

A photograph of a person sitting in a field of white headstones, likely a cemetery. The person is wearing a white headscarf and a light-colored top. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

INFO PACK

Srebrenica:

An Account of the Bosnian Genocide

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Srebrenica: An Account of the Bosnian Genocide

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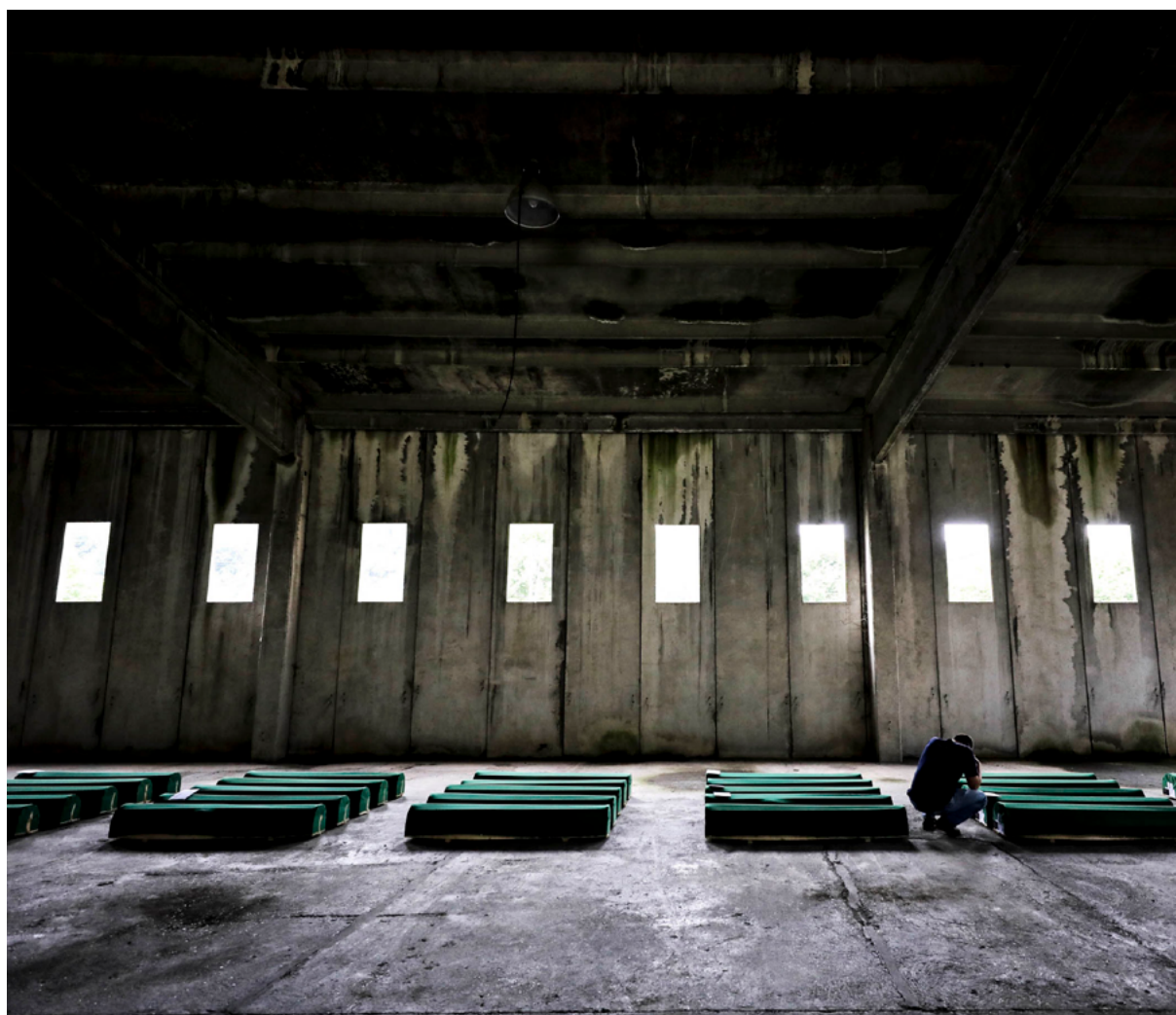
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Summary

