

SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

**“POLITICAL AND MILITARY RELEVANCE OF THE DEFENSE OF SARAJEVO  
1992 - 1995”**

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*Abstract for a paper presentation*

“Genocide and International Intervention:  
The Problematic Legacy of the Dayton Peace Accords 1995-2012.”

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This paper proposes to address the problematic legacy of the Dayton Peace Accords. The paper explores, in this respect, the extent to which Republika Srpska was founded as a genuinely dehumanizing zone of exclusion. When Republika Srpska was declared in 1992, the declaration entailed both a linguistic and a conceptual violence. The literal meaning of the name was “Serb Republic,” and the implication was that it was a territory “of and for Serbs” in which non-Serbs were not welcome. This was a linguistic violence because the territory of Republika Srpska was imposed on areas where Bosniaks also lived and where, in many cases, they were the incontestable majority.

Tragically, the linguistic violence of the imposition of Republika Srpska was soon to become a physical violence as well, a violence aimed at the exclusion, or the expulsion of Bosniaks from that territory. As has been well documented, the physical violence amounted to persecution, extermination, murder, deportation, inhumane acts and other crimes. From Foča to Višegrad, from Srebrenica to Zvornik, from Bijeljina to Prijedor, Republika Srpska was created on a foundation of war crimes, including genocide and crimes against humanity. More than 350 mass graves have been discovered

within the territory of Republika Srpska, and the human remains of the Bosniak victims are still being identified. It has not escaped our attention that the founding leaders of Republika Srpska have all been indicted, or tried, or convicted of war crimes.

Republika Srpska was subsequently recognized and legitimized by the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995. While the Dayton agreement ended the genocidal aggression, the recognition of Republika Srpska can be interpreted and criticized as a reward for a successful genocide. Hence, the necessary question for the international diplomatic community would be the following: in our time, after Auschwitz and Treblinka, and with the existence of the Genocide Convention, how could a genocidal aggression possibly be rewarded in this way?

Further, the paper seeks to clarify the extent to which Republika Srpska continues to be a dehumanizing zone of exclusion seventeen years after the Dayton Peace Accords. This zone of exclusion has the effect of discouraging Bosniaks from returning to their homes in Republika Srpska. Such a dynamic exclusion takes the form of ethnically laden cultural indicators. In addition to the territorial boundaries of Republika Srpska, for example, one can note the proliferation of new Serbian Orthodox churches across the landscape, churches which in some cases were constructed directly upon the ruins of Mosques that had been willfully destroyed. In addition, one notes the declaration of Cyrillic as the official alphabet of Republika Srpska and the installation of exclusively Cyrillic road signs. In a nation that uses two alphabets this is an unfortunate assertion of ethnic difference. One also finds prominent posters throughout Republika Srpska celebrating indicted war criminals such as Vojislav Šešelj. These posters include provocative ultranationalist images such as the map of “Greater Serbia,” or the depiction of the “White Eagles” military unit, and are a form of psychological terror directed against Bosniak returnees. Bosniaks who seek to install memorials to commemorate the atrocities in locations such as Višegrad, Foča or Kereterm, face formidable challenges. Finally, the cultural landscape is contaminated by the President of Republika Srpska’s denial of the genocide at Srebrenica as well as his divisive rhetoric of secession from Bosnia. In all of these ways, along with the fact that their homes have been destroyed or occupied, and employment is scarce, Bosniaks are discouraged from returning to their lives in Republika Srpska.

Raphael Lemkin, the well-known Polish-Jewish jurist who coined the term genocide and championed its inscription in international law, wrote that the crime of genocide has two phases: “one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national

pattern of the oppressor.”<sup>1</sup> The declaration of the ethnically denominated Republika Srpska within the national boundary of Bosnia imposed Serbian ethnicity and initiated the violent destruction of Bosniak culture within its territory. Following recognition at Dayton the authorities in Republika Srpska have systematically sustained the active exclusion of Bosniak culture. The legitimization of Republika Srpska and its genocidal legacy, as well as its political culture of exclusion that operates today are obstacles to reconciliation and justice. Finally, in the context of Lemkin’s statement cited above, the paper argues that the genocide that began in 1992 with the establishment of Republika Srpska is, in a sense, still ongoing. In this respect, the international diplomatic community must not only address the crimes of the past but must also find a way to address the extent to which Republika Srpska continues to be a dehumanizing zone of exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation - Analysis of Government - Proposals for Redress*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), p. 79 - 95.