and the complexity of the DNA matching process. As of today, a significant number of victims still await identification, and the search for the missing continues, driven by the unwavering commitment to bring closure to the families and ensure that the truth of the genocide is fully recognised.

The Concealment of Genocide Crimes and the Dismemberment and Transfer of the Bodies of Murdered Bosniaks to Different Graves

The Serbian Army initially tried to conceal their crimes by burying the bodies of the Srebrenica victims in a series of primary mass graves near the execution sites. The destruction of evidence and documents following the war crimes was an integral part of the campaign to cover up and deny the truth.

The number of those killed and the number of mass graves were so large that in September and October 1995, many of the primary graves, where the murdered Bosniaks were buried, were opened by the Bosnian Serb Army. To hide the genocide and conceal the true number of victims, the bodies were dismembered and distributed into secondary, tertiary, and even more mass graves. Their goal was to hide the evidence, obscure the true number of those killed, and prevent the identification of the victims.

Photo 5*Mass Grave Investigations | Mass Crimes in Srebrenica*

Source: <https://phr.org/issues/investigating-deaths-and-mass-atrocities/investigating-mass-crimes-for-prosecutions/mass-crimes-in-former-yugoslavia-srebrenica/>

Killing an enemy soldier in combat is not a war crime. If those buried in the mass graves had indeed been soldiers killed in battle, there would have been no need for Bosnian Serb forces to execute a massive cover-up campaign. (Krstić, 2001). There is much evidence that proves that is exactly what they did in September and October 1995. In order to cover up their initial crimes of killing civilians and prisoners of war, the Bosnian Serb forces committed another crime—they attempted to relocate the bodies. They used bulldozers and other heavy machinery to exhume some of the mass gravesites and move the bodies to other locations. The Prosecution conducted a forensic analysis of the 21 mass graves that it exhumed and found that some primary and secondary sites were linked. Forensic experts analysed the soil, bullets and other materials found in the sites they exhumed and found that 12 of them were linked to each other (Krstić, 2001, para. 78). The Trial Chamber in the Krstić case found that this evidence demonstrates an extensive campaign to conceal the bodies of the men who the Bosnian Serb forces killed and buried in mass gravesites in July 1995. This cover-up attempt shows not only that the Bosnian Serb forces committed horrible crimes but also that they were well aware that what they had done was against the law.

The Funeral and Commemoration Ceremonies Held on July 11

In memory of the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre, a memorial complex was built in Potočari, Srebrenica, in 2003, and the genocide victims were buried there. The Potočari Memorial Cemetery now holds the graves of 6,959 genocide victims (Karçiç, 2022, p.51)

After the war, efforts to find the missing led to the discovery of mass graves, and the DNA tests for the victims found in these graves were conducted in a very sophisticated DNA laboratory in the city of Tuzla. Genocide victims, whose identities have been confirmed and for whom at least 75% of their skeletal remains have been recovered, are buried each year on July 11th during funeral ceremonies at the Potočari Memorial Cemetery. Every year on the same date, a large commemoration is held at the 1995 Genocide Memorial and Cemetery in Potočari, attended by the families of the Srebrenica victims, high-level participants and thousands of participants from all over the country.

Photo 6*1995 Genocide Memorial and Cemetery in Potočari*

Source: <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en>

The "March of Peace" (Marš Mira) Held in Honour of the Genocide Victims

On July 11, 1995, to escape the genocide in Srebrenica, Bosniak civilians fled along a forest path to reach the safe area of Tuzla. This route, commonly referred to as the "Road of Death," is now the site of the annual "Peace March" (Marš Mira), a traditional event led by genocide survivors in memory of those who perished during the Srebrenica genocide. The march begins on July 8th from the town of Nežuk.

Tens of thousands of Bosniaks and their families embark on this 100-kilometer journey, which lasts for three days and three nights. On July 10th, participants reach the Potočari Genocide Memorial Cemetery, where they took part in the commemorative ceremonies held there.

Photo 7*A scene from March Mira*

Source: <https://perspektif.eu/2020/07/11/mars-mira-olum-yolundan-baris-yoluna/>

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only 3,500 of 15,000 Bosniak civilians who took this forest path survived and reached the safe area. Ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian War resulted in the near-total removal of Bosniaks not only from Srebrenica but also from cities like Prijedor, Foča, Zvornik, and Višegrad. Some were forced to flee, while others were killed.