The takeover of the UN safe zone of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces in July of 1995 was followed by the killing of a large number of Bosnian Muslim civilians, in what has been characterised as the worst ethnic cleansing campaign in Europe since World War II. The fall of Srebrenica and its environs to Bosnian Serb forces in 1995 made a mockery of the international community's professed commitment to safeguarding regions it had declared as safe zones and placed under UN protection in 1993. Abuses carried out by Bosnian

Serb forces in the supposed safe areas included abuses against women, children and the elderly and the deliberate mass killings of men and boys. This info pack aims to compile existing research on Srebrenica and aggregate relevant data on the casualties of the 1992-95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This info-pack explores: (i) the historical background of the conflict in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, (ii) the offensive against the UN-designated 'Safe Area' of Srebrenica and (iii), introducing the systemic and intentional character of violence, as well as institutions of justice.



A relative of a Srebrenica victim prays around the coffins of 35 Srebrenica victims at the Potocari Monument Cemetery ahead of the 23rd anniversary of Srebrenica massacre in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina on July 10, 2018. (Samir Yordamović - AA)

Historical background

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are bordered to the north and south-west by Croatia, by Serbia on the east, on the southeast by Montenegro, and the southwest by the Adriatic Sea along a narrow extension of the country.

The region has often felt the influences of more powerful regional actors that have contended for control over it, and these influences shaped BiH's characteristically deep ethnic and religious mix. Islam, Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are all present, with the three religious traditions commonly corresponding to three major ethnic groups; namely Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, respectively. The role of religion as a mode of identity gained importance with the dissolution of the communist regime, the revival of nationalism in the wake of Yugoslav disintegration, and the violence of the war.

The Bosnian war began in the aftermath of the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which existed from 1945 until 1990. During this half-century, Yugoslavia was made up of six republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Due to BiH's central geographic position within the Yugoslavian federation, the post-war People's Republic of BiH became one of the constituent republics of the Republic of Yugoslavia. Life in BiH underwent political, economic, and social changes that were imposed on the whole of Yugoslavia fuelled in part by Josip Broz Tito's leadership. While living under a socialist system, the country witnessed the ascension of a strong Bosnian political elite in the 1960s-70s, as they aimed to reinforce and protect the sovereignty of BiH. Their struggles proved key in establishing a political foothold during the turbulent period following Tito's death in 1980, considered today as the early steps towards Bosnian independence.

Map of BiH



Source: University of Texas Library

In 1990, multiparty elections were held throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. When the second round of elections was held on 25 November 1990, a coalition of three ethnically-based parties gained seats in rough proportion to their populations. A tripartite government was led by the Bosniak politician Alija Izetbegovic in a joint presidency. A significant split soon developed on the issue of whether to stay within the Yugoslav federation, which was overwhelmingly favoured among Serbs, or seek independence, which was overwhelmingly supported by Bosniaks and Croats. Bosnian Serbs were concerned that the Muslim-Croat dominance in the region would be directed against their interests, and consequently, these fears set the stage for war. Growing domestic and inter-

national tensions in BiH made cooperation with the Serb Democratic Party, led by Radovan Karadzic, increasingly complex within the alliance.

In 1991, numerous self-styled 'Serb Autonomous Regions' were declared in BiH with significant Serb populations. After the disintegration of the Yugoslav state in 1991, the majority of the population of BiH voted for independence in a 1992 referendum, which Bosnian Serbs were encouraged to boycott. The referendum for "a sovereign and independent Bosnia- Herzegovina, a state of equal citizens and nations of Muslims, Serbs, and Croats and others who live in it" was approved by a 99.5 per cent affirmative vote. The Republic of BiH was formally recognised by the majority of European countries and the United States in April 1992. On 7 April 1992, after the declaration of independence, Bosnian Serb forces, supported by the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), attacked the newly established Republic of BiH on the basis of seeking to unify and secure what they considered to be Serb territory.

