

4: Ethnic Cleansing & War Crimes, 1991-1995

BULLET PAGE

- Between 1991 and 1995, approximately three million people were displaced in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to “ethnic cleansing” - “a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”
- Most scholars concur that “Ethnic cleansing” (1) is carried out *systematically*, (2) identifies and *targets specific groups* by ethnicity, nationality, or religion, (3) entails the *deliberate use of violence*, and (4) reflects the intent of the *authorities either to support such a practice or to refrain from prevention*.
- “Ethnic cleansing” and other crimes were evidently perpetrated to some extent by all parties in the conflict, and there were victims on all sides, although the gravity and dimension differed markedly. The great majority of the violations were committed in April-October 1992 by Serb forces against Bosniacs, and, to a lesser extent, against Croats. Croat forces also conducted “ethnic cleansing” campaigns against Serbs in eastern and western Slavonia and the Krajina, and against Bosniacs in the Mostar and Central Bosnia region. In a few instances, Bosnian Muslim forces victimized Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but on a much smaller scale than the other belligerents. There is no evidence to support claims by Serbian media in 1991-92 of master plans to commit genocide against Bosnia’s or Croatia’s Serbian minorities.
- Within Bosnia, perhaps 70% of all expulsions and deaths occurred in April-August 1992, the overwhelming majority committed by Serbian forces. Of the final tally of 2.2 million expellees and 100,000 killed, a clear majority were Bosniacs. Over 80% of non-Serbs disappeared from the territory of Republika Srpska. In the summer of 1995, a large part of the Serb population in the Croatian and Bosnian Kraljinas either fled or were deliberately expelled by Croat military forces.
- The minutes of Rump Yugoslavia’s Supreme Defense Council show conclusively that the VJ provided the VRS and SVK with extensive logistic and financial assistance, including the payment of salaries for roughly 4,800 VRS military officers.
- The VJ General Staff held monthly meetings with representatives from the VRS and SVK in Belgrade in order to coordinate equipment, economic and technical assistance. The “Drina Plan” adopted in November 1993 anticipated the coordination of the three armies’ operations in the case of an escalation of the conflict in order to “create conditions for the establishment of a single state of the Serbian people.”
- Belgrade’s political and military leadership was well aware that the Bosnian Serb armed forces’ policy of ethnic cleansing made no clear distinction between military action against Bosnian Muslim troops and attacks against Muslim civilians, and that crimes were committed systematically on a large scale.
- “Ethnic cleansing” should not *per se* be equated with “genocide” (defined as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group). To date, only a few of the most extreme examples of “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be characterized as acts of genocide, most notably the Srebrenica massacre in 1995. Forcible transfer does not constitute in and of itself a genocidal act. Only when “ethnic cleansing” implies the specific intent of extermination, does it represent genocide.