The Capture and Prosecution of the Genocide Perpetrators

The perpetrators of the Srebrenica genocide, particularly those responsible for the Srebrenica massacre, began to be captured and brought to justice in the years following the end of the Bosnian War in 1995. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established by the United Nations in 1993 to prosecute serious crimes committed during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, including the Bosnian Genocide.

Here are some key events and milestones in the capture and prosecution of those responsible:

1995-1997: The ICTY issued its first indictments against Bosnian Serb leaders, including Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, who were indicted for their roles in the Srebrenica genocide and other atrocities. However, capturing these high-profile figures took many years due to their efforts to evade justice.

1999: Slobodan Milošević, the former President of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, faced charges at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) but was not formally punished due to his death before the trial concluded. The ICTY indicted Milošević in May 1999. He faced charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide related to his role in the conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. After being ousted from power, Milošević was arrested in April 2001 and transferred to The Hague. His trial began in February 2002. He was charged with 66 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. During the trial, Milošević represented himself for a significant portion of the proceedings. The trial was one of the longest in the history of the ICTY, lasting until March 2006. On March 11, 2006, Slobodan Milošević died in his detention cell in The Hague. His death was due to a heart attack, which occurred before the trial's conclusion. Because Milošević died before the trial was completed, he was never convicted or formally punished. The trial did not result in a verdict, and his death left many charges unresolved in terms of a formal judicial determination. Although Milošević was never formally sentenced, his trial and the accusations against him had significant impacts on international criminal justice and the perception of accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The early 2000s: The ICTY and various international forces, including NATO, intensified their efforts to capture war criminals. Lower-ranking officials and soldiers involved in the genocide were apprehended more quickly, while key leaders remained at large for several more years.

2008: Radovan Karadžić, the former leader of the Bosnian Serbs, was captured in Belgrade, Serbia, after more than a decade on the run. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for the genocide in Srebrenica, crimes against humanity, and other war crimes. After being charged with war crimes by the ICTY, he was a fugitive from 1996 until July 2008. While on the run, he lived under an alias in Belgrade, where he specialised in alternative medicine and psychology at a private clinic. On July 21, 2008, he was arrested in Belgrade.

A few days after his arrest, he was brought before the Belgrade War Crimes Court and extradited to the Netherlands. Under the supervision of the ICTY, he was placed in the United Nations Detention Unit in Scheveningen, where he was charged with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was sometimes referred to by the Western media as the "Butcher of Bosnia," a nickname also given to the former General of the Army of Republika Srpska, Ratko Mladić. On March 24, 2016, he was found guilty of 10 of the 11 charges, including the genocide in Srebrenica, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and was sentenced to 40 years in prison. On July 22, 2016, he appealed his conviction. The appeal was rejected on March 20,

2019, and his sentence was increased to life imprisonment. He was extradited to The Hague to stand trial before the ICTY.

2011: Ratko Mladić, Serbian General Ratko Mladić, Commander-in-Chief of the Bosnian Serb Army, had been wanted for 16 years by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague for genocide and war crimes committed against the Bosniak people during the Bosnian War. Approximately 16 years after the massacre, he was caught and arrested in Lazarevo, northern Serbia, where he had been living as a fugitive under the false identity of "Milorad Komadic". After a one-week trial at The Hague International Criminal Court, an arrest warrant was issued for him. Mladić's life sentence was completed at the end of the appeal hearings, and his life sentence was upheld on June 8, 2021.

In a case held in the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Trbic was sentenced to 30 years in prison for the murder of nearly 1,000 Bosniak civilians on July 13, 1995. In the Srebrenica cases held in different courts, 45 Serbs have been sentenced to 699 years in prison to date.

In 2007, the UN's judicial organ, the International Court of Justice, described the events in Srebrenica as "genocide" but ruled that *the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia-Montenegro were not responsible*.

These trials marked significant milestones in international justice, highlighting the commitment to holding those responsible for genocide and other atrocities accountable, even many years after the crimes were committed.

Conclusion

The war that took place in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the 20th century and the events and activities that occurred during this war have led to the conclusion of the fundamental, essential, and important facts outlined below.

What happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 is certainly not a civil war, as some biased media outlets have claimed. The war was waged against the legitimate state of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and crimes against humanity and genocide were committed not only in Srebrenica but also against the entire Bosniak population living in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Serbia and Montenegro, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Croatia, and their false entities, as well as individuals and collaborators acting on behalf of these states.