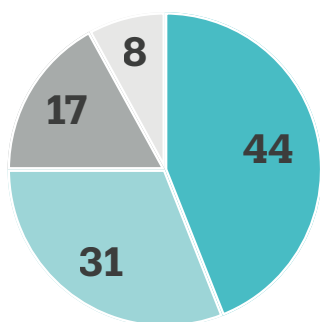
While the initial causes of the war continue to be debated, significant Serb offensives began in March 1992 in Eastern and Northern Bosnia. Serb forces later gained control over the airport in Sarajevo, which further limited the in-

ternational humanitarian organisations' ability to deliver aid.

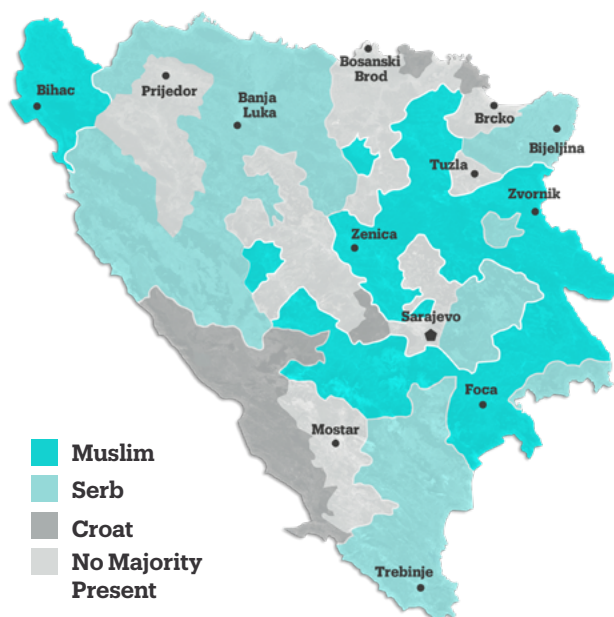
War soon consumed the region, as ethnic nationalists within BiH, with the support of Serbia and Croatia in some cases, tried to take control of territories they claimed as their own. As part of its ethnic cleansing campaign, Serb forces used tactics such as systematic persecution involving widespread torture, murder, beatings, rape, forced displacement, confiscation and destruction of property, and the destruction of religious and cultural objects such as mosques and Catholic churches. Of the three groups, Muslims suffered the most, [accounting for 70 per cent](#) of the total civilian deaths; while Serbs accounted for [20 per cent](#), according to recent estimates.

The deteriorating conditions in BiH led the UN Security Council to pass [Resolution 757 \(1992\)](#) on 30 May 1992, which imposed severe sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In response to these sanctions, on 6 June, an agreement was reached between the Serbian authorities and the UN, which allowed for UNPROFOR to take control of Sarajevo's airport and control of the security zone that surrounded it.

Ethnic Minorities- Based on The Data From The Preliminary 1991 Census



Population Structure
Data from preliminary 1991 census



Struggle for Srebrenica



Source: Remembering Srebrenica

At the beginning of 1992, Bosnian Serb forces targeted Srebrenica, a city located less than ten miles from the Drina River, Serbia's border with BiH. The campaign was aimed at seizing control of a block of territory in eastern BiH. [According to the 1990 Yugoslav census](#), approximately 37,000 people — 72.5 per cent Bosniak-Muslim and 25.5 per cent Serb — lived in the Srebrenica municipality. Serb forces besieged the town at the start of 1992, preventing UN aid convoys from reaching it.

