

A Very Odd and Unexpected Silence Regarding the “Srebrenica Genocide”

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Our associate Andy Wilcoxson has made mincemeat of the claim that Serbian forces captured 7,000 to 8,000 Muslim prisoners in the aftermath of the takeover of Srebrenica on July 11, 1995, which is what they must have done to be able to execute that many as charged. He demonstrates that viewed in the light most favorable to the Prosecution, evidence put before the Hague Tribunal supports the conclusion that at most about 3,500 Muslims were captured by Serbian forces. That caps the number of illegal executions that could have taken place at a level significantly below the official Srebrenica narrative claim.

A closely related but very important issue is the reticence of post-July 11 retrospective Muslim reports about Srebrenica mass prisoner executions and genocide. This very important topic is simply missing: While there are some references to Serbian crimes and prisoner executions, contrary to expectations the recently committed “genocide” is not accorded particular prominence in these reports.

It is striking that Western governments and their associated and dependent institutions got onto the Srebrenica genocide story within days of the alleged event in mid-July 1995, while Bosnian Moslems, whom one would have expected to be the first to raise the outcry, trailed far behind in their response. (There is no record, for instance, of Izetbegović raising the issue of Srebrenica genocide during the Dayton peace conference in November 1995, four months after the event, when he already should have had some serious evidence in his possession that could have been used for tactical advantage.) General “genocide talk” on the Bosnian Muslim side started in 1992, as soon as the war began and before any significant numbers of people were killed on any side. But that obviously was a propaganda tactic designed to keep the Serbs off balance and on the defensive. It is clearly distinguishable from specific, Srebrenica-related genocide complaints which could have arisen only after July 11, 1995. An unnaturally long time elapsed after the event before such complaints picked up traction on the Bosnian Muslim side.

We will briefly review some of the post-July 11, 1995 reports on Srebrenica derived from Moslem sources.[1]

1. Major Ramiz Bećirović was the commander of the 28th Division column which conducted the breakthrough from Srebrenica to Tuzla. His debriefing statement was given in Tuzla to the ARBiH Second Corps Security Department on 11 August 1995.

The closest that Major Bećirović comes to using the word “genocide” is on p. 2: “Nijaz MASIC and N. ALIC worked on gathering information on the genocide in Bratunac and Srebrenica,

but I don't know what happened to the documentation that they compiled." Contextually the reference is to the overall data gathering process about crimes committed against Muslims from the beginning of the war, not specifically to Srebrenica-related events in the second half of July of 1995.

Bećirović does not try to conceal the fact that Srebrenica "demilitarization" was a sham: "After we got those two agreements on the demilitarisation of Srebrenica, we had to disarm completely. We barely managed to secure some older weapons in disrepair to hand over to UNPROFOR while the troops hid the rest at their homes. It was a custom for the troops to keep their weapons at their homes and only exceptionally were they handed out to other troops at the line. It was never permitted to have weapons grouped in one place." (Page 5) Elaborate ruses were employed to mask the fact that Muslim forces within the enclave were armed:

"On the occasion of our breakthrough, the heavy weapons remained, while we took infantry weapons with us . The ammunition for infantry weapons was immediately destroyed because UNPROFOR told us they had no technical conditions for safeguarding them, while other ammunition was damaged because of the poor conditions under which it was kept. We always had to have several troops on the line who had to hide because UNPROFOR would take them into custody and confiscate their weapons. When the Dutch came, they filmed our troops with cameras to prove to us that we had weapons, so we had problems proving that we had no weapons." (Page 5) Describing "the transfer of materiel and technical equipment" that was carried out in cooperation with the ARBiH General Staff, Bećirović elaborates that "[A]s part of this organised transfer, we got some 20 Zolja [hand-held rocket launchers], a small quantity of hand-grenades and a small quantity of ammunition for 7.62 rifles... later, at our request, materiel and technical equipment was brought in by helicopter." (Page 5)

