

Unjustified bosnian genocide



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“ History repeats itself” is a phrase commonly heard and used by many people. After World War I, The League of Nations was formed as an international organization to preserve world peace. However, after World War II it became evident that the League was ineffective in its prevention, so it was replaced by The United Nations in 1945. The purpose was to become a collective international organization of countries to prevent events such as war and genocide from occurring, after witnessing the horrific atrocities of WWII.

However, even after the formation of the UN, several other wars and genocides had occurred between 1945 to today, and in particular there was a brutal genocide in Bosnia. Bosnia lies next to the Adriatic Sea, paralleling the “ boot” of Italy. Bosnia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1878 to World War One. After the War, the geographical area became Yugoslavia. By 1980 the population of Bosnia consisted of 2 million Bosnian Serbs and Croats (Catholic Christians) and over 1m Bosnians (Sunni Muslim), all claiming Bosnia as their homeland.

1 After the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, tensions were rising in Bosnia and Herzegovina; between two ethnic groups, the Bosnians (Muslims) and the Serbs. It was clear a war was on the rise, but the UN’s repeated failure on multiple issues allowed what could have been a preventable war and genocide to happen. Firstly, the UN tried to limit their involvement in the war by sending only a limited number of troops for humanitarian purposes.

Furthermore, they attempted to set up safe zones, which failed miserably because their forces were too widespread and the areas were open and exposed, easily allowing them to be taken over. Additionally, the Dutch

soldiers that were guarding the safe areas were ill equipped and exhausted due to lack of resources and replacement troops. Even worse, the UN stopped sending humanitarian relief through air packages because they supposedly came to an agreement with the Serbs to send relief using convoy trucks through Serbian territory, which inevitably resulted in the Serbs preventing the resources from going through.

Last, but not least, four years after the war concluded, the UN completed their investigation and even admitted they failed to prevent the genocide of the Bosnians. Based on the UN's refusal to supply more troops, lack of protection around safe areas, inability to provide proper equipment, their gullibility in thinking the Serbs would allow relief trucks to go through and through their own admission of guilt demonstrates that the UN was negligible in preventing the genocide in Bosnia.

After witnessing the horrific events of the Holocaust, UN officials made it a priority to set up legislation in order to prevent something like this from happening again. In 1948, the UN passed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (i. e. the Genocide Convention), which did not go into effect until 1951. This Convention outlined a specific definition for genocide with strict guidelines of what constitutes genocide and the crimes that would be punishable under the new convention. Here lies the first problem of many, in regards to the UN's failure to respond to the genocide.

Although it was clearly evident that the Serbs were targeting and eradicating Bosnians, a clear act of genocide, this atrocity was instead labelled as "ethnic cleansing". The UN and several other bodies used this term because

under the new convention, using the definition of genocide would require military intervention by the UN, but classifying it as an ethnic cleansing allowed the UN to wipe their hands clean of any responsibility. This led to the additional problem of an insufficient number of troops being deployed in Bosnia.

Several members of the Security Council, including the United States, refused to supply the necessary number of troops that would be needed to defend the area. A UN report suggested that 34, 000 troops would be necessary to ensure the security of the Bosnian citizens, however the Security Council only authorized about 7, 400-7, 600 troops mainly for humanitarian purposes. It was then estimated by UN officials that only about 3, 500 of these troops were deployed, with only a few hundred being sent to Srebrenica, the site where the main genocide occurred.

After the Serbs had launched several attacks on Srebrenica, the UN attempted to reach a resolution. The Serbs claimed they would end their attacks on Srebrenica if the citizens handed over their weapons to the U. N. in order to classify it as a demilitarized zone[CITE]. The U. N. complied with this request, leaving the majority of the citizens of Srebrenica unarmed, except for a few light weapons retained by defenders. As a result of this “ demilitarization”, the Security Council declared Srebrenica a “ safe area” in April of 1993.

The events in Srebrenica would spur the U. N to create an additional five safe areas in Zepa, Goradze, Bihac, Tuzla and Sarajevo, making a total of six if you include Srebrenica[CITE]. However, the Serbs would soon demonstrate that these “ safe areas” were far from what they claimed to be. It was

already problematic that there was a lack of troops in these areas, but the UN failed to give the Protection Force (UNPROFOR) clear instructions as to what their duties were.

It was unclear whether they were allowed to use force to protect the population or if they could only use force their own self-defense (UN troops). A UN mandate said to “deter attacks against the safe areas”, but many troops interpreted this as only justifying the use of force for self-defense and not the civilians[CITE]. Additionally, the Serbs claimed that whatever light weapons the Srebrenica defenders had left were being used against them for “terrorist activities” and as a result they invaded an already demilitarized zone, a consequence which the UN should have been able to foresee.

In July 1995, Serb Leader Ratko Mladic and his troops began shelling Srebrenica and thousands muslim inhabitants were injured and many died. 2 Furthermore, basic needs such as food, water and shelter were becoming scarce as the serb forces started to surround Srebrenica. In an act of retaliation, the UN sent a Dutch contingent of soldiers to secure and protect the town from the Serbian forces. Ironically, the UN Dutch forces that were sent were poorly equipped, few in numbers and did not receive reinforcements from the UN though their mission was to protect Srebrenica from Serb attacks.

