

ETHNIC CLEANSING IN BOSNIA

And former Yugoslavia 1991-1995



Croats: mostly Catholic
Serbs: mostly Serb Orthodox
Bosniaks: mostly Sunni Muslim

Josip Broz Tito

Slobodan Milosevic

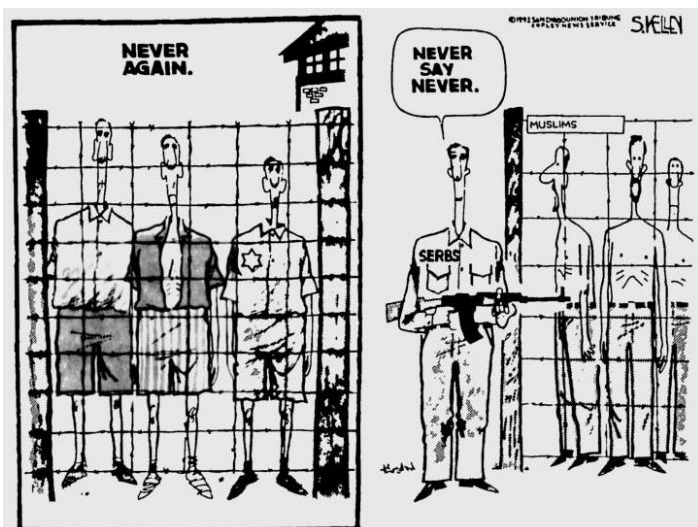
Ethnic Cleansing

Rape Camps

Srebrenica Massacre

Mass Graves

International Criminal Tribunal for
the Former Yugoslavia



Bosnian Genocide

In April 1992, the government of the Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia. Over the next several years, Bosnian Serb forces, with the backing of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army, targeted both Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Croatian civilians for atrocious crimes resulting in the deaths of some 100,000 people (80 percent Bosniak) by 1995. It was the worst act of genocide [in Europe] since the Nazi regime's destruction of some 6 million European Jews during World War II.

Background

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Balkan states of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia became part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. After the death of longtime Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in 1980, growing nationalism among the different Yugoslav republics threatened to split their union apart. This process intensified after the mid-1980s with the rise of the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, who helped foment discontent between Serbians in Bosnia and Croatia and their Croatian, Bosniak and Albanian neighbors. In 1991, Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia declared their independence; during the war in Croatia that followed, the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army supported Serbian separatists there in their brutal clashes with Croatian forces.

In Bosnia, Muslims represented the largest single population group by 1971. More Serbs and Croats emigrated over the next two decades, and in a 1991 census Bosnia's population of some 4 million was 44 percent Bosniak, 31 percent Serb, and 17 percent Croatian. Elections held in late 1990 resulted in a coalition government split between parties representing the three ethnicities (in rough proportion to their populations) and led by the Bosniak Alija Izetbegovic. As tensions built inside and outside the country, the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his Serbian Democratic Party withdrew from government and set up their own "Serbian National Assembly." On March 3, 1992, after a referendum vote (which Karadzic's party blocked in many Serb-populated areas), President Izetbegovic proclaimed Bosnia's independence.

Struggle for Control in Bosnia

Far from seeking independence for Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs wanted to be part of a dominant Serbian state in the Balkans--the "Greater Serbia" that Serbian separatists had long envisioned. In early May 1992, two days after the United States and the European Community (precursor to the European Union) recognized Bosnia's independence, Bosnian Serb forces with the backing of Milosevic and the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army launched their offensive with a bombardment of Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo. They attacked Bosniak-dominated town in eastern Bosnia, including Zvornik, Foca, and Visegrad, forcibly expelling Bosniak civilians from the region in a brutal process that later was identified as "ethnic cleansing." (Ethnic cleansing differs from genocide in that its primary goal is the expulsion of a group of people from a geographical area and not the actual physical destruction of that group, even though the same methods--including murder, rape, torture and forcible displacement--may be used.)

Though Bosnian government forces tried to defend the territory, sometimes with the help of the Croatian army, Bosnian Serb forces were in control of nearly three-quarters of the country by the end of 1993, and Karadzic's party had set up their own Republika Srpska in the east. Most of the Bosnian Croats had left the country, while a significant Bosniak population remained only in smaller towns. Several peace proposals between a Croatian-Bosniak federation and Bosnian Serbs failed when the Serbs refused to give up any territory. The United Nations (U.N.) refused to intervene in the conflict in Bosnia, but a campaign spearheaded by its High Commissioner for Refugees provided humanitarian aid to its many displaced, malnourished and injured victims.

Attack on Srebrenica: July 1995

By the summer of 1995, three towns in eastern Bosnia--Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde--remained under control of the Bosnian government. The U.N. had declared these enclaves "safe havens" in 1993, to be disarmed and protected by international peacekeeping forces. On July 11, however, Bosnian Serb forces advanced on Srebrenica, overwhelming a battalion of Dutch peacekeeping forces stationed there. Serbian forces subsequently separated the Bosniak civilians at Srebrenica, putting the women and girls on buses and sending them to Bosnian-held territory. Some of the women were raped or sexually assaulted, while the men and boys who remained behind were killed immediately or bussed to mass killing sites. Estimates of Bosniaks killed by Serb forces at Srebrenica range from around 7,000 to more than 8,000.