In April of 1992, following the European Community's recognition of Bosnian independence, Serb forces besieged Srebrenica, while the mostly Muslim inhabitants of the town were defended by Bosnian government forces, along with a small United Nations peacekeeping contingent. Most of the non-Serb men were put into detention centres or were indiscriminately murdered. According to the [Bosnian Book of the Dead](#)—a casualty report published in 2007 by the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo—the Bosnian War (1992-1995) claimed [350,000 recorded](#) casualties including 97,207 deaths, 40% of whom were civilians. Most of the women, children and elderly who were not able to escape the region were forcibly expelled.

Srebrenica initially came under the control of the Bosnian

Serb forces, however, units belonging to the Bosnian Territorial Defence Force under the leadership of Naser Orić recaptured the city a few weeks later. Despite being severely outgunned, Orić's troops resisted Bosnian Serb assaults until early 1993, when Bosnian Serb forces launched a major offensive in eastern Bosnia. This assault reduced the Srebrenica municipality from approximately fourteen square kilometres to eight square kilometres.

Thousands of mostly Muslim refugees from other areas of eastern Bosnia flocked to places like Cepa, Gorazde and Srebrenica, where territorial defence units had succeeded in fending off Bosnian Serb attacks. As a result of this sudden demographic shift, Srebrenica's population swelled to an estimated 55,000 to 60,000 and remained under siege for more than three years. Residents were reported to be on the verge of starvation, and the humanitarian crisis in the area became dire.

Former French general Philippe Morillon, commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), visited Srebrenica in March 1993. By then, the town was overcrowded, and living conditions were difficult. Morillon's visit was the first by an international figure for several months. His visit aimed to publicly convey his condemnations of the Bosnian Serbs' siege and continued attacks against the enclave.

According to Morillon's testimony, there was almost no running water as Serb forces had destroyed the region's water supplies. Food, medicine and other essentials for survival were extremely scarce. When Morillon was preparing to leave, the residents of Srebrenica prevented his exit. They refused to let him pass, forcing him to stay in the region until the UN concretely addressed their immediate needs. Morillon told the panicked residents of Srebrenica at a public gathering that ["the town was under the protection of the UN and that he would never abandon them."](#)

On 16 April 1993, [the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 819](#) declaring Srebrenica a 'safe area', which necessitated that "all parties treat Srebrenica and its surround-

ings as a safe area which should be free from any armed attack or any other hostile act". The Security Council resolutions establishing the six 'safe areas' provided for the placement of UN troops within the areas in question but left unclear whether force could be used to protect the enclaves and their population from attack or whether UN troops could use force only for self-defence. A subsequent resolution stated that UNPROFOR was mandated to "deter attacks against the safe areas."

Ethnic cleansing by Serb forces continued throughout the region, even after safe areas were declared. Srebrenica was supposed to be protected by a Dutch battalion (DUTCHBAT), small and lightly armed group of peacekeepers when Bosnian Serb forces overran it in July of 1995.

Meanwhile, Bosnian Serb forces proclaimed that they would only end their attacks on Srebrenica if residents relinquished their weapons to the UN, effectively turning the enclave into a de-militarised zone. UN troops were al-

