

## **REGIONAL REPORT: Can Anyone Arrest Karadzic?**

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The former Bosnian Serb leader pens dramas and political tomes, as Yugoslavia and NATO pass the buck over who should arrest him

The fugitive Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic is still at large because those who could arrest him do not want to take the risk of trying to bring him before The Hague tribunal.

NATO's secretary general, George Robertson, recently declared that responsibility lay with the signatories to the 1995 Dayton peace deal that ended the Bosnian conflict - Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina - as well as with the states that founded the tribunal, and the United Nations.

The hunt for Karadzic was not the primary task of the international peace forces in Bosnia, he said. "Responsibility for the arrest of war criminals is not up to the military alliance," he told BBC television on April 28.

The Bosnian Serb entity, the Republika Srpska, RS, and Yugoslavia are the only possible areas where he might be hiding. Both are obliged to arrest and extradite Hague indictees under laws on cooperation with The Hague that their respective parliaments have adopted.

But both authorities fear his arrest would cause a political backlash. They know Karadzic's numerous supporters would stigmatize them as traitors.

While the government of RS implausibly claims it does not even know of Karadzic's whereabouts, the real obstacle is that he retains a greater following among the public than any other politician.

The government includes many members of Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, founded by Karadzic, and the police and ministries are full of his supporters.

Yugoslavia also claims ignorance of Karadzic's whereabouts, though its leaders have publicly admitted they would not want to arrest him even if they did know where he was.

Serbia's prime minister, Zoran Djindjic, told the German daily Frankfurter Rundschau in April that his arrest might trigger public unrest. He passed the responsibility for action to the international peacekeepers in Bosnia, adding that if they could not apprehend him, no one else could.

No one should expect Serbia to act with only 20,000 lightly armed policemen, he said, "whilst the international peace forces in Bosnia with their 50,000 soldiers have not managed to arrest Karadzic or Mladic in five years".

The UN International Police Task Force in Bosnia is highly unlikely to arrest Karadzic, as it is in charge of supervising the local police and is unarmed.

But the international troops are not much more likely to net him. Robertson insisted they were obliged to

arrest suspects only if they "come across" them. This means NATO-led SFOR troops can act only if fugitives "cross their path".

Nevertheless, he added that SFOR would continue to take action to apprehend Karadzic. "Those hiding and supporting him, those who have information about his movements, will realise international justice does not give up," he said.

Karadzic recently accused SFOR's US general, John B Silvester, of abusing his mandate by attempting to arrest him in the village of

Celebici last February.

In a letter sent to Kosta Cavoski, a well-known law professor in Belgrade and president of the Committee for Truth about Radovan Karadzic, he added the general had written to his friends and relatives warning them not to help him evade arrest. The letter was published in the Belgrade tabloid Nedeljni Telegraf on April 24.

An SFOR spokesman, Scott Lundy, confirmed that such letters were being used as part of the arrest strategy. He told a Sarajevo press conference on April 25 that the correspondence was one of the "various methods and approaches" SFOR was adopting to bring war crime indictees to justice. "The letter Silvester recently dispatched to a close friend of Karadzic is one of those methods," he said.

Since the transfer of Karadzic's old mentor and sponsor, Slobodan Milosevic, to The Hague in June 2001, Belgrade has been forced to cease offering discrete support for RS's policy of non-cooperation with the tribunal.

The US administration, meanwhile, has made no secret of its desire to see the war crimes court wind up its work with the arrest and trial of Karadzic and his former military commander, Ratko Mladic.

This time pressure has lent a new urgency to the drive to get both men behind bars. Much to Belgrade's dismay, Washington has given Yugoslavia until October to arrest the two fugitives, diplomatic sources have told IWPR.

SFOR is clearly working on its own strategy for Karadzic's arrest in the meantime. Diplomatic sources in Bosnia say Silvester is concentrating on finding a defector in Karadzic's inner circle.

At the same time, SFOR is trying to garner sympathy for its actions among the local population. It hopes to include RS officials in the arrest to lessen the danger of a backlash and a general souring of attitudes towards SFOR.

The attempt to catch Karadzic from "within" is symptomatic of SFOR's approach. They want to avoid both body bags and unnecessary unpopularity.

The more the confused, hesitant bid to arrest Karadzic blunders on, the more seemingly bullish and confident the Bosnian Serbs' wartime leader has become. Although in hiding, he never misses an opportunity to promote himself. Not since 1996 has he enjoyed such a high public profile.

On April 22, his supporters even presented his latest play, Sitovacija, in Belgrade. The drama ridiculed the international forces in Bosnia and those Serbs who have tried to gain power through their offices.

It was "the best testimony that our hero is not only in good health, but in good spirits as well," Cavoski said at the launch, adding that two volumes of Karadzic's texts on the Serb national question would soon be published. They "represent the most important work on Serbs and Serbia at the end of the 20th century," he went on.

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**Location:** Serbia  
Croatia  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

**Focus:** International Criminal Tribunal for the former  
Yugoslavia

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