

Par reci o nagodbama za priznanje krivice u razotkrivanju Srebrenice

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As a result of his plea agreement, Miroslav Deronjic, former civilian head of the War Staff in Srebrenica, has provided invaluable information to the Tribunal, not only about the 1995 events in Srebrenica. [See, 'Srebrenica Exposed: A Word About Plea Agreements'] His recent statement submitted in the Milosevic case tells a tale of Serbian arms smuggling and clandestine preparations for war in Bosnia. It bolsters the view that, at least in the early years, Bosnian Serb forces together with units from the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), Serbian State Security (DB) and paramilitaries formed one army.

Deronjic first learned about efforts to arm the Bosnian Serbs in spring 1991, through Goran Zekic, a local Serb leader involved in arms smuggling. Behind the arms operation was Radovan Karadzic, then leader of the SDS (Serbian Democratic Party) and later President of Republika Srpska (RS), who had no confidence the JNA would protect the Bosnian Serbs. At the time, the JNA remained an all Yugoslav army which had not yet decided where its future lay after disintegration of the state.

The witness participated in an early transfer of weapons from Serbia to the Bosnian Serbs. Together with Zekic, he traveled to Belgrade where they met Mihalj Kertes in the Serbian Presidency building. While his official position at that time remains murky, Kertes told the two Bosnian Serbs that he had charge of arming Serbs in Croatia and Kosovo. He was trying to impress them, Deronjic decided. Nevertheless, they concluded an arrangement for truckloads of military supplies to be transferred from the JNA depot in Buban Potok (near Belgrade) to Bosnia, with a stopover in Serbia. Deronjic described how it was eventually carried out with weapons temporarily stored at sites in the Bratunac area until they were needed. Though he didn't participate in further transfers, he testified that one or two more were made in this manner.

On cross examination, Milosevic asked the witness if he thought Kertes was in a position to issue orders to the Army. Deronjic replied, 'Obviously he was. Arms from Buban Potok came not only to Bratunac but other municipalities.' The Accused suggested the need to hide arms shipments in Serbia after they left Buban Potok contradicted the witness's statement that the Police in Serbia approved of the arms smuggling. However, as both Accused and witness agreed, the shipments were illegal. Generally, when police abet illegal activity, they do so quietly.

Weapons were also obtained through the JNA. One channel was through the Uzice Corps, whose commander at that time was Dragoljub Ojdanic (indicted by the Tribunal for his role in Kosovo). Deronjic describes an organized system for JNA assistance to the Bosnian Serbs: 'We [he and Goran Zekic] were told then that the Uzice Corps was tasked with providing that kind of logistics [weapons and other assistance] to Srebrenica and Visegrad. When I asked about Bratunac, he [unidentified intermediary] told me that Valjevo Corps was in charge of us. . . . So, I know that the Uzice Corps during '91 and later provided assistance, in terms of weaponry and ammunition, to Srebrenica and later on to Skelani.' By summer or fall of 1991, the Bosnian Serbs had stored enough arms in a large warehouse at Milici that there was no need to procure more.

More weapons did come in, however, despite a UN embargo. One way this happened was during training of local Serbs by the JNA, Deronjic learned from his brother-in-law who was involved in the training. The JNA transported truckloads of weapons for the training, which remained with the individual trainees after it was completed. On cross examination, Milosevic elicited Deronjic's agreement that the reason only Bosnian Serbs were being trained was that Muslims and Croats had boycotted conscription. For whatever reason, the JNA in Bosnia was largely a Serb army by summer 1991. And, Deronjic pointed out, it was not normal for trainees to retain their weapons after they completed training.

The former SDS (Serbian Democratic Party) official also gave information about the SDS Plan to divide Bosnia, ethnically cleanse areas of their non-Serb populations, and form a Greater Serbia with the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro. The SDS formed the basis of the Bosnian Serb leadership which later became the Republika Srpska (RS).

In the spring of 1991, the top and local SDS leadership held a meeting in Sarajevo. Karadzic told the assembled gathering that for all intents and purposes Yugoslavia didn't exist any longer, in which case the only option for Serbs in Bosnia was a Greater Serbia. 'He also mentioned that if Bosnia were to leave Yugoslavia, then the only option would be the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. . . .' In his cross examination, Milosevic asserted that the Bosnian Serbs didn't make a plan to separate themselves. Rather,

they were excluded by the actions of the Bosnian Muslims. While Deronjic agreed that Serbs were effectively excluded, he did not agree they had made no plan themselves.

In fact, the SDS made extensive plans for the future of the Bosnian Serbs. The witness recalled an informal gathering of Karadzic, various prominent SDS leaders and himself at a restaurant where Karadzic said it had been agreed that Bosnia would be divided. 'He didn't explain where this was agreed and what was agreed. He only said it like that.' [This occurred a month after the Karadjordjevo meeting between Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic, where they reportedly 'divided up Bosnia' between Croatia and Serbia.]

