

Death, Lies, and Videotape

Behind the "Srebrenica Atrocity Video"

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Several minutes of video footage made public late last week pushed the issue of Kosovo out of the Balkans limelight and focused it firmly on Bosnia. A film showing the execution of six men in civilian clothing by a paramilitary group known as "The Scorpions," procured by a notorious purveyor of atrocity porn, has been cited as crucial, "irrefutable," "final," and "incontrovertible" evidence that not only were the events following the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995 "genocide," but that the government of Serbia was involved.

Moving features about shocked citizens and grieving relatives who recognized family members came across the wires, along with exclusive revelations of the tape's origins and triumphant boasts of Serb-baiters in the press about the tape. Lobbyists for the Hague Inquisition waxed long and poetic about its importance. Almost everyone commenting on the tape agrees that it is evidence of Serbian involvement in Srebrenica events. Al-Jazeera, for example, calls it "irrefutable proof of Serbia's role."

That, however, is simply not true. The tape is not a smoking gun, but rather a publicity stunt. Assuming the men shown ? both the killers and the victims ? were identified correctly, it will have clarified one bloody episode in the Bosnian war; no more, no less. The hysteria surrounding its release speaks far more about the machinery dedicated to fabricating and maintaining a web of lies about Bosnia and the Balkans than about anything that actually took place in and around Srebrenica following July 11, 1995.

Shot on the Hillside

Portions of the video shown at the ICTY and in Serbia, and available online, show several men in uniform shooting four men in civilian clothing, and ordering two others to dispose of the bodies. It is indeed disgusting, such banality of evil, akin to the Abu Ghraib photos. It is also brethren to mujahedin recruiting videos showing the ritual murder of Serbs: a reminder the war in Bosnia was vicious, brutal, and about as uncivilized as war gets. It is indeed the Devil's sacrament, nourishing the vile State while destroying the souls of men.

That said, the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the video are so outlandish, so hyperbolic and often entirely factually inaccurate, it becomes obvious that the media and politicians involved have nothing against the devil ? indeed, they worship the State ? or even killing as such. They are simply using this particular document of killing to further lies and violence, while invoking justice, humanity, and peace.

Atrocity Porn Star

The video has seen the light of day thanks to the efforts of one Natasa Kandic, often

described as a “courageous human rights lawyer” and “Serbia’s most prominent human-rights activist.” But AP describes her NGO, the Humanitarian Law Center, as an organization that “investigates crimes committed by Serbs during the Balkan wars.”

Indeed, Kandic’s focus is not on human rights or humanitarian issues, but on finding “evidence” of alleged Serb atrocities, and making such allegations, the more shocking, the better. She was the source the disgraced USA Today reporter Jack Kelly quoted about the infamous notebook, but when Kelly asked for corroboration she denied his story. Kandic is also behind the freezer-truck hoax, the claims of crematoria for Albanians in southern Serbia, and a host of other atrocity claims that the media eagerly report, but no one ever manages to verify. The London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) is often her accomplice in publishing these claims. So it should not surprise that the most detailed report on the tape and its origins ? containing the most serious allegations and assertions, presented as proven truth ? came from two IWPR hands, Tim Judah and Daniel Sunter, in last Sunday’s Observer.

It cannot be a coincidence that the airing of the tape and its arrival at the ICTY come just days before a conference on Srebrenica that Natasa Kandic is organizing at Belgrade’s biggest conference center, “in cooperation” with the ICTY Outreach Office in Serbia. It also comes on the heels of a declaration pushed by a conglomerate of Empire-supporting NGOs in Serbia (one of them being Kandic’s HLC) to accept the description of Srebrenica as genocide committed in the name of the Serbian people.

Claims and Implications

The ICTY used the videotape, and a document showing that members of the Scorpions served in the Serbian anti-terrorist police units in 1999, to claim that they have always acted on Belgrade’s orders. Such contentions were supported by Kandic and Dejan Anastasijevic, a reporter for Time magazine and an eager supporter of the ICTY whom the AP mistakenly dubbed a “military analyst.” While these allegations have enormous propagandist value, as “evidence” they are worthless.