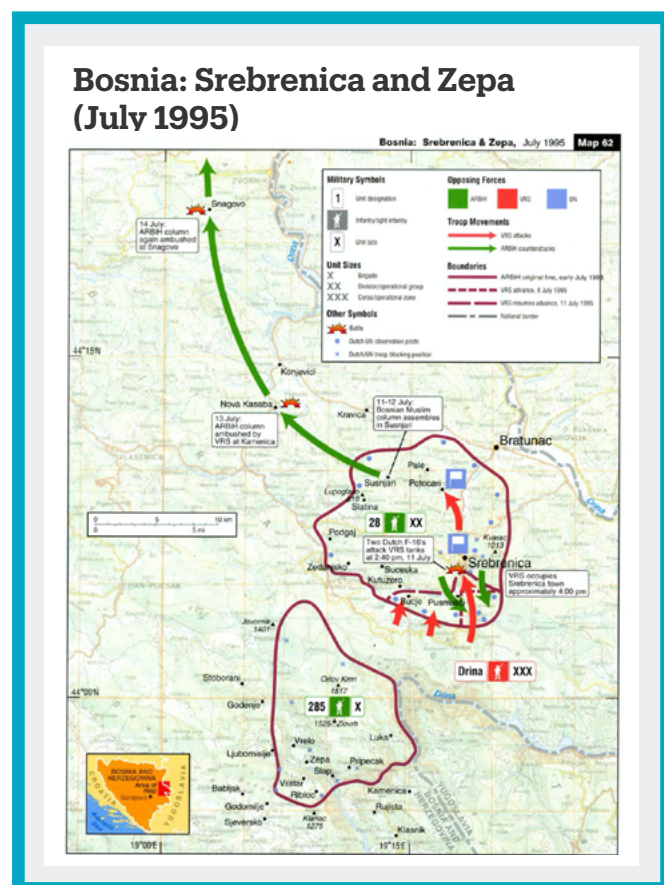
lowed into the town only after most of the weapons belonging to Bosnian forces were placed under UN control. Despite Bosnian Serb objections, Srebrenica's defenders retained some of their light weapons. Bosnian Serb forces would later justify their final offensive on the enclave by claiming that these weapons were being used against them.

By early March 1995, access for UN convoys to the region was increasingly restricted by Bosnian Serb forces so that only one aid convoy per month was being allowed to enter the 'safe area' in order to feed approximately 39,000 civilians. As fewer aid convoys were making it through to the enclave, the situation deteriorated into lawless violence, creating enormous opportunity for black market profiteering. Amid terror used against residents by Bosnian Serb forces, thousands of Muslims fled Srebrenica to the nearby village of Potocari, where a contingent of approximately 200 Dutch peacekeepers was stationed. Bosnian Serb forces launched a full-scale offensive on Srebrenica at 3:15 A.M. on 6 July, under the command of Ratko

Mladic. This was one of the first incidents invoking widespread chaos and panic because there was no safe place for Srebrenica's civilians to retreat. On July 7 and 8, tensions between the Bosnian army and the DUTCHBAT rose because the Dutch troops refused several requests from the Bosnian government to protect their troops.

On the night of 11 July, the UN used the air support it had at its disposal after Bosnian Serb forces overran the UN compound. Many displaced people later reported to the [Human Rights Watch/Helsinki representatives](#) that Bosnian Serb forces stripped off the clothes from the Dutch troops and wore the UN uniforms and helmets, posing as UN troops while walking among the displaced in Potocari. More than [10,000 Bosniak Muslim men](#) set off from Srebrenica town through dense forest in an attempt to reach safety. The next morning, thousands of Bosniak men surrendered to Bosnian Serb forces under false promises of security. In the subsequent slaughter, more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were murdered.

T.N., (full name is kept anonymous) a sixty-three-year-old refugee from eastern Bosnia who had been living in Srebrenica, [recounted the following](#):



Source: University of Texas Library

"At one point during all this, a few Serbian soldiers stopped a UNPROFOR vehicle and pulled out two UNPROFOR soldiers. The UNPROFOR men were outraged. The Serbs were making them take off their clothes at gunpoint. One UN man got really mad, took his uniform off and threw it on the ground. Then the Serbs took off in their vehicle."

On 12 July, Serb forces marched into the UN compound, pushing back the UN forces and separating about 2,000 men who were to be killed. The women and children were

taken by buses and trucks to government-held territory. Dressed in UN uniforms and driving UN vehicles, Bosnian Serb forces shot down about 6,000 Muslim men and boys in the woods. By 19 July, between 7,000 and 8,000 men, the majority of whom were Bosnian Muslims, had been killed. Over the next few months, "the perpetrators returned to hide the evidence of their crimes: they dug up the remains, transported and reburied them in numerous secondary graves scattered across Eastern Bosnia."