From August to October 1991, Bosnian Serbs began to form autonomous regions, which gave rise to the infamous ethnic map. Local leaders were required to mark a map with the existing ethnic composition of their municipalities. At a December 19, 1991 meeting of the SDS in Sarajevo, Karadzic unveiled another phase of the plan. Each municipality was designated Variant A or Variant B, depending on whether its Serb population was in the majority (A) or the minority (B) and instructions were given to the local SDS leadership accordingly. 'The instructions identified precise steps to be taken within the respective municipalities in order to establish Bosnian Serb control.'

Bratunac was a Variant B municipality, with a non-Serb majority. Immediately on Deronjic's and his delegation's return to Bratunac they took steps to implement their instructions. They first formed a Crisis Staff (Deronjic was selected President) and then a local Serb Assembly. These were put in place, pending Serb assumption of control over the municipality.

The next phase of the plan was the initiation of military actions to take over the municipalities. According to Deronjic, it followed a pattern that was similar in Bijeljina, Visegrad, Zvornik, Skelani, Bratunac and Srebrenica. First, 'volunteers' from Serbia would arrive and provoke unrest, including killings, intimidation, etc. After that, the JNA would arrive to 'introduce order.' The Army's presence, Deronjic said, further intimidated the local Muslim population, 'which would be followed by ethnic cleansing.' 'These events in fact caused the transfer of population in the Podrinje region. I'm fully convinced that none of these events were coincidental. All these events were planned, they were an integral part of a plan, and that what preceded them was implementation of other elements of the plan.'

The arrival of the 'volunteers' before the outbreak of any conflict, Deronjic pointed out, is further evidence that a plan existed. Equally, the JNA's appearance and intervention on the side of the Serbs supports a conclusion of planning.

Deronjic described the implementation of the plan in his municipality, Bratunac. On April 17, 1992, a uniformed and well-equipped group of young men and a few women arrived in Bratunac. At a meeting with representatives of the Muslim population, the group commander presented them with an ultimatum to withdraw from all organs of power in the municipality. The Muslims drew Deronjic aside and asked if he could guarantee their safety. He said he could not, nor could he provide permits for them to leave the area. He 'might have been insolent to them,' he told the OTP. Deronjic was fully in favor of the plan, at this time.

Later that night, the 'volunteers,' with intent to create panic in the population, 'were driving madly around town, shooting, turning their sirens on, and basically creating chaos all night long.' There was also widespread looting. The local population watched as the volunteers drove cars loaded with goods across the bridge into Serbia. Within a few days, a group of Bosnian Muslims headed by Naser Oric, set up an ambush in which many of the volunteers were killed. Another, smaller group of Serbian volunteers replaced the first.

A small armoured mechanised unit of the JNA arrived within a few days of the ambush, commanded by a Captain Reljic. One or two days later, he proclaimed military rule and proceeded to implement the campaign of disarming Muslim villages in the Bratunac municipality. At the same time, the local SDS organized civilian structures so they could resume operation in the absence of Muslim staff.

It was during the ethnic cleansing of Glogova, one of the Muslim villages in Bratunac municipality, that Deronjic committed the crimes to which he pled guilty. In the 'Factual Basis' supporting his plea, Deronjic admitted to ordering and participating in the attack on Glogova. He personally ordered that some of the Muslim houses be destroyed to sow panic among the population. There was no resistance from the population. Deronjic's statement concludes, 'As a result of the attack on the village of Glogova on the 9th of May 1992, 65 Bosnian Muslim residents of the village were murdered, the entire Bosnian Muslim population of the village was forcibly displaced and a substantial number of Bosnian Muslim residences in Glogova were razed to the ground. The mosque was also burned and destroyed.' While Deronjic didn't physically commit any of the murders, it was a natural and foreseeable consequence of the attack. He was willing to take the risk.

Shortly afterwards, Deronjic went to Pale to report the results. On the ethnic map he colored Glogova blue, the color designated for Serb majority areas. 'I reported that Glogova had been partly destroyed and torched to a large extent and that the Bosnian Muslim population had been forcibly removed. After making

this report, those assembled in the conference room applauded . . . and Velibor Ostojic commented 'now we can colour Bratunac blue.'

There was one further operation in Bratunac town (May 10 & 11) conducted by the JNA together with a local sabotage detachment and the police to assure Bratunac was completely cleansed of its Muslim population. Remaining non-Serb citizens were ordered to go to the stadium, where men and women were separated, valuables confiscated and women placed on buses. Men were held, according to one of the 'volunteers,' to exchange for Serbs imprisoned elsewhere. Deronjic and Crisis Staff members felt this explanation was implausible, but the volunteer insisted Commander Reljic knew about it. The Crisis Staff protested, but lacked power to do anything at the time.

