

Media Disinformation Frenzy on Srebrenica: The Lynching of Ratko Mladic

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In the afternoon hours of May 26, the president of Serbia called a surprise press conference to announce, in [Boratesque](#) English, the arrest of General Ratko Mladic, wartime commander of Bosnian Serb forces. Entirely by coincidence, or so President Tadic's crack team of spin-masters would have everyone believe, this happened on the very day EU's foreign policy commissar Catherine Ashton was visiting.

Tadic [argued](#) that the arrest "lifted the stain from Serbia and from Serbs" everywhere, and "ended a difficult period in our history." He expressed hope that the arrest would mollify the bureaucrats of Brussels to unfreeze his government's bid to join the EU. True, he personally received praise from the [Emperor himself](#) and not a few [media mavens](#). But the EU remained aloof, and soon produced more demands, while the mainstream media cared little about his spin on events – they gleefully proceeded to dredge up every bit of mud they've ever slung at Serbia and the Serbs, and add more.

The Five-Day Hatefest

The media feeding frenzy in the five days between Gen. Mladic's arrest and his rendition on Monday resembled nothing so much as the similar outpouring of vitriol almost three years ago, during the [arrest and rendition](#) of former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic. It had been a rare moment, as [Brendan O'Neill noted](#), when Islamic militant joined hands with liberal interventionists and hated their common villain.

Accounts of the alleged atrocities by the "Butcher of Bosnia" ranged from outlandish to flat-out made up. For example, [George Jahn of the AP](#) described this ghastly scene from Sarajevo:

"Burn their brains," he bellowed as his men targeted the nearly defenseless city from the hills above. At war's end three years later, Sarajevo was a burned-out shell.

The actual quote was "Stretch their wits," and it was taken from radio transmissions allegedly intercepted by the Bosnian Muslims (it will be interesting to see if they can be authenticated at the trial). The "nearly defenseless" city harbored an entire [army corps](#), with artillery. And the worst-bombed parts of Sarajevo in the end were the sections held by Mladic's forces. But who needs pesky *facts*, when they get in the way of a good story?

Worse yet were the accounts of what happened in Srebrenica, a town in Eastern Bosnia captured from a [brutal Muslim warlord](#) in July 1995. Mladic personally oversaw the evacuation of civilians, while Muslim troops made a break from the town; the war crimes tribunal (ICTY) declared the deaths of those that didn't survive the trek to be "genocide,"

stretching the definition [to absurdity](#) (PDF).

Although no two [reports](#) told exactly the same story – the only constants in reporting about Srebrenica are the “8,000” alleged dead, the phrase “men and boys,” and the description along the lines of “Europe’s worst crime since the Nazis” – they all painted a vivid picture of Serbs raping, murdering and butchering innocent Muslim civilians as UN troops stood by and watched. [None of that’s true](#).

Incongruously, AP reporters even managed to [locate a boy](#) who appeared in a famous photo with Mladic, who had ruffled his hair and given him chocolate. Izudin Alic now lives near Srebrenica, proof that the official story is utter nonsense.

The sort of hysterical hyperbole used to describe the events of the Bosnian War – the Egyptian judge who wrote Mladic’s original indictment in 1995 claimed that “children [were] killed before their mothers’ eyes, a grandfather forced to eat the liver of his own grandson” – does a colossal disservice to its actual victims. The horrors of war were quite ghastly enough on their own. Embellished to the point of snuff fiction, they morph into myth and fuel the flames of hatred. Perhaps this is why Bosnia is [still mentally at war](#), 15 years after the guns fell silent.

Presumptions of Guilt

Six months ago, when a report by Swiss Senator Dick Marty accused the Albanian authorities in the self-proclaimed state of Kosovo of engaging in [forcible harvesting and illicit trafficking](#) of human organs, the media and officials in Washington and Brussels were very careful to maintain the presumption of innocence, and talked of need for hard evidence. That standard, however, does not apply in cases where they have already passed both verdict and sentence.

The other day, Geert Wilders, Dutch politician currently on trial for alleged “hate speech” against Islam, pointed out in his [closing remarks](#) that he was “being compared with the Hutu murderers in Rwanda and with Mladic.” And in an essay complaining about the fuzzy definition of genocide employed by the ICTY, liberal luminary [Ian Buruma](#) first decided that Mladic *looked* guilty – “the kind of bull-necked, pale-eyed, snarling psychopath who would gladly pull out your fingernails just for fun” – and then expressed “no doubt that he is guilty of serious war crimes.”

Why bother with a trial at all, then? Don’t you know there’s a [depression on](#)?

Who is Ratko Mladic?