Srebrenica as an Act of Genocide

In the spring of 1995, Bosnian Serb forces planned to attack Srebrenica definitively. President of Republika Srpska Radovan Karadzic [issued a directive](#) to Bosnian Serb forces to "complete the physical separation of Srebrenica from Zepa as soon as possible, preventing even communication between individuals in the two enclaves. 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."

Bosnian Serb forces quickly overran Srebrenica. Forensic evidence suggests that the majority of the victims were killed in mass executions rather than combat. Bosnian-Serb forces first expelled women and children from Srebrenica, while they rounded up military-age males. The Tribunal has determined that over several days, Bosnian Serb forces executed some [8,000 people](#). According to an investigation authorised by the Dutch government: "in some places, the Muslims were slaughtered like beasts."

In May 1993, the UN established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and issued indictments against 19 individuals for war crimes against Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. The UN General Assembly, the UN Commission on Human Rights, the World Conference on Human Rights, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia have all considered the atrocities in BiH as genocide. To reach this verdict, the chamber had to admit that the crimes were

committed with the specific intent set down in Article 4(2) of the ICTY Statute, which follows the definition in the Genocide Convention. Before proceeding to the court of law, it is necessary to examine the legal definition of the word 'genocide' in the document, which defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy an ethnical, national, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) killing members of the certain group;
- (b) causing severe bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately perpetrating on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The [chamber further found](#) that "by killing all the military-aged men, the Bosnian Serb forces effectively destroyed the community of the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica as such and eliminated all likelihood that it could ever re-establish itself on that territory." The [chamber exposed](#) specific intent to destroy part of the Bosnian Muslim group because "the Bosnian Serb forces knew, by the time

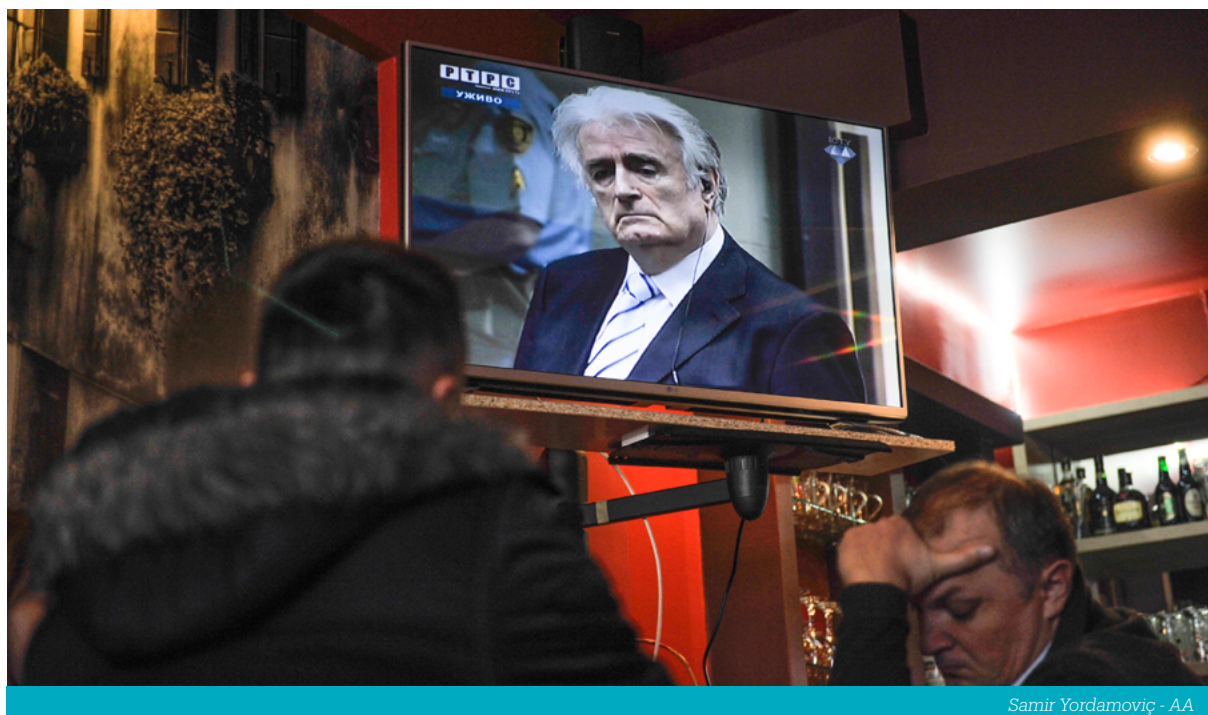
they decided to kill all of the military-aged men, that the combination of those killings with the forcible transfer of the women, children, and elderly would inevitably result in the physical disappearance of the Bosnian Muslim population at Srebrenica.” The chamber thus concluded that these investigations and observations brought the Serb military actions within the meaning of Article 4 of the Statute: Genocide had indeed taken place.