Within a few days, Deronjic heard people were being beaten and murdered in the hangar. In addition to volunteers, local Serbs were allowed entry to participate in the beating and killing. After trying unsuccessfully to get the military to stop the crimes, Deronjic called a meeting of the Crisis Staff. They decided to release the prisoners under cover of night with assistance from the civil and military police. About 400 people were transported to Pale where they were turned over to the authorities.

On the following day, the Crisis Staff passed a resolution expelling all the volunteers. They also expelled the JNA commander Reljic, who, they learned, had proposed to liquidate Deronjic. According to the witness, 'the JNA stayed in Bosnia Hersegovina until 15 of May [1992]. It was clear that the JNA sided with the Serbs and that it supported the implementation of the plan.'

Deronjic then revealed the extensive involvement of the Serbian State Security Service and its special Red Beret unit in the region. As early as April 1991, Predrag Spasojevic from Serbian State Security came to the region to set up and train small groups that would be the nucleus of the first paramilitaries in Bratunac. Spasojevic had good contacts with the military and the JNA, according to the witness.

In June, with Serb civilian delegations from municipalities throughout the region, he was called to a meeting of the Territorial Defense, where Franko Simatovic [aka, Frenki], head of the Serbian DB special operations unit (known as the 'Red Berets'), addressed them. Frenki explained that he came with orders from 'the highest level of military, political, and state circles of Republika Srpska and Serbia.' The Serbian DB would set up a series of training camps in all the municipalities, with instructors from the special units of the SDB. The local civil authorities were to secure facilities and provide logistical support. Since the RS had already established its own army (VRS), one of its commanders asked who was to command these new formations. 'Mr. Franko Simatovic told us that it was a special structure, that he was in command of it, and that each camp would have its own commander.' It was separate from the VRS, but 'he said that they would naturally cooperate' with it. The local authorities were tasked with recruiting local citizens to be trained. Simatovic also had operational command of an air base established in the area under General Ratko Mladic's general command.

The directive to establish local paramilitary units headed by Serbian DB was carried out. The instructors from Serbia, with their trainees, also participated in combat operations in Bosnia. In addition, Deronjic learned that the instructors were paid by the Serbian Minister of the Interior and that special weapons (with night vision, infrared rays, etc.) were supplied to them from Serbia.

Later, when Deronjic and his Crisis Staff tried to expel these instructors, Mladic intervened and prevented it. Deronjic reported that the units committed crimes against the local Serb population as well as non-Serbs. They looted Serb property, arrested and tortured Serbs. 'The torture was severe. I experienced it myself. It included electrical shocks and forcing people to eat 1 kilogram of salt a day. . . . People were severely beaten up with baseball bats. . . . Some people were forced to eat paper because they didn't like some of their statements.' Except for the one statement here, Deronjic was otherwise reticent about his own arrest, detention and abuse at the hands of these paramilitaries.

Deronjic described seeing the JNA's paratroop brigade from Nis, Serbia at Konjevic Polje following its takeover by Serb forces. The JNA Valjevo Corps also entered Bratunac to assist with the campaign of cleansing the area of its non-Serb population. Except that General Philippe Morillon of UNPROFOR stepped in at Srebrenica, the onslaught of combined local Serb, JNA, Serbian DB and paramilitaries would have taken the entire region in 1993. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces undertook to finish the job with tragic consequences.

For his part, Deronjic was angry that, as a result of the campaign in 1992-93, a large segment of the Bosnian Muslim population from the area was pushed into Bratunac municipality. It made more sense, he complained, to direct them to Tuzla, which was held by Bosnian Government forces. He learned that Rajko Dukic, a businessman who stood to gain from the arrangement, had advocated for it with Mladic. '[T]he whole action was planned in the Yugoslav general staff, with Dukic.' Deronjic said. 'So we're talking about Belgrade, the Yugoslav general staff in Belgrade.'

In our column of 25 November 2003, we discussed the value of Deronjic's detailed statement about events

surrounding the Srebrenica massacre. His information on Serbian involvement in the war in Bosnia is also detailed and extremely useful in the case against Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic, at every opportunity, repeats his mantra that 'Neither Serbia nor I had anything to do with the war in Bosnia.' Deronjic is not the only witness to present contradictory evidence. Indeed, Karadzic himself, through transcripts of his statements before the RS Assembly, asserted that the RS could not have accomplished its military successes without Serbia and Milosevic. Deronjic's evidence is equally strong. He was there, he participated, he saw what was happening. Not only did Serbia supply weapons, its State Security Service (in practice, directly answerable to Milosevic) trained and commanded paramilitary groups to wage war in Bosnia. After Deronjic's testimony, there seems little question that Serbia was a major player in the Bosnian war. It could not have done that without the full knowledge and participation of its president, Slobodan Milosevic.

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