

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UN created the Safe Areas to forestall ethnic cleansing and other human rights violations against the civilian populations of Bihać, Goražde, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Tuzla and Žepa. This apprehension stemmed largely from the record of crimes committed by Croatian- and Bosnian-Serb forces during 1991-1992. Whereas the international community was eager to “do something” to protect civilians in the six besieged towns, France, Great Britain and the USA were primarily interested in *appearing* to “do something” but were unwilling to incur the financial, military, and political sacrifices necessary to render the Safe Areas effective. Although non-permanent members of the UN Security Council such as Hungary, Pakistan, New Zealand and Venezuela sought “protected zones” the UNSC’s permanent members created a Safe Area system that lacked deterrence.

The Bosnian-Serb military (VRS) had a legitimate right to besiege all six towns, a task that was complicated by the imposition of UN resolutions and counterattacks by Bosnian government forces (ARBiH). Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that the VRS was not guided in its choice of tactics by concern for international law. During the course of operations, VRS forces resorted to massive, indiscriminate attacks against civilians in the Safe Areas that violated international law. The most notable violations consisted of (1) the shelling of civilians areas, particularly in Sarajevo and Goražde, (2) the targeting of several prominent civilian structures within the capital such as Koševo hospital, the National Library and National Museum, (3) sniper attacks against civilians from the VRS-occupied heights around Sarajevo, (4) the intermittent interdiction of humanitarian relief supplies to several of the Safe Areas.

Although not conclusive, existing evidence indicates that VRS was most likely responsible for the three disputed mortar attacks against a Sarajevo breadline (February 1992), the marketplace (February 1994) and city market (August 1995). Without exception, “evidence” presented by the Bosnian-Serb have been discredited by subsequent investigation. Moreover, the aggregate record of the VRS besiegers -- particularly the massive resort to indiscriminate shelling and VRS snipers’ specific targeting of individual civilians -- renders moot the debate over of any one incident, since it leaves uncontested the premise for international intervention, namely that the Bosnian-Serbs had engaged violated international law with impunity.

Each of the three disputed “mortar massacres” inspired the great powers to threaten military intervention and the UN to impose various restrictions on the VRS. The creation of a 20-km. heavy weapons “total exclusion zone” prompted the VRS to reallocate artillery during the course of 1994, thereby shifting the focus of siege operations to the Goražde and Bihać Safe Areas. By the beginning of 1995, the imminent threat of a HV-ARBiH offensive and the vulnerability of UNProFor to hostage taking emboldened VRS commander Ratko Mladić to eliminate the three eastern Safe Areas of Goražde, Srebrenica and Žepa. After an initial offensive in May 1995 failed to capture the high ground around Goržde, he turned to Srebrenica and Žepa, both of which fell in July 1995.

Following the fall of Srebrenica, VRS units expelled approximately thirty thousand civilian women and children and then systematically murdered between 6,500 and 8,800 men and boys in a well-coordinated operation directed by General Ratko

Mladić. The victims were then buried in mass graves, although the bodies were soon disinterred and reburied in fresh graves after aerial surveillance located them. The precise number of massacre victims is presently impossible to fix, both because of the efforts to hide the evidence and because an undetermined fraction of Bosnian males died in the process of fleeing the enclave, primarily from VRS artillery and small arms fire, but also from fratricide, suicide, and accidents (such as drowning crossing the Jadar River). Nonetheless, the evidence of a massacre is overwhelming, and includes the recovery of over four thousand bodies by forensics teams, the testimony of survivors, confessions of several Bosnian-Serb accomplices, and the official judgment a *Republika Srpska* commission.

Although the number of victims is small by comparison, there is substantial evidence that Bosnian-Serb civilians who remained in Sarajevo were murdered, principally during the first year of the siege by criminal gangs led by Ramiz “Celo” Delalić and Mušan Caco Topalović. Anecdotal testimony suggests random attacks against individuals or small groups of up to fifty civilians. Further research is needed to ascertain the extent of (1) crimes committed against Serb civilians within and around Safe Areas such as Sarajevo, Srebrenica and Žepa, and (2) the extent to which the Yugoslav political and military leadership knew about and assisted in the Srebrenica massacre.