The Tribunal has completed a number of trials and appeals against more than 20 individuals for their involvement in the Srebrenica massacre. Those convicted include general Radislav Krstic, commander of the Republika Srpska Army Drina Corps, Drazen Erdemovic, a soldier with the 10th Sabotage Detachment, and Dragan Obrenovic who is the deputy commander of the Serbian Zvornik Brigade. Erdemovic and Obrenovic acknowledged their participation in the Srebrenica killings. The facts about Srebrenica contained in the judgements against Krstic, Erdemovic and Obrenovic have been established beyond a reasonable doubt.

The Srebrenica atrocities are also part of the indictments against Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. In 2001 Milosevic was arrested and charged with crimes against humanity and for committing an act of genocide. He later died in prison in 2006 before

his trial was concluded. According to ICTY indictments of Karadzic and Mladic, on 20 to 21 July 1995 Serb forces urged Bosniak men who had fled Srebrenica to surrender and assured them safety. Approximately [350 men acknowledged these requests and surrendered](#). Bosnian Serb soldiers then took around 150 of them, commanded them to dig their graves and immediately executed them. [Karadzic](#) later went into hiding in 1997, and he spent more than a decade at large before he was arrested in July 2008. In March 2016 he was found guilty of committing an act of genocide in the Srebrenica massacre and was sentenced to 40 years imprisonment.

After Milosevic's arrest in 2001, Mladic disappeared and later was arrested by Serbian authorities in 2011. He was placed on trial by the ICTY the following year and in November 2017 he was found guilty of war crimes and genocide and was sentenced to life in prison. The Trial Chamber further pointed out that the intent of Serb commanders to murder the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica can also be detected in the fact that they destroyed Bosnian Muslim homes and religious sites in the town. In short, the evidence confirmed that Serb forces intended to kill the Bosnian Muslim men of military age in order to destroy the population of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica.



Samir Yordamovic - AA

The Dayton Peace Agreement

Several peace proposals during the war failed, mainly because the Bosnian Serbs refused to concede any territory since they had taken control of approximately 70 per cent of the land by 1994. In February 1994, NATO used military force for the first time in the conflict by shooting down four Bosnian Serb aircraft that were violating the UN-imposed no-fly zone. In May 1995, NATO conducted a series of airstrikes against the Bosnian Serb stronghold of Pale. Following the Srebrenica massacre, the tide began to turn against the Serb forces, as Croat and Bosniak forces recaptured some of the Serb-held territories in Bosnia. It was the first defeat for Serbian forces in four years, and it shifted the balance of power on the ground. Combined with a large-scale Bosniak-Croat land attack, this led Bosnian Serb forces to agree to U.S.-sponsored peace talks. Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, Serbian President Milosevic, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, and representatives from the United States, France, Germany, Italy,

Russia, United Kingdom and the European Union (E.U.) met in Dayton, Ohio.