Bećirović's description of his last mission from Muslim-controlled territory to the Srebrenica enclave in June 1995 is highly indicative: "According to our account, around 1,300 to 1,400 families of fallen soldiers were to receive 50 German marks each, and the parents of the fallen victims were paid out *Bairam* gifts in the amount of 50 German marks. About 200 families were supposed to be paid 50 German marks each in the 280th Brigade, so that around 1,100 families were paid, although I don't know how many parents received this compensation." (Page 8) He then adds: "I know that a total of some 260,000 German marks were distributed, since there were around 1,300 to 1,400 families." (Page 9)

The number of families in Srebrenica slated to receive "martyrs' monetary awards" matches almost exactly the number of BiH army soldiers listed as killed in action (1,333) in Naser Orić's book published before the town fell. Since its publication and time reference (April 1992 - September 1994) predates the July 1995 genocide, it is reasonable to ask where these admitted battle casualties were buried and what assurance there is that their remains are not interred at the genocide victims' Memorial in Potočari.

On page 15 of his debriefing Bećirović confirms that the retreating 28th Division column engaged in combat all along the way. "Fire was opened on the moving column" he says and he received reports "that there were dead and wounded."

While it may be argued that Bećirović was involved with the retreating column and was not in a position to directly observe possible prisoner executions elsewhere, by 11 August he

could have learned enough about it from other refugees in Tuzla to be able to comment. The absence of any specific reference to the mass execution of his captured soldiers is most intriguing, to say the least. [2]

2. *"Analytical summary of the causes of the fall of Srebrenica and Žepa,"* dated 23 February 1996 is a Report by the Military security directorate of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Main Staff commander, Gen. Rasim Delić. Again, those looking for either impassioned or coldly analytical references to "Srebrenica genocide" are going to be disappointed.

On p. 4 it is stated matter of factly that "a number of soldiers and civilians surrendered without resistance, after which the Chetniks committed frightful crimes against them." Further on it is written that the "Chetnik occupation of Srebrenica and the crimes they committed against the people of this region...had an impact on the morale and the self-confidence of the defenders of Žepa." There are, however, no specific references to post-July 11, 1995 mass prisoner executions although by then military intelligence should have gathered enough information about it to fill a hefty dossier. Not only is the main event in the Srebrenica theater completely ignored in this intelligence report but, oddly, the relatively uneventful fall of the tiny enclave of Žepa receives disproportionate attention, on 5 out of a total of 8 pages. [3]

3. *"Analysis and chronology of events in Srebrenica"* is undated in its ICTY version but it is properly marked with Tribunal page numbers which indicates that it is at least prima facie accepted by that authority as an authentic document. From internal evidence it is clear that it must have been written in the second half of July 1995 or later because it makes reference to a Second Corps Security Department document dated 20 July, 1995.

On p. 1 it is stated that after entering Srebrenica the "aggressor was executing 28th Division personnel on the spot," certainly a war crime but of unspecified magnitude, describes opportunistic rather than organized and systematic killing, and as described hardly rising to the level of genocide. Also that "some of the prisoners were taken to the playing field in Konjević Polje," which certainly is a fact corroborated by other evidence.

Further on mention is made of "ambushes designed to block [the progress of the column] which was moving toward free territory of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in groups of 200, 300, and 500 mostly armed males" and that "the aggressor... continues to perpetrate genocide against the Bosnian population of Srebrenica - slaughters, mass executions, rapes, separation of families, and exodus of helpless people." (Page 1) While the word "genocide" is used it is given a very general meaning consonant with the thrust of Bosnian Muslim propaganda since the beginning of the war. It is significant that mass execution of captured prisoners, as a specific act rising to the level of genocide, is not mentioned, contrary to what one would expect under the circumstances.

Interesting tidbits follow. Serbian losses in combat engagements with the column are said to be "much greater" than during the takeover of Srebrenica. (Page 2). So much for UN supervised demilitarization. It is also alleged that between 720 and 1,400 Bosnian Muslims were killed by Serbian forces in Potočari. If information was available to the authors about the Potočari killings, albeit imprecise, why were they unaware of the much more massive prisoner executions that allegedly occurred in other places? That, at least, would be the obvious conclusion since they go unmentioned in this narrative.