One trial monitor effortlessly tracked down the testimony of a Krajina Serb official from October 2003, indicating that the Scorpions were a mercenary/militia outfit established in 1992 and fighting in Bosnia. Only some individual members of the unit later volunteered for anti-terrorist operations in Kosovo, and were indeed on Serbian police payroll ? in 1999. Two of them were found guilty of murdering Albanian civilians; one is in prison, the other fighting extradition in Canada. That the Scorpions as a unit were never part of the Serbian police was confirmed by General Obrad Stevanovic, former assistant police minister currently testifying at the Milosevic trial.

But to claim that a 1999 document listing several former Scorpions members as belonging to the Serbian police is “proof” that the unit ? or the individuals ? were in police pay four years earlier is patently absurd.

Meanwhile, Natasa Kandic continues to “reveal” details to the story that seriously challenge her already threadbare credibility. As a guest in a TV show hosted by a noted Muslim nationalist, on a Muslim nationalist TV network in Bosnia, she claimed that “prisoners from Srebrenica were brought all the way to Trnovo, where some sort of military operation ? probably diversionary ? was taking place, in order for them to appear as casualties of

fighting rather than execution.” (For the record, the blogger who noted this is absolutely on Kadic’s side, and even suggests the Scorpions were “some sort of roaming Einsatzgruppe that would go wherever their services were needed.”)

Kadic’s claim is entirely false. There was indeed a massive military operation underway at the time in and around Trnovo, an all-out offensive by Muslim forces to “unblock” Sarajevo, which produced horrendous casualties and achieved nothing. In Kadic’s obsessed mind, a Muslim offensive becomes a Serb “diversion.”

Despite these factual problems, the video ? and the accompanying hysteria - is accomplishing its propaganda purpose: to shock the Serbian public into believing the Official Truth about Srebrenica. According to reports from Belgrade, the Serbian government is encouraging precisely such beliefs in an effort to please the Empire.

Myth and Reality

Deliberate descriptions of what happened in Srebrenica in the mainstream media inevitable include the phrase “the worst atrocity in Europe since World War Two” or “since the Holocaust,” sometimes also “the worst massacre of civilians,” etc. They consciously evoke the Holocaust and Nazi imagery to tie Srebrenica to genocide, Serbs to Nazis, and Muslims to their innocent victims.

But in reality, most of the men who died in the aftermath of Srebrenica’s fall were combatants, members of the 28th Infantry Division of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose commander is on trial by the very Hague Inquisition on charges of murder, rape, and torture.

What most likely happened to them, while horrific, was not something only the Nazis — or by deliberate analogy, the Serbs — would do. Consider this:

“The U.S. armed forces bombed one end of the main highway from Kuwait city to Basra, sealing it off. They bombed the other end of the highway and sealed it off. They positioned mechanized artillery units on the hills overlooking it. And then, from the air and from the land they simply massacred every living thing on the road. Our forces did not wait for the fleeing people to surrender, they did not surround them and force them to surrender, they just exterminated them.”

- William A. Cook, December 2002, emphasis added

Yet the Serbs actually waited for Srebrenica Muslims to surrender. They evacuated the women, children, and the elderly they found at the Potocari UN camp. Serbia itself sheltered some 800-plus Muslim refugees from Srebrenica. And in another Muslim enclave that fell just a few days later, Zepa, there was no massacre. Even assuming, arguendo, that the recorded act of the Scorpions was somehow standard practice for the POWs taken in the attempted breakout from Srebrenica, or even that Serb forces preferred not to take prisoners, such atrocities do not amount to genocide. But “breaches of the Geneva convention” doesn’t sell newspapers and TV ads; it doesn’t justify invasions and occupations, nor the creation of Imperial inquisitions out of thin air. “Genocide” and “worst atrocity since the Nazis” do.

A decade later, “Srebrenica” has become a justification for Imperial intervention in the

Balkans. Together with the concept of “joint criminal enterprise” that seeks to blame the entire political and military leadership of Serbs in Yugoslavia for that country’s violent collapse, it underpins the “right” of Washington and Brussels to use force to “solve” the chaos and death created by their politics. In asserting their “right” of power, they stop at nothing, even using atrocity porn such as the “Scorpions” videotape.

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