The resulting Dayton Accords designated a federalised BiH in which 51 per cent of the land would compose a Croat-Bosniak federation and 49 per cent a Serb republic. The General Framework Agreement was signed in Paris on 14 December 1995 by the parties and by witnesses including President Clinton, British Prime Minister John Major, French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.



Gravestones are seen at the Potocari Monument Cemetery in Potocari village of Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina on February 15, 2020. (Samir Jordamovic - AA)

January 1993 - Muslim guerrilla commander Naser Oric more than doubles the size of Muslim territory in eastern Bosnia.

March 1993 - The Bosnian Serb Army, backed by troops and weapons from neighbouring Serbia, threatens to seize Srebrenica. 60,000 people have flooded into Srebrenica under dire conditions.

16 April 1993 - The UN Security Council passes Resolution 819, declaring that the UNSC is deeply alarmed" with the "rapid deterioration of the situation" in Srebrenica.

7 January 1993 - The Bosnian Serb Army, backed by troops and weapons from neighbouring Serbia, threatens to seize Srebrenica. 60,000 people have flooded into Srebrenica under dire conditions.

12 March 1993 - French General Philippe Morillon, the UN Commander in Bosnia, arrives in the town. He declares the refugees to be "under the protection of the UN".

22 May 1995 - The UN commander in Bosnia, General Bertrand Janvier, urges the Security Council either to protect the Srebrenica area by increasing troops or by withdrawing the vulnerable peacekeepers in order to allow for decisive airstrikes to break the Serb paramilitary forces'.

January 1995 - A UN Dutch battalion arrives in the town of Srebrenica.

July 1995 - Shelling erupts in the southern part of Srebrenica.

June 1995 - From April through June, Serbian forces tighten their stranglehold, cutting off convoys to the Safe Area.

May 1995 - Serbian forces hold 350 Dutch Peacekeepers hostage around Sarajevo in response to NATO airstrikes.

5 July 1995 - Artillery strikes approach southern Srebrenica.

9 July 1995 - Muslim defenders in Srebrenica unsuccessfully appeal for the return of their surrendered weaponry from international peacekeepers amid the Serbian offensive. Refugees flee from the advancing Serbs in the south. Bosnian Serb forces intensify the attacks, as the road to Srebrenica is now open. The Serbs take thirty Dutch peacekeepers hostage.

8 July 1995 - Serb forces take over the Bosnian defender's observation post. They instructed men and women of Srebrenica to surrender their weapons and leave.

10 July 1995 - Colonel Karremans, commander of DUTCHBAT troops in Srebrenica, sends his third request for military support from the United Nations. Serbian forces shell Dutch positions. The request for air support was rejected by UN Commander General Janvier. Serbian forces are in the mountainous region over the town centre. Karremans again requests air support, after which general Janvier finally agrees to provide air support.

11 July 1995 - More than 20,000 refugees - women, children, sick and elderly - flee for the main Dutch base at Potocari, three miles away. Dutch F-16 fighters launch airstrikes on Serbian forces; Serb forces threatened to kill the Dutch hostages and shell refugees. The NATO airstrikes are abandoned. Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladic enters Srebrenica to claim the town for the Bosnian Serbs. He warns the Dutch commander that the city's inhabitants must turn over any weapons or risk death. Later, Serb forces arrive in Potocari.

16 July 1995 - Negotiations between the UN and Bosnian Serbs forces resulted in the Dutch force being permitted to leave the area. Weapons, medical supplies and food are left behind. Colonel Karremans calls the attack on Srebrenica "an excellently planned military operation." He makes no mention of the atrocities.

13 July 1995 - Hundreds of men are captured as they try to flee through the mountains. In the next several days, further reports of mass murders by Bosnian Serb forces would be reported by the survivors who were able to make their way out of Srebrenica.

12 July 1995 - Tens of thousands of Muslim women and children are deported out of Srebrenica. Bosnian Serb forces separate the men and boys from the others.

Between 12 July and 16 July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces killed over 8,000 Bosniak Muslim.