As far as the progress of the column is concerned, we learn (page 4) that “during July 16 about 30 wounded and about 2,000 made it through the corridor...” while on July 17 “about 4,000 to 4,500 soldiers arrived as well.” (Page 5)

The apparent lack of concern for the thousands of allegedly executed prisoners and for the genocidal character of that crime is the more intriguing in light of the keen awareness, expressed on pages 5 and 6, of the potential of all Srebrenica-related crimes to be exploited in the media.

In the “Conclusion” to this Report (page 8) there is no mention whatsoever of the mass execution of prisoners which has come to be known as the “Srebrenica genocide.” Principal attention is focused on the pros and cons in the debate about whether or not the enclave could have been successfully defended. Finally, there is an Annex with the breakdown of 45 tons of arms and ammunition that were sent to the enclave in contravention of the demilitarization agreement. [4]

4. “*Analysis of events in Srebrenica and the breakthrough of 28th Division units*” was prepared by the command of the 28th Division at the request of the commander of the ARBiH Second Corps in Tuzla. It was forwarded to the Corps command on 24 July, 1995 under file number 02/1-727/55.

This Report also features much interesting information. It seems to confirm, for instance, that the spearhead of the Serbian attack from the direction of Zeleni Jadar consisted of “four tanks T-55 and infantry of the strength of one brigade” (p. 01854506). That hardly sounds like an irresistible force and one wonders why the Red Arrow anti-tank missiles mentioned in the equipment supply lists were not used to good effect.

An order of the Tuzla-based 24th Division to units under its command to prepare by noon on July 12 to go into action to relieve the oncoming column from Srebrenica is cited, but there is no follow up information on what action, if any, was taken. We know now that no effort was made from the Tuzla side to assist the Srebrenica column, and one wonders why. It is also of great interest that as of the date this Report was composed (24 July, 1995) a total of 29,336 Srebrenica refugees were recorded and accommodated in Tuzla (p. 01854507), which not only tallies with contemporaneous records of international agencies in the field but also narrows down the possible number of Muslim losses after July 11, 1995 from all causes (execution and military action) given that the total population of the enclave was about 40,000.

Again, it is startling that such a high level overview of Srebrenica events should not include the “main event,” i.e. mass execution of thousands of captured prisoners that became known as the Srebrenica genocide narrative, particularly since in the cover letter a request is made to bring it to the attention of the “chairman of the Presidency, Mr. Alija Izetbegović.” [5]

5. There is also a report entitled “*Fall of Srebrenica*,” dated 28 July, 1995 and prepared by the Tuzla branch of the State Security Service. There are items of interest here with a bearing on some rather emotional but unfounded claims of the Srebrenica lobby: “There were not many women and children in the column. There were possibly around 10 women.” (Page 1D23-0554) At least that stands in stark contrast to the allegations often made by lobby propagandists that the number of women and children slaughtered by Serbian forces ran into the hundreds.

This Report also confirms a fact that is already amply documented by other sources but that is never reaffirmed in vain. The column was involved in active combat and its casualties are the other major source of Muslim losses in the critical period after the takeover of Srebrenica:

“After the column had progressed three to four kilometers from the rest point, it came under fire. The men were overcome with panic, fleeing forwards, backwards, to the sides, and for about 10 minutes the firing was directed at one part of the column, and then it moved along the whole column. There were men killed and wounded at the front and rear of the column.” (Page 1D23-0554)

But the “main event” after the fall of Srebrenica again gets no mention at all. [6]

6. General Rasim Delić, commander of the Bosnian Muslim armed forces in July, 1995 addressed the Bosnia and Herzegovina National Assembly on 30 July, 1996 about the reasons for the fall of Srebrenica from the military point of view. The points he made in his comprehensive report are of interest both for what he said and failed to mention.

