

More claims that Western powers protected Radovan Karadzic

By Paul Mitchell
21 August 2008

Earlier this month, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic appeared before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) after 13 years in hiding. He was arrested in the Serbian capital of Belgrade disguised as Dragan Dabic, a doctor of alternative medicine.

In 1995, the ICTY indicted Karadzic on 13 counts of genocide and other war crimes allegedly committed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina during 1992-1995, when he was president of the Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska—RS), head of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) and supreme commander of the Bosnian Serb army. It accused Karadzic of responsibility for the 44-month shelling of the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica by units of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) under the command of General Ratko Mladic—officially the largest mass murder in Europe since World War Two.

Karadzic disappeared at the end of the war following the signing of the November 1995 Dayton Accord, which partitioned the former Yugoslav republic into two ethnically based entities—the RS and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the Moslem-Croat alliance).

When he appeared in court, Karadzic claimed he was granted immunity from war crimes charges in a deal reached with former US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, architect of the Dayton Accord.

He told the court that in 1996 Holbrooke “acting on behalf of the US ... suggested to my high-ranking representatives that I should stop all kinds of political and public activities, give no interview and publish no articles and books. In other words, they wanted me to disappear for quite a long period of time until the full implementation of the Dayton accord ... Mr. Holbrooke said he would allow me to avoid facing war crimes charges in exchange for keeping a low profile. He also warned me that my personality would be facing very harsh criticism to prevent my supporters from undermining the implementation of the Dayton accord.... In line with our deal, [former Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton] Madeleine Albright proposed to the President of the Republika Srpska, Bilyana Plavsic, that I should leave for Russia, Greece or Serbia to open a private medical clinic there”.

Holbrooke vehemently denied Karadzic’s claim. He said that in July 1996 he travelled to Belgrade and negotiated a signed agreement witnessed by former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic forcing Karadzic to resign his political positions. “I negotiated a very tough deal. He had to step down immediately from both his posts as president of the Serb part of Bosnia and as head of his party. And he did so,” he said. “But when he disappeared, he put out a piece of disinformation that I had cut a deal with him if he disappeared we wouldn’t pursue him. That was a completely false statement.”

“There was never any deal to give him immunity from capture, it was simply that NATO failed to capture him. That’s NATO’s failure, not a deal.”

But RS foreign minister Aleksa Buha claimed that he was present at the agreement during which “Holbrooke strongly promised that The Hague tribunal would be history for Karadzic if he withdrew from politics forever.” Muhamed Sacirbey, the US educated Wall Street financier who became Bosnia’s foreign minister and envoy to the UN maintains that he learned about the Karadzic-Holbrooke deal from US diplomat Robert Frowick on the day it was signed.

In addition, Rasim Ljajic, a Serbian Minister who is also head of the National Council for Cooperation with the ICTY said about the alleged Karadzic-Holbrooke deal: “We spoke with many witnesses who confirmed this agreement. However, we did not find any documents to prove it. The fact is that no one in Bosnia wanted to arrest Karadzic when he was still reachable. Holbrooke’s current overreaction, and his overly energetic denial of the notion of a bilateral deal, raises certain doubts.”

Piotr Iskenderov of the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences claims that under the agreement, Karadzic received \$600,000, six security guards and a safe-house. The protection was withdrawn according to the Belgrade daily *Blic* after the CIA tapped Karadzic’s phone in 2002 and discovered that he was still deeply involved with the SDS. “In America they went crazy realizing Karadzic was making a fool of them,” said the paper’s source.

Former chief prosecutor at the ICTY, Carla del Ponte, has also hinted at an agreement. In a meeting with the former speaker of the RS parliament Dragan Kalinic in 2004 Del Ponte said, “I am investigating the story of an agreement between Karadzic and Holbrooke.” When Kalinic asked, “Do you believe that the agreement exists?” Del Ponte replied, “Yes”.

Del Ponte’s spokeswoman Florence Hartmann has been more forthright than her boss. She told *Blic* that whether or not there was a formal agreement with Karadzic, US officials “did nothing” when the prosecution gave them, on several occasions, the exact locations where Karadzic and Mladic were hiding.

“Information about the fugitives’ whereabouts was abundant, however, it would always turn out that one of the three countries—the US, Britain or France—would block arrests.”

“Sometimes arrest operations were halted by [former French President Jacques] Chirac personally, other times by Clinton”, she added.

