

## **The U.S., Bosnia, and Henry Kissinger's Lie**

By Michael Sells

Mon, 16 Oct 95

On the Charlie Rose Show, Sept 14, 1995, Henry Kissinger argued for what would be in effect an ethnic-partition and religious apartheid in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Kissinger urged a dividing up the country between Croatia and Serbia and, in effect, forcing the Muslims (and any Bosnians who wanted a state not based on "ethnic-cleansing") into a ghetto in the center. The basis of Kissinger's argument was his claim that "There is no Bosnian culture."

Ironically, the person who has done most to disprove Kissinger's remark is none other than Serb General Ratko Mladic, who has spent four years busily trying to destroy the vast testimony to Bosnian culture.

He burned down the National Library in Sarajevo with three days of shelling by incendiary grenades--the largest book burning in modern history. Over a million books and 100,000 manuscripts and rare books were burned, including much of the ancient South Slavic heritage of Bosnia.

He selected out and shelled the Oriental Institute manuscript collection in Sarajevo, with its collection of 5000 Bosnian manuscripts in Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Adzamijski (Bosnian Slavic written in Arabic script).

He shelled repeatedly and deliberately the National Museum with its priceless collection of Bosnian art. A few objects, such as the Sarajevo Haggadah were saved by courageous Bosnians (Croat, Muslim, Serb, and Jewish) who risked their lives to save as much of their Bosnian cultural heritage as possible. One of his soldiers even lined up the Bosnian art collection of a Sarajevan artist (who was Serb) and "executed" them by drilling them with machine-gun fire.

Mladic's soldiers selected out artists, writers, teachers, and scholars for particularly brutal tortures and killings in his concentration camps.

Mladic's army joined irregular Serb militias in dynamiting over 600 mosques, including the masterworks of European architecture and Bosnian heritage: the Colored Mosque in Foca (built in 1551) and the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka (1583). Mladic's men also dynamited Catholic churches throughout the area of occupation.

In places he couldn't occupy, Mladic deliberately shelled hundreds of other Bosnian architectural treasures. The famous Ghazi Husrev Beg Mosque in Sarajevo (1531) was repeatedly targeted. In Mostar, Mladic's army shelled the cathedral in Mostar, the Karadjoz Bey Mosque, entire historical districts, as well as the regional archives of Herzegovina. The Jewish graveyard in Sarajevo was dug up and scattered all over by Mladic's troops. Mladic's troops annihilated, systematically, the ancient heritage of Trebinje, another city in Herzegovina. These shellings and demolitions were not the result of collateral damage. The targets were selected carefully and the areas around them were left unscathed./1/

Why would General Ratko Mladic spend four years destroying a culture that didn't exist in the first place?

No possible reason. The idea is absurd. Mladic's four years of frantic destruction was an attempt to destroy something that very much existed and very much still exists.

Mladic targeted the vibrant, powerful, and beautiful testimonies to Bosnian culture so that some day, advocates of religious apartheid in Bosnia, such as Henry Kissinger, could declare: "there is no Bosnian culture." People looking at the parking lots where mosques and churches and art museums and music schools and libraries and manuscript collections once stood would say: "I guess Kissinger is right."

And if there is no Bosnian culture, why not divide Bosnia, as Kissinger and General Mladic wish, between Croatia and Serbia, and herd the Muslims into a central ghetto? (How many non-Christian ghettos have survived in Europe since 1096, the first crusade?)

The same Kissinger-type reasoning was used by advocates of apartheid in South Africa. There was no "African culture", they said, so why not put Africans on reservations called homelands and have apartheid?

The same approach was used during the extermination of the American Indian nations. There was no Native American Culture so why not put the American Indians on reservations or "ethnically cleanse" those who refuse to go to the reservations?

There is only one problem with Kissinger's statement and his plan. As with South Africa and the American Indians, so with Bosnia, cultures are hard to kill.

You can kill people and you can dynamite mosques or desecrate cemeteries. You can build the concentration camps and killing centers that are now being exposed before the world at the UN War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. After the people have been "cleansed" (killed or driven into refugee camps) and their monuments have been destroyed, you can, like Kissinger, claim these the culture never existed in the first place.

But you cannot kill the spirit of a great culture. Present-day South Africa is testimony to that. The very survival of the American Indian culture is testimony to that. And the perseverance and survival of Bosnians, rooted in their ancient and powerful culture that was made up of a variety of religions and cultural influences powerfully blended into a great culture, gives the lie to Kissinger.

All the bombs, shells, concentration camps, rapes, and mass-killings of General Mladic have only served to do one thing: to put Bosnian culture into the fire and steel it into purer and more resilient metal /2/.

And at a time when extremists of all sides in the U.S. are demanding apartheid, separation of races and religions, and religious and racial wars--at a time when some people are saying "American culture doesn't exist"-- Bosnian culture survives the overwhelming destructiveness of the Serb army, the betrayal by Croat extremists, the collaboration with the

genocide by the NATO nations which could have stopped it in 1992, and the lie by the likes of Henry Kissinger.

Bosnian culture is sending us a message.

In the United States, if we want a society where people of different races, religion, and backgrounds share a common culture and build a united nation, then we are Bosnians. If we insist that cultures are not made by "ethnic cleansing" or apartheid and if we insist that division of people into ethnic, religious, and racial ghettos is not a solution, we are Bosnians. If we insist that people of different races, religions, and background can work together and build a common culture, then we are Bosnians.

And if we sit back and allow the authors of genocide like General Mladic and the apostles of apartheid like Henry Kissinger to triumph in Bosnia, we will not likely be able to save our own culture /3/.

The end

---

1. This piece was originally posted on the internet newsgroup alt.current-events.bosnia on October 14, 1995.

For information on the war on Bosnian culture, see Andras Riedlmayer, "Erasing the Past: The Destruction of Libraries and Archives in Bosnia-Herzegovina MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ASSOCIATION BULLETIN, vol. 29 no. 1 (July 1995), pp. 7-11" and "Killing Memory: Bosnia's Cultural Heritage and its Destruction" VHS videocassette, 41 minutes (Haverford, PA: Community of Bosnia Foundation, 1994).

Also see Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz, WHY BOSNIA (Pamphleteer's Press, 1993). For a historical overview, see Noel Malcolm, BOSNIA: A SHORT HISTORY (New York University Press, 1994).

2. For one example of the Bosnian response to destruction, see Sarajevo Expo 92, an exhibit of seventeen works by major Sarajevan artists created during the worst period of the shelling of Sarajevo. The exhibit is being displayed at various places in the U.S. by Aida Musanovic, one of the artists.

3. This short article is dedicated to the hundreds of Bosnians who have been killed while risking their lives to save art, manuscripts, and other testimonies to their cultural heritage.