In 1991, Ratko Mladic was a professional officer in the Yugoslav People’s Army. Born in 1943, he had never met his father, who was killed during WW2 by the Ustasha, Croatian Nazis conducting a [genocidal campaign](#) against the Serbs and Jews in what are today Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Mladic went to military schools and was “groomed in the Titoist tradition of... trans-national Yugoslavism,” wrote [historian Srdja Trifkovic](#), a primary source in this instance. Per Trifkovic, Mladic “rediscovered his Serb roots in late middle age,” when he was set in charge of the crumbling Yugoslav Army units in Dalmatia, and then in Bosnia.

Mladic arrived in Sarajevo following the “Dobrovoljacka massacre,” in which Muslim militias

ambushed the retreating Army convoy led by his predecessor, under the UN flag of truce. The ICTY never charged anyone in this case; the [official](#) on whose authority the militia acted was recently proclaimed a hero by the Bosnian Islamic community. Refusal of the Bosnian courts to even open the case underpinned the recent [game of brinkmanship](#) that culminated mid-May.

A skilled tactician, Mladic won many battles, but waged an unwinnable war. The [Bosnian Serb strategy](#) called for staking out a defensible territory, then negotiating with the Muslim regime in Sarajevo. That regime, however, absolutely refused to negotiate, fighting the war with CNN cameras rather than cannons in hope of intervention from the West.

In March 1992, Croatia tried to bypass the [Vance Plan](#) by invading Bosnia and encircling the Serb-inhabited west; Mladic and his troops thwarted this move, and maintained the lifeline “Corridor” till the end of the war. Serb politicians and officers, including Mladic, have said they were trying to prevent the repetition of WW2 events. This has been dismissed as propaganda – yet the fact that few Serbs remain in Croatia following Zagreb’s [1995 blitzkrieg](#) speaks for itself.

Mladic and his civilian boss, Karadzic, were accused of war crimes by the ICTY in late 1995, as U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke endeavored to cut them out of the peace talks. There isn’t any doubt whatsoever that the decision to indict them was political.

That said, there are indeed serious questions concerning Sarajevo and Srebrenica, the true extent of the bombing, the executions of prisoners (which certainly happened) and whether Mladic sanctioned it or not. It is unlikely, however, that they will ever be answered in a show trial before the ICTY.

The Railroad

As most other Serb defendants in The Hague, Mladic is not charged with anything he actually did, but with being what he was – a senior military officer, and as such considered a part of the alleged “joint criminal enterprise” to establish an ethnically pure “Greater Serbia.” The [conspiracy is a myth](#); even under Milosevic, Serbia was more multi-ethnic than any other fragment of Yugoslavia (while Empire’s allies such as Croatia or “Kosovo” are notorious for ethnic purity). The ICTY’s own [recent conviction of Croatian generals](#) demolishes the conspiracy charge – which is why it will likely be overturned. Yet they persist in the conspiracy charge against the entire political, police and military leadership of the Serbs (from Krajina, Bosnia and Serbia itself), asserting in effect that the Serbs’ war aims were wholly illegitimate, while those of others were entirely valid.

Why? Because, as [Mick Hume pointed out](#) in 2008, the Empire *needed* Bosnia to give itself new meaning following the Cold War. To be a hero, the “white hat” of old Westerns, the Empire had to have a villain, the proverbial “black hat.” It found one in the Serbs, a nation suddenly bereft of friends and beset by enemies looking for a powerful sponsor. And so, in the [greatest propaganda coup](#) of modern time, the victims of [Nazi brutality](#) were themselves declared Nazis reborn.

Before Bush II launched the Lost War of Terror, the Clintons “saved Bosnia” and “liberated Kosovo.” [Osama bin Laden](#) had usurped the mantle of the chief “black hat” for almost a decade, but he was inconvenient, interfering with the forced perception of Islam as the “Religion of Peace” and plans for *jihad* as a tool of Washington’s [strategic interests in](#)

[Eurasia](#).

With Obama's first term effectively the [Clinton Restoration](#), the Balkans was once again trotted out as the great and noble rescue, invoked to justify military interventionism across the globe. It will become even more important now that Bin Laden is [sleeping with the fishes](#). And even after 15 years, the wonks in Washington still cannot, or will not, see that the rescue was a sham, that the [expected gratitude](#) will never materialize, and that trying to use *jihad* as a weapon has already backfired once, and will do so again.

In order to maintain the delusion of Empire's unchallenged dominion, for the bombs to continue to rain on Libya – and whoever else is next – Ratko Mladic and the Serbs need to be [monsters in public perception](#), regardless of what they may or may not be in fact.

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