In an interview given last year, Hartmann claims that “the reasons why Western powers don’t want to see Karadzic and Mladic on trial

is ... their very likely intent to put the blame for the crimes they have committed on the international community by saying that they have been given a green or orange light to take over the Srebrenica enclave.”

“Western powers created the conditions for mass killings to happen”, she said.

Furthermore, she maintains that not only have the Western powers been “uncomfortable” with evidence related to Srebrenica appearing in public, but from the day the ICTY was created “there was an effort to steer justice to justify the actions of the big powers in their response to the war, the genocide.”

“They consistently tried to overlook who was indicted, and then selectively provided evidence and even altered it depending if the Tribunal mandate to establish the truth would harm them or not.”

The Srebrenica massacre has already “harmed” one Western power. A Dutch parliamentary report on the role of the country’s troops led in 2002 to the resignation of the government and its top army chief. According to this report, by participating in the intervention, the Dutch ruling elite had hoped that “the Netherlands could use this to show its worth and Dutch prestige would be enhanced in the world.” But in the end, it continued, the Netherlands “played no role at all” in the Dayton agreement: “It was even banned from the conference table.”

The report revealed how the UN “safe areas” were a new and undefined concept that had “less to do with the reality of Bosnia-Herzegovina than with the need to achieve a compromise in the Security Council and with the wish to diminish the tensions that had arisen between the United States and Europe concerning the right approach.”

However, the Srebrenica massacre cannot be considered simply a tactical mistake brought about by tensions over the “right approach.” It was the outcome of the drive by competing imperialist nations to incorporate Yugoslavia into the capitalist world market.

The economic and political tensions that had developed in Yugoslavia in the 1980s under the impact of IMF restructuring programmes and exploited by communalist politicians were to explode with the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

After initially opposing Germany’s recognition of the first two secessionist republics, Slovenia and Croatia, Washington aggressively promoted the independence of Bosnia. The US saw this as a means of preserving its military predominance and preventing the emergence of potential rivals, either global or regional. Among the latter was the danger of an expanded Serb state, potentially in alliance with Russia.

Warnings that the secession of Bosnia, where the Serbs constituted a large minority and where most of the Yugoslav army was stationed, would provoke civil war were ignored as each of the imperialist powers pursued its own interests.

After years of blocking European-initiated settlements on the grounds that they rewarded “ethnic cleansing” and failed to preserve an independent and multi-ethnic Bosnia, Washington unilaterally imposed its own carve-up.

The Clinton administration used military force, involving thousands of sorties by US warplanes to inflict overwhelming damage on the telecommunications and transportation links of the Bosnian Serb army, allowing the regular army of Croatia, together with Bosnian Moslem and Croat forces, to expel ethnic Serbs in the largest acts of ethnic cleansing to occur in the entire course of the Bosnian civil war.

Milosevic, Croatia’s Franjo Tudjman and Bosnian President Alija

Izetbegovic were brought to the US Air Force base at Dayton, Ohio to ratify the settlement. After denouncing Milosevic as the equivalent of a Balkan Hitler, Washington promoted him as the guarantor of peace and promised economic concessions in return for handing back Serb-held territory and sidelining the Bosnian Serb leadership.

However, Milosevic was violently denounced for “selling out” the Serb minorities in Bosnia and Croatia. The most prominent Serbian opposition figure, Zoran Djindjic, who was prime minister after the ousting of Milosevic until his assassination in 2003, was closely aligned with the Bosnian Serb leadership. In a revealing interview with the *New York Times*, Djindjic assured the West that his nationalism was intended solely for domestic consumption. “Our primary goal is to reform the economy and push Yugoslavia into Western Europe,” he said, “but we cannot rally popular support around an economic program. This is why we are building our movement on Serbian nationalism.”

With the declaration of Kosovo’s independence on February 21 and a new pro-Western government in power in Belgrade, the Western powers calculated that the time was ripe to haul in Karadzic (and media reports suggest Mladic is negotiating the terms for his surrender) and remove the last obstacle to Serbia’s accession to the European Union. The demonstrations against Karadzic’s arrest organised by the ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party attracted a tiny crowd compared to the violence—including attacks on embassies—that happened after Kosovo declared independence.

The West wants to bring Serbia in from the cold because the country is regarded as the economic powerhouse of the Balkans (PriceWaterhouseCoopers rates it as the third best place to invest among developing economies). In addition, the Western powers are seeking to prevent Russia—which found itself excluded from the Balkan carve-up and threatened by the extension of the NATO alliance to its borders—from re-establishing the decisive role it has played in Balkan affairs for centuries.

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