After Bosnian Serb forces captured Zepa that same month and exploded a bomb in a crowded Sarajevo market, the international community began to respond more forcefully to the ongoing conflict and its ever-growing civilian death toll. In August 1995, after the Serbs refused to comply with a U.N. ultimatum, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) joined efforts with Bosnian and Croatian forces for three weeks of bombing Bosnian Serb positions and a ground offensive. With Serbia's economy crippled by U.N. trade sanctions and its military forces under assault in Bosnia after three years of warfare, Milosevic agreed to enter negotiations that October. The U.S.-sponsored peace talks in Dayton, Ohio in November 1995 (which included Izetbegovic, Milosevic and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman) resulted in the creation of a federalized Bosnia divided between a Croat-Bosniak federation and a Serb republic.

International Response

Though the international community did little to prevent the systematic atrocities committed against Bosniaks and Croats in Bosnia while they were occurring, it did actively seek justice against those who committed them. In May 1993, the U.N. Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague, Netherlands. It was the first international tribunal since the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-46 and the first to prosecute genocide, among other war crimes. Radovan Karadzic and the Bosnian Serb military commander, General Ratko Mladic, were among those indicted by the ICTY for genocide and other crimes against humanity.

Over the better part of the next two decades, the ICTY charged more than 160 individuals of crimes committed during conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Brought before the tribunal in 2002 on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, Slobodan Milosevic served as his own defense lawyer; his poor health led to long delays in the trial until he was found dead in his prison cell in 2006. In 2007, the International Court of Justice issued its ruling in a historic civil lawsuit brought by Bosnia against Serbia. Though the court called the massacre at Srebrenica genocide and said that Serbia "could and should" have prevented it and punished those who committed it, it stopped short of declaring Serbia guilty of the genocide itself.

<http://www.history.com/topics/bosnian-genocide>

Slobodan Milosevic



GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA AND FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

From 1991 through 1995, between 100,000 and 200,000 people died as a result of ethnic and religious-based mass-murder. Most victims were Bosnian Muslims, followed by Croatian Catholics. Most perpetrators were Serbian Orthodox Christians, although at different times Serbs were victims as well, and all groups commit atrocities against each other at some point during the conflict.

TIMELINE

Ancient Grudges: Serbs were enemies with Croats and Bosnians at various times since the Middle Ages, over religious and ethnic differences.

1918: Kingdom of Yugoslavia is created, combining **Serbia** with the territories of **Croatia, Bosnia,** and **Slovenia** (from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire). This achieved the Serb dream of a “**Greater Serbia**” and was seen by some as an Allied reward to Serbia following World War I. Non-Serbs often resented what they viewed as Serb domination.

1941-1945: Axis Powers controlled Yugoslavia during WWII. Croatian fascists, put in control of a puppet government, collaborated with the Nazis and commit crimes against Serbs and political enemies. Communist Partisans, mostly Serb, fought to remake Yugoslavia, and commit crimes of their own.

1945-1991: Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. One-party communist state headed by Josip Broz **Tito** (Named President For Life), a Croat whose strict rule bound the different groups together by force. Despite this, disparate groups suspicious of each other. Non-Serbs generally favor greater regional autonomy.

1980: Death of Tito.

1980s: Ever increasing ethnic tensions.

1989: Opening of Berlin Wall; end of the Cold War. Communist governments collapse across Eastern Europe.

1991: Dissolution of the Soviet Union. Increasing pressure in Yugoslavia to end communist party rule; independence movements in non-Serb territories gain momentum.

1991: Slovenia declares independence from Yugoslavia. Yugo government rejects the secession but little is done militarily.

1991: Croatia declares independence from Yugoslavia. Yugoslav military (dominated by Serbs) and Serb militias occupy Croatia to prevent independence; war ensues. Much of Croatia is overrun by Serb forces. **Crimes against humanity: Ethnic cleansing** of Croats and Bosniaks from areas with significant Serb populations. Some reprisals and ethnic cleansing against Bosniaks and Serbs is also perpetrated by Croatian fighters.

1992: Bosnia declares independence. Yugoslav military and Serb militias shift focus to this ethnically and religiously diverse area. Bosniaks become the primary target of Serb ethnic cleansing. Chaos as all ethnic / religious groups fight each other for territory.

1992-1995: GENOCIDE. Ethnic cleansing increasingly means murder. Serb militias commit most of the atrocities in an effort to retain “Greater Serbia” in Bosnian and Croatian territories. Croat-Bosniak alliance against the Serbs.

1995: CROAT COUNTER-OFFENSIVE. Serb fighters are pushed from much of Croatia and parts of Bosnia.

1995 U.S. NATO BOMBING CAMPAIGN AGAINST SERBIA. Serb militias and Yugoslav targets are bombed to force an end to ethnic cleansing. The conflict draws to a close. Independence is achieved by Bosnia and Croatia; U.S. and UN troops remain in Bosnia today as peacekeepers.