Displeased with the status of Srebrenica, the Dutch Commander of the contingent consistently asked the allied french forces to provide air support, the request was stalled and eventually denied by the French contingent. In an attempt to delay the Serbian attacks, the Dutch Commander threatened the Serbian officials of an air strike on July 11 at 6: 00 am if they continued

to advance into the town of Srebrenica; still hoping that the French would assist. On the day of, no airstrikes were issued so the bombardment continued on Bosnian muslims, and over 20, 000 refugees fled to the Dutch HQ and were eventually overrun by the Serbian forces.

The UN did not intervene because their job was to only provide humanitarian services and not to engage in combat with the Serbian forces. In conclusion, the UN poorly planned, executed the security of the town of Srebrenica; the UN could have suppressed, rather prevented the mass murders taking place in Srebrenica if they had accepted that the Bosnian War was indeed an act of genocide.

An agreement was issued between the Serbs and the UN stating that humanitarian services would be allowed to pass through. ³ They stopped sending support via airplanes and helicopters because they made an agreement with the Serbians to allow the convoys with supplies to pass through their territory before getting to the Bosnians but the serfs inspected the content, removed supplies, delayed transport etc which the UN did nothing about. Furthermore, there were many notions that suggested that the Serbian forces were planning an attack on the " safe area".

⁴Upcoming to the massacre, the Serbian forces were gradually restricting the humanitarian convoys to a inhumane point of one convey a month; this was supposed to feed 39, 000 people. And the Dutch forces could only watch helplessly, as to the authoritative and inhumane ways of the Bosnian-Serbian Forces. The UN was fully aware of the forthcoming attacks on the Bosnians' based on the weapons, fuel etc being added by the Serbs, which was normally illegal.

As if all of these mishaps were not enough evidence of the UN's negligence in preventing the Srebrenica genocide, the icing on the cake came in 1999 when the UN completed their investigation into the events of Srebrenica and admitted they had failed to do their part in protecting the people of Srebrenica from genocide. At the time, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote that " through error, misjudgment, and an inability to recognize the scope of the evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to save the people of Srebrenica from the Serb campaign of mass murder"[CITE].

The UN also admitted that their instructions to troops were vague, seeing as the Secretary General was cited as allowing the use of force to deter attacks against safe areas, but then subsequently saying that due to a lack of troops, the U. N. cannot guarantee the defense of safe areas[CITE]. Additionally, the UN commanders could have intervened and stopped the Serbian onslaught, but conflicting interests prevented them from doing so. The Security Council, in particular the United States, refused to provide troops or intelligence on Serbian movement within the area[CITE].

As a result, most of the peacekeepers were from the Netherlands, France and Britain and the Dutch peacekeepers repeatedly asked for NATO air strikes, but UN commanders rejected the appeal by claiming there might be hostages involved and an air strike could potentially kill UN forces[CITE]. However, this presented a prime opportunity for the UN to intervene as their casualties would have been minimal and would have stopped the Serbs dead in their tracks, but the UN's inaction resulted in the massacre of thousands of Bosniaks in July of 1995.

After the damage had already been done, the UN decided to send in air strikes a month later and ended the war swiftly within five months, in November, demonstrating that they had the capability to resolve this conflict and if they had acted sooner, they would have been able to cripple the Serb's offensive and save thousands of lives. After examination of the evidence provided, it is clear that the United Nations failure on multiple occasions to intervene in the Bosnian war resulted in the genocide of thousands of innocent Bosniaks.

The first mistake they made was trying to sugar coat what was really going on by calling the massacres and ethnic cleansing and not properly classifying it as genocide, as that would involve military intervention as per the Genocide Convention. By limiting their involvement in the war, the UN was only able to send a small number of troops for humanitarian purposes. Furthermore, they attempted to set up safe zones after demilitarizing those areas and leaving the citizens of the safe area defenseless, in addition to the UN troops that were uninformed about when to use force.

Additionally, the Dutch peacekeepers were ill equipped and exhausted due to lack of resources and replacement troops, as well as several rejected requests for air raids. The problem was exacerbated when the UN reached an agreement with the Serbs to send convoy trucks containing resources and relief, which as a result stopped the UN sending relief via air packages, in addition to the Serbs taking the resources from the convoys and limiting what relief ultimately reached the safe areas.

Finally, after the UN completed their investigation into the genocide, Secretary General Kofi Annan admitted that the UN failed to do its part in

protecting the people of Srebrenica. Therefore it is conclusive that the UN's refusal to supply more troops, lack of protection around safe areas, inability to provide proper equipment, failure to assume responsibility of humanitarian relief and through their own admission undoubtedly confirms that the UN was negligible in preventing the genocide in Bosnia. It is often lamented that " history repeats itself" and in this case, it couldn't be truer.