**Betrayal of Bosnia by the United Nations and the World Community**

By Zeshan Shahbaz

    Since the early spring of 1992, the UN member state of Bosnia-Herzegovina was savagely attacked and its people butchered while the rest of the so-called civilized world watched and did next to nothing to halt it. The United Nations, which was set up to maintain international peace and security, failed in protecting, and betrayed, its UN member state: Bosnia-Herzegovina.

    Bosnia, from its inception, was looked upon as a place where a brutal civil war had started – this could not have been further from the actual facts. The truth was that this war was started by one-sided aggression. In reality, the nationalist Serb forces perpetrated the brutal war against the federal, legitimate Bosnian Government forces and its civilian population.

    In the following paragraphs, it will be outlined how the Bosnian State came in formation under the auspices of the UN, EC and World community. Then, factual accounts of the fascist and brutal aggression, which took place against the innocent civilians of Bosnia, will be exposed. And lastly, it will be proven, how the World Community betrayed Bosnia, and, how the UN defied its own UN resolutions and international laws in guaranteeing Bosnia's virtual destruction.

    Ever since 1987, when Serbian Nationalists had ruled the Yugoslav federation, its republics started seceding from the rump Yugoslavia dominated by Serbian nationalists – constitutionally the Yugoslav Republics had the right to secede. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the last of the former Yugoslav republics to secede.

    The succession of the Bosnian Republic was, starkly democratic, actually, more so than the succession of the other two former Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia and Croatia, for example, Roy Gutman stated: "In theory the new state was better off diplomatically than Slovenia or Croatia, for Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic had followed to the letter a plan prescribed by the United States and its European partners. Washington explicitly accepted Bosnia's "pre-crisis republic borders as the legitimate international borders.” Unlike Croatia and Slovenia, Bosnia could claim to be the victim of cross-border aggression and assert the right to self-defense under the UN charter."1

    The Bosnian government, on the advice of the EC, held an independent plebiscite in late February, 1992. In the referendum, which was held from February 29 to March 1st, 99.4 percent of the votes opted for full independence with a 63 percent turnout. Following this, the UN officially recognized Bosnia as an independent, sovereign UN member state. During and immediately after this, the siege of the Bosnian capital city Sarajevo began and invading Yugoslav Serb forces started the ethnic cleansing campaign of mostly Muslim civilians in eastern and northwestern Bosnia. The Yugoslav federal army or paramilitary forces under its supervision came in from Serbia and seized control of cities and towns on the Bosnian side of the Drina River, which forms the boundary between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.2 The Serb military began its most horrendous form of killings, rape, ethnic cleansing and genocide of mostly the Muslim population in the Bosnian town areas of Zvornik, Visegrad, Foca, Banja Luka and Bijeljina areas.  Civilians in these towns were systematically cleansed and killed. Concentration camps were also set up in towns of Banja Luka and Omarska where there were daily killings, torturing of mostly Muslim civilians. Following are factual accounts of the killings, rape and ethnic cleansing of Bosnian civilians as reported by Ed Vulliamy (Foreign Correspondent of the Year) and Roy Gutman (Foreign Correspondent who's book "A Witness to Genocide" won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize – Winning Dispatches on the 'Ethnic Cleansing' of Bosnia):

          The most ferocious 'ethnic cleansing' of all had begun in
          the satellite villages and towns around Banja Luka and
          Prijedor in the Bosnian Krajina, where in May the Serbs had
          declared their autonomous 'Serbian Republic of
          Bosnia-Herzegovina'. Between 150 and 200 homes, shops
          and mosques were being burned or dynamited every day in
          the Krajina, sending a tide of refugees towards Croatia which
          the UNCHR called the 'most serious refugee crisis since the
          Second World War'. 'Whole communities,' said Peter Kessler,
          the organization's spokesman, 'and whole towns have been
          emptied.' By the end of May, half a million people had been
          wrenched from their homes, and their number would more
          than double before the summer.3

          In the (Bosnian) town of Kozarac, there was barely a single
          house left undamaged and those that stood intact were
          occupied by apparently nonchalant Serbs. This town of
          25,000 had been 90 per cent Muslim, a 500-year-old
          settlement. Late in May, the Serbs had set about its
          methodical obliteration. According to relief workers, some
          3,000 people were killed. Later in the year, the Guardian's
          Ian Traynor and Tom Gjelten of US National Public Radio
          pieced together what had happened: 'The Serbs' operation
          was clinical, calculated and comprehensive. The local
          political, business and cultural elites were singled out for
          extermination…Emir Kevljanin, who stood at the crossroads
          with his wife and teenaged children, part of the exodus from
          Kozarac … said: "they were very systematic, destroying
          everyone who could bring about a revival of Kozarac."4