In General Delić’s view the main reasons for the enclave’s collapse were internal conflicts, specifically:

“Divisions caused by internal power struggles;
Bad relations between Interior Ministry and Army officials;
The killing of dissidents and political rivals [Vahid Šabić, Akif Huskić, Salihović Hamdo];
War profiteering and criminal operations;
Poor organization of defence forces [Territorial Defence and BH Army] and internecine rivalries for leadership positions.” (Page 01854596)

When commenting on the impact of “demilitarisation”, Delić himself puts the word in quotation marks:

“Demilitarisation” created conditions which made army-building in that area quite difficult. (Page 01854596)

How do you engage in army-building and at the same time honestly implement demilitarisation? Delić explains:

“When in April of 1994 first arms and ammunition convoys began to arrive, we organized deliveries of arms and ammunition to Srebrenica and Žepa in such a way that it would not jeopardize their ‘demilitarised and protected zone’ status.” (Page 01854596)

According to Delić’s estimate about 23 tons of supplies were flown into the “demilitarized” enclave which “ensured the defensibility of the free area of Srebrenica.” (Page 01854597)

There follows a breakdown of the military assistance flown into Srebrenica [not counting Žepa] up to the May 1995 supply helicopter downing. (Page 01854598) He then continues:

“Even Goražde did not receive that much materiel and Sarajevo was being defended with less in 1992 and 1993. In order to improve [Srebrenica’s defence capability] we did the following: On return flights we brought in soldiers and officers to attend courses to learn to use new MTS and to be taught to better perform their duties, and Commanders and brigade chiefs of staff were being brought in to receive documents and to confer on possible combat missions around Srebrenica.” (Page 01854598)

It is clear that one of Delić’s main unspoken goals in addressing the deputies was to absolve the army and by implication himself of responsibility for Srebrenica’s fall. [“What can we say about the resistance when in spite of having so much anti-armor weapons they failed to destroy a single tank?... To put a halt to some speculations, I must say that the Second Corps did what it could.” (Page 01854600)] Accordingly, he blames the local leadership for errors of judgment and failure to follow instructions. In the process he adds a criticism that may have far-reaching significance:

“They failed to act in accordance with plans formulated in advance which would not have saved Srebrenica but would have enabled the evacuation of the people.” (Page 01854600)

In light of the impressive evidence of a Serb – Moslem land swap deal involving Srebrenica assembled in the Flyum/Hebditch documentary and of Delić’s possible slip of the tongue, one must wonder: Did the Sarajevo leadership have an evacuation plan? That is something that they have always vehemently denied and insisted, along with ICTY, that the evacuation must strictly be viewed as part of a Serb ethnic cleansing campaign.

In conclusion, Delić cites four main reasons for the fall of Srebrenica but he also studiously ignores the biggest Srebrenica story of all – genocide:

“Betrayal on the part of the international community, which made Srebrenica difficult to defend;

Political and military disunity;

The powerful impact of Serb and UNPROFOR propaganda so that already by the Spring [of 1995] the population was ready to evacuate Srebrenica; and

Failure to offer resistance proportionate to the available MTS, terrain advantages, and the motivation to defend the people.” (Page 01854600)

A review of Muslim post-mortem (no pun intended) retrospectives on Srebrenica discloses valuable facts and insights confirming much that we already know and opening new lines of inquiry. But the topic that they systematically avoid is the most interesting and intriguing part of the story. These reports are dated from 24 July 1995 to 30 July 1996 and cover a one year time span following the fall of Srebrenica. Where is the expected discussion of the execution of thousands of Muslim prisoners, the allegation that now constitutes the core of the Srebrenica genocide narrative? There was plenty of time during this period to sift and supplement the initial evidence of a genocide that now we are being told was of “planetary dimensions”. (The controversial Serbian imam Muamer Zukorlić proposed recently that Srebrenica be elevated to the status of no less than a “world metropolis of the human conscience.”) Why was none of that awareness in evidence in the military, security, and

political analyses composed in the immediate aftermath and within a reasonable time period after these dramatic events transpired?

If anything remotely resembling the summary execution of 8,000 prisoners, in a manner which rises to the level of genocide, had occurred it is disingenuous to suggest that Bosnian Muslim authorities, in their pro foro interno reports, simply missed it. Such an explanation is particularly unpersuasive in light of the fact that ICTY chief investigator Jean-Rene Ruez received his marching orders to go to Srebrenica within a week of the takeover and was in Tuzla already on 20 July, 1995 with instructions to initiate an investigation of possible genocide. Was the Tribunal at the Hague better informed of facts on the ground than were the Bosnian Muslims who were actually there and is it reasonable to assume that ICTY had a greater moral interest in sorting the matter out than they did?

For the moment, precise answers to these questions are not available. However, it is possible to identify an odd lacuna in the way that Srebrenica events were portrayed internally in Bosnian Muslim documents, and we have done it. They are the party that arguably should have been the most interested in putting the genocide issue in the forefront of its internal reports. A tentative explanatory hypothesis can be ventured.

The Muslim side was distracted by war settlement arrangements and there is no doubt that Srebrenica did play the important role of a political chip in their end-game strategy. But they probably are not the ones who conceived the “Srebrenica genocide narrative” that ultimately became a permanent feature of international political discourse and practice, and they certainly never had the logistical means to impose it on the global level.

The political opportunities “Srebrenica genocide” presented on a scale much wider than Bosnian Muslims’ Balkan playing field were more likely to have been noticed by their Western sponsors. As evidenced by the promptness with which they reacted to exploit those opportunities they did notice them quite early. (As noted, Ruez was on the job in Tuzla just days after the fall of Srebrenica with the clearly defined task to find evidence that would enhance the role of the Hague Tribunal and block Karadžić’s personal participation in the forthcoming peace negotiations by furnishing a rationale for a genocide indictment against him. On August 10, Secretary Albright did not miss a beat at the UN, waving misleading aerial photographs, charging genocide, and threatening military intervention against Bosnian Serbs in a foreshadowing of the serial R2P “humanitarian interventions” that ensued with the “no more Srebrenica” rationale in the background. Meanwhile, several internal Bosnian Muslim reports were being written with no reference at all to the alleged genocide that was driving Western institutions and political figures into a moralistic frenzy and inciting them to various forms of “robust” world-wide military action.)

More systematic research needs to be done to establish and compare the length of time that elapsed between mid-July 1995 events in Srebrenica and when the genocide narrative took definitive shape in Western and Bosnian Muslim public discourse, respectively. The evidence at this point suggests that Western propaganda mechanisms were primed to spring into action as soon as that could decently be done without arousing suspicion of prior knowledge or collusion with the perpetrators. For the Bosnian Muslims, on the other hand, the Srebrenica genocide narrative, as a well defined and specifically aimed political weapon, appears to have been a strategic afterthought. They were, however, happy to jump onto their sponsors’ propaganda bandwagon once it got rolling and to capitalize politically on the “genocide” when they fully grasped the attendant advantages. Even so, however, their response was unexpectedly sluggish and quite delayed.

Notes

- [1] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=32199>
- [2] ICTY ERN no. 0185-4518-0185-4532-ET.doc/al
- [3] Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje, 1992 – 1994, Ljubljana, 1995. Orić lists 1333 pre-July 1995 “martyrs” by name with date and place of birth and date and place of death on pages 211 – 244 of his book. For the complete list, see:
http://www.srebrenica-project.com/sr/DOWNLOAD/Odlomak_iz_Oriceve_knjige.pdf
- [4] ICTY ERN no. 11854425 – 11854433.
- [5] ICTY ERN no. 01854504 – 01854511.
- [6] ICTY file no. 1D23-0548 – 1D23-0556.
- [7] ICTY ERN no. 01854595 – 01854601.
- [8] Srebrenica: a Town Betrayed,
<http://tv.globalresearch.ca/2011/07/srebrenica-town-betrayed>
- [9] Electronic news portal E-novine (Belgrade), 23.08.2012
- [10] Le Point (Paris), no. 1862, 26 May 2008.
- [11] J. P. Maher’s “Argument and Rhetoric in ICTY Judgments,” in Deconstruction of a Virtual Genocide (Den Haag-Belgrade, 2011), pp. 173-175, is a good start.

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