

## **REPORT: French Srebrenica Inquiry**

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A French commission publishes findings of investigation into whether the country bore any responsibility for the Srebrenica massacre.

A French parliamentary commission has conceded that France "carries part of the blame" for the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica where 7000- 8000 Bosnian civilians were killed by Serb forces.

The 10-member group said French General Bernard Janvier, commander of UNPROFOR forces for former Yugoslavia at the time, was too hesitant about ordering air strikes against Bosnian Serb troops, a move which they said might have prevented the massacre.

Testifying before the commission, Janvier defended his actions and, in a statement likely to inflame diplomatic relations with The Netherlands, was scathing about the 400 Dutch UN troops who failed to resist Serb forces.

"If there had been 400 Frenchmen in Srebrenica it would have been different," he said. "We would have fought. The Dutch were ordered to fight. When you get such an order it is your duty to fight..."

"We would have used weapons such as 81-mm cannons. Any armoured vehicle is equipped with 50 mm machine gun. We would have fought and I am convinced we would have pushed the Serbs back."

The probe by deputies of all parties was set up following strong pressure from the renowned French humanitarian group Medecins Sans Frontiers. The organisation had representatives stationed in the UN protected zone when it fell into the hands of Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic.

The commission's 1200-page report detailed the results of an inquiry lasting nearly a year. Its main objective was to determine what responsibility French military and political officials should bear for the tragedy.

One of the report's fundamental conclusions was, "There was no strong political will to intervene in Srebrenica, not by the French, not the British, nor the Americans, but not even by the Bosnian authorities in Sarajevo".

A majority of commission members absolved Janvier of a charge levelled by Medecins Sans Frontiers that he held back NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb positions around Srebrenica as part of a deal to release UN hostages held by Mladic.

Deputies François Leotard and René André challenged three sentences in the report. The first one noted, "Srebrenica is also a defeat for France". The second remarked that "France is no less responsible than the others for the tragic fall of Srebrenica". And the third maintained, "France did not do all it could to fulfil its mission properly".

The two deputies said these claims were an unworthy reflection on the 56 French soldiers killed in Yugoslavia peacekeeping missions, mostly in Bosnia. They said French forces had saved security zones that were under their direct protection, namely Sarajevo and Bihac.

The report demanded that "France, Britain and America should use all means to arrest those accused of crimes against humanity, Ratko Mladic and his political leader Radovan Karadzic".

Deputies Pier Brana and Marie-Hélène Aubert expressed regret that the term "genocide" was not explicitly used in commission's report, especially in reference to Hague indictees Karadzic and Mladic. And especially since Bosnian Serb general, Radislav Krstic, was on August 2, 2001, convicted of genocide for his crimes in Srebrenica.

The commission concluded that blame for the massacre also lay with other leading countries of the UN and NATO which showed "permanent ambivalence" towards Bosnia. It also criticised UN representative Yasushi Akashi of Japan whom Janvier accused of taking a "minimalist concept of the Blue Helmets' role in Bosnia".

Janvier, whose evidence covered 70 pages of the report, also disagreed with British General Rupert Smith, UNPROFOR commander for Sarajevo, who urged resolute military action against Serb forces.

Janvier held the view that military force should be used only as a last resort.

Much of his statement concentrated on the shortcomings of intelligence. "UNPROFOR units were not fighting forces," he said "That is why they did not have the intelligence network required in war. This was one of (their) biggest weaknesses.

"For example UN forces thought 26 Serb tanks were positioned around Sarajevo in the time of siege. When on 14 September, 1995, Serbs had to withdraw heavy weapons under pressure, we counted 56 tanks. And when we occupied the Serb zone in January 1996, we found ten more in hangars."

Janvier complained that the US military officials would not pass on information obtained through their high technology intelligence system because the Americans always wanted to "discredit the French". He argued that US Admiral Leighton Smith, commander of NATO forces in southern Europe, had as much authority as he did to order air strikes but failed to do so.

The commission published transcripts of evidence from other French generals including Philippe Morillon, UNPROFOR commander from October 1993 to July 1994, and Hervé Gobilliard, commander of the Sarajevo sector from 1994 to 1995.

But it said General Rupert Smith, the then-UN general secretary Bhutros Bhutros Gali and the UN High Commissioner for refugees, Sadako Ogata, all declined invitations to appear before the commission.

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