This war, characterised by aggression and occupation against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina from all sides of the country, aimed to seize the Bosnian territory and eliminate the Bosniaks. It was conducted under extremely challenging social, economic, military, and political conditions for the Bosniaks. The Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was formed, organised, and grew under very difficult and complex conditions, while the capital, Sarajevo, was under a 3.5-year siege by Serbian forces. Until the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina reached a certain level, this war was essentially waged against unarmed, defenceless, innocent, and peaceful people by forces that were highly organised, trained, and equipped with heavy weaponry (especially from the Yugoslav People's Army of Serbia and Montenegro, part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), which were used against civilians and the civilian population.

Just as is happening today in Gaza, the United Nations, the European Union, leading Western states, NATO, and Russia—the dominant elements of the so-called international community—turned a blind eye to the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By imposing an arms and military equipment embargo on a recognised member state of the UN (the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina), they prevented this state from

exercising its right to individual and collective defence. They neither prevented nor stopped the attacks on the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the acts constituting genocide against the Bosniaks.

It must be clearly and unequivocally stated that the genocide and other crimes against humanity and violations of international law that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina were primarily committed to destroy the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to eliminate the Bosniaks, the largest ethnic group in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to create a large, ethnically cleansed Serbian state and a large, ethnically cleansed Croatian state. These crimes were carried out deliberately, with planning, organisation, and systematic execution. Throughout the 3.5-year war, crimes were committed by Serbs, as well as Croats and Montenegrins, including the mass killing of innocent civilians around approximately 600 concentration and prisoner camps, particularly in designated safe zones, the burial of victims in mass graves, the systematic sexual abuse of more than 50,000 women, and the destruction of cultural and religious heritage. These crimes are collectively referred to as the "Bosniak Genocide." The Dayton Peace Agreement, which was imposed on the genocide victims, the Bosniaks, by the United States and European states in an effort to stop the war while ignoring the genocide occurring throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, has essentially served as a punishment for the Bosniaks. Many of its provisions violate international law. By allowing the Serbs to occupy the lands where they committed the genocide, the agreement not only legitimised the genocide but also rewarded the perpetrators of this crime. It officially recognised these lands as "Republika Srpska."

On the other hand, the Dayton Peace Agreement had significant effects on the activities, functions, and effectiveness of international and national courts established after the war to prosecute crimes against humanity, violations of international law, and genocide. By reducing the genocide that occurred throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina to a micro level, focusing only on the genocide that took place in July 1995 in the UN Safe Area of Srebrenica, an injustice has been done to the entire Bosniak people. Furthermore, while states such as Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia should have been held accountable as perpetrators of genocide, the indictments focused on the idea that genocide crimes were committed by individuals. As a result, some high-ranking politicians and some military unit commanders who participated in the war were labelled as war criminals. However, states failed to enforce the decisions of the International Criminal Court regarding their capture and prosecution. The inability to fully achieve justice continues to hinder the healing process for the Bosniak people in the aftermath of the genocide. As of 2021, The International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia and courts in the Balkans have sentenced 47 people to more than 700 years in prison, plus four life sentences, for the crimes committed in Srebrenica. In 2021, in response to the Dutch Supreme Court's ruling in 2019 that the Netherlands was partly responsible for the deaths of 350 men whom Dutch peacekeepers turned over to Mladić and his henchmen, the Dutch government began efforts to prepare compensation settlements for their family members.

Furthermore, finally, on 23 May 2024, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the *Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide, Designating an International Day of Reflection and Commemoration*. The draft resolution, presented by Germany and Rwanda and co-sponsored by Turkey along with more than 40 other countries, was adopted with 84 "yes" votes in the 193-member UN General Assembly. The resolution received 68 "abstentions" and 19 "no" votes. The resolution condemned the denial of the Srebrenica Genocide, as well as the glorification of crimes against humanity, genocide, and war criminals. The importance of continuing efforts to identify the genocide victims and recover their remains was emphasised in the resolution, which also called for the prosecution of those responsible for the Srebrenica Genocide who have not yet been tried.



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Author Details **Alptekin Tartıcı (Dr.)**

¹ Turkish National Defense University, Army War Institute, Faculty of Command and Staff Training, İstanbul, Türkiye

 0000-0002-2864-9528  alptekintartici@gmail.com

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