          General Mladic's army, with its Serbian patrons and a
          medley of local cohorts, moved across eastern Bosnia like a
          grim combine harvester. They linked together the top and
          bottom right-hand corners of the country, where Serbs were
          the majority, by displacing, sometimes killing, 200,000
          Muslims in between. In Zvornik, on the Bosnian-Serbian
          border, (Bosnian) fighters hoped to defend their community
          with hunting rifles by standing on the bridge linking it with
          Serbia. They dissapeared shortly after the arrival of a band
          calling itself the 'Serbian volunteer force'. The irregulars
          wreaked the first horror, the army would then move in and
          remove any remaining civilians and the death squads would
          'mop up'. Some Muslims fled, some were taken prisoner,
          some were killed, others were brought back over the border
          to await transport by railway boxcar to Hungary.5

The following account exposes the extreme human misery the Muslim and Croat civilians in Banja Luka were in:

          In the city, a reduced Muslim population hung on, subject
          to nightly murders and house burning. By mid-August, Banja
          Luka was a petrified city. Muslims were scared to be seen
          talking to any visitor, let alone journalists. One woman came
          up to us a few minutes before curfew just to say: 'They are
          killing us, one by one. My husband, my son have gone and
          are dead, and still they stand around the house, sitting on my
          wall, the same men, after dark. Can you get me out? Can
          you? By the end of the month, Vukic was local leader of SDS
          (Serbian nationalist party), and he passed an edict that no
          Muslim or Croatian woman was permitted to have a baby in
          any Banja Luka hospital. UNCHR officers trying in vain to
          work from Zagreb estimated that a quarter of a million
          Muslims were driven from their homes in the Bosnian
          Krajina alone during one single and brutal wave of
          'cleansing' in September.6

    Vulliamy and Gutman were the first ones to visit the death and concentration camps in Bosnia. Their accounts are horrifying. According to their accounts, people were tortured and killed daily. The conditions were inhumane, for example:

          The camp is an open pit where only a third of the
          prisoners have shelter from the elements and most have to
          stand in mud, according to a witness. Six to 10 people die
          daily. "The corpses pile up. There is no food. There is no air
          to breathe. No medical care. Even the grass around the pit
          has been completely clawed away,”7

    Another grotesque and horrible pogrom of the Serbs were massive and systematic rape of Muslim females. There were accounts that rapes were also done in sadistic and bestial fashion where they would kill after raping, rape young girls and women in public and in front of family members. Testimony gathered by the (Genocide in Zenica) commission includes that of a thirteen-year-old who was raped in front of her mother and who later died.8 One girl of fourteen was tied naked to a tank and driven around her village near Prijedor. After being raped, she was, as the collector of the testimony says, 'thrown in front of her parents so that they could see her half dead'.9 Approximately 25,000 Muslim women were raped by the Serbian army.

    Now the question arises where was the World Community and UN during systematic decimation and rape of the Bosnian civilians? What role did the International Community play in this crisis? Did they attempt to prevent genocide and destruction of a state and its people? On the whole, they miserably failed in preventing Bosnia’s impending destruction. The 'international community' actually played an indirect and sometimes as a direct third party to the annihilation of Bosnia and its people. The 'international community' firstly did this through the propagation of misinformation of the reality and nature of the Bosnian crisis. And secondly, it was by the impotent action in response to the genocide in Bosnia – actually, the United Nations and world community came up with policies that for the most part appeased the aggressors of Bosnia.

    Bosnia from the start was looked upon as a place where a brutal civil war had started – this was false. The fact is that it was the nationalist Serb forces (and later nationalist Croat forces) which perpetrated this brutal war against the Bosnian civilians, and the federal and legitimate Bosnian Government forces. Also, the federal Government of Bosnia was not exclusively "Muslim" as it was portrayed in world media and was erroneously painted out to be – it was a multi-ethnic government comprising of Muslims, Croats and Serbs alike. It was a multi-national, and legitimate, government of Bosnia who were trying to defend its indivisible, multi-ethnic nation of Bosnia from nationalistic terrorist forces:

          …the government of Bosnia (though often called in the press
          the Muslim government) is actually the government of those
          who want to keep Bosnia the entity it was; it is supported by
          much of the urban population of all ethnic groups. Most of
          the Sarajevo Serbs I know are still in the city, in favour
          of Izetbegovic's government. The present Bosnian cabinet
          (February 1993) contains nine Muslims, six Serbs, and
          five Croats. One third of the Territorial Defense forces of
          Sarajevo, including its second in command, is Serb. Thus
          Serbs (and Croats too) are on both sides. And both Croatian
          and Serb chauvinists want to depict the conflict as an ethnic
          war – to justify their states' territorial expansion, to demean
          the Bosnian cause by making it seem as if it too were just
          one more narrow ethnic one…10

  The propagandist exaggerations were put forth by Serbian and Croatian nationalists in which they influenced in forming world opinion:

          The Serbian and Croatian national extremists also realized
          that the goal of a genuinely multi-ethnic state was the key
          premise of Bosnia's claim to uniqueness in the central lands
          of former Yugoslavia. By eradicating the pattern of ethnic
          intermingling and promoting hatred and intolerance among
          Bosnia's nationalities, they undermined the Bosnian
          government's potential political base… In propaganda and in
          deeds, Serbian and Croatian nationalists have sought to
          portray the Bosnian government as "Muslim," thereby seeking
          to devalue its claim to represent the interests of all
          Bosnians. To a dismaying degree, they have succeeded in
          the court of world public opinion.11

Thus the prevalent myths that the war was based on age old animosities and all sides were to blame were one of the reasons behind the lack of intervention or any action to protect Bosnia's territorial integrity by the world community.

    The United Nations and the EC lacked in adequately saving Bosnia and it seemed purposely wanted to make the Bosnian Government capitulate to its aggressors. Firstly, before the succession of Bosnia had taken place, the Bosnian President requested a UN force to be deployed in Bosnia – it was denied, while knowing full well that crisis was eminent. Secondly, the UN enforced an arms embargo on the Bosnian Government – thus in turn helping the enemies and aggressors of Bosnia. The Bosnian Government on numerous occasions pleaded in vain to the UN Security Council to lift the arms embargo, the request was stubbornly rejected.

    On December 18, 1992, the UN General Assembly, realizing that every sovereign UN member state has the right to self-defense under article 51 of the UN Charter, voted by a tremendous majority to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia and asked the Security Council to authorize "all means possible" to preserve Bosnia's territorial integrity. The General Assembly's request to the Security Council was refused.

    The clear contradiction between the General Assembly and that of the Security Council for the most part peculiarly went unnoticed in the media and press. Ian Williams, journalist with The New York Observer, however had made note of this:

          The sordid maneuverings in the Security Council in April
          [1993] raise the question of whether the carnage in the
          Balkans could actually have continued for the past year
          without the UN. The most notable example of the UN's
          contribution to the mayhem in the region has been the
          lopsided arms embargo against Bosnia-Hercegovina, which
          in principle favors the Serbs … The Balkan crisis has shown
          that, far from being the keystone of the new world order, the
          United Nations has no independent volition apart from the
          Security Council, which can and does ignore the will of the
          General Assembly … A series of creeping procedural
          changes since the end of the Cold War have virtually made
          the Council a tight cabal of the five [permanent members']
          foreign ministries.12

In spite of political and diplomatic pressures against them, three non-permanent members of the Security Council, New Zealand, Pakistan, and Venezuela, consistently resisted against the position of the Security Council and Permanent members of Britain and France on the arms embargo. After a visit to the besieged Bosnian town of Srebrenica in April 1993, Diego Arria, Venezuela's Ambassador to the United Nations, appealed once again to the Security Council to the one sided arms embargo against Bosnia. Arria's speech was "reported to have brought tears to the eyes of listening UN staff members.”13 Permanent UN Security Council members Britain, France, and Russia rejected the request.

    In June 1993, Pakistan and Venezuela again appealed to the Security Council to lift the arms embargo. Addressing the Security Council Diego Arria, responded to the French and British objections:

          We are told that lifting the arms embargo would
          increase violence. Already nearly two hundred thousand
          people have died. More than two million people have been
          displaced from their homes. Twenty thousand women have
          been raped. The International Court of Justice and the World
          Conference on Human Rights have indicated that
          Bosnia-Hercegovina is a victim of genocide and "ethnic
          cleansing," among other unspeakable crimes. For this
          Council, then, what precisely does it mean to say that
          violence would increase and spread? If an armed people
          possess a greater ability to defend themselves, this does
          not mean that violence would necessarily increase. Until
          now the Serbs have been able to easily trample and
          vandalize the Bosnian Muslims. When the Bosnians are in a
          position to defend themselves, circumstances may deter the
          Serbs and, above all, place limits on their capacity to act with
          impunity. More war? Rather, it is the international
          community's inconsistent attitude in the adoption of
          measures to stop aggression that has given free reign to the
          escalation of the conflict. It has essentially meant a
          massacre of mainly the Bosnian Muslim community. This is
          the reality … To do all that one can possibly do to prevent a
          people from exercising its right to defend itself in order to
          survive means to shoulder moral and political
          responsibilities of extraordinary significance.14

Despite the repeated appeals, the embargo against Bosnia was not revoked, instead, Britain and France recommended the make-up of "safe havens" in Bosnia. The Americans endorsed the idea with some equivocation, acknowledging in the words of one American intelligence official that a "polka dot solution" would result in "six little West Banks in Western Europe with enormous problems." The American official explained whimsically, "You can't create a viable economy inside a polka dot.”15

     The Bosnian Government spoke against the proposal calling it formation of "ghettos" on its territory. Alija Izetbegovic, the Bosnian President, declared on Radio Sarajevo, "If the international community is not ready to defend the principles that it itself has proclaimed and which it proclaims to be a reflection of its fundamental values … [and instead] prefers to close its eyes before the most ruthless violations of human rights and international law, even more to reward both aggression and genocide, let it then say this openly both to our public and its own … Let it proclaim that the UN Charter and all the carefully and patiently built rules of international law are no longer valid.”16

    Being that the UN defied its own charters and laws in not lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian Government, it clearly made the UN complicit in Bosnia's destruction.

    The UN also failed with its so-called "safe haven" policy. The UN safe haven of Gorazde fell to the Serbs and the British UN General Michael Rose refused to protect the safe area. This resulted in burning of Muslim homes, ethnic cleansing and mass killings. The UN also handed over safe areas of Srebrenica and Zepa to the Serbs and mass killings ensued in which more than 8000 civilians, mainly men and boys were massacred.

    European Community ministers continuously pressured the Bosnian Government to agree to the ethnic cantonization of the country – so instead of offering support or protection to the territorial integrity of the indivisible nation of Bosnia, they elected to systematically break it up.

    The UN force even failed at protecting Bosnian Government officials from Serb assaults, the following is a tragic and dramatic account of how Bosnian Vice-President, Dr. Hakija Turaljic was killed under UN protection:

          When things went wrong, even with something so simple
          as transporting a Bosnian official to and from the airport, the
          UN was quick to blame everyone but themselves. In January
          1993, the Bosnian Vice-President, Dr. Hakija Turaljic,
          perhaps the ablest member of Izetbegovic's cabinet, was
          returning to Sarajevo in a French armored personnel carrier
          after meeting with Turkish humanitarian officials at the
          airport. At the bend in the road halfway into town, a spot
          where Bosnian Serbs would later establish a checkpoint –
          despite the fact that, according to the airport agreement, they
          were already allowed to inspect relief supplies at the airport
          and had supposedly ceded control of the road to the UN –
          his convoy was stopped by a hundred and fifty Serb fighters
          and a number of armored vehicles. A standoff ensued. The
          French battalion commander, Colonel Patrice Sartre, instead
          of calling for help from the UNPROFOR airport garrison,
          actually sent away three British Warrior fighting vehicles that
          had happened to be on the scene. When their commander,
          Captain Peter Jones, offered to deploy around the armored
          personnel carrier in which Turaljic was sitting, Sartre
          dismissed him. "This is a French problem," he said. Shortly
          thereafter, Sartre allowed the rear hatch of the APC to
          be opened in order, he said later, to demonstrate to the
          Serbs that there were no arms or "mujahedin" riding along
          with Turaljic. At this point, according to a French enlisted
          man riding with the Vice President, Turaljic was weeping.
          His terror was entirely warranted. As Sartre stood there, a
          Serb fighter simply pointed a machine pistol past his
          shoulder and into the rear of the vehicle and cut Dr. Turaljic
          to bits.17

The UN commission exonerated the French soldiers and hinted it was the Bosnians fault for creating "an atmosphere of anxiety" among the Serbs that day. I guess creating anxiety among the Serbs gives them the justification to kill with the UN's blessing!? The irony is that Colonel Sartre, far from being sent home, was allowed to carry on in Bosnia, and upon his return to France was awarded the Legion of Honor.

    Now the question arises: Why did the UN and rest of the World Community, instead of protecting Bosnia, played a part in its destruction? This is a phenomenon that cannot be easily understood – but there were some clear-cut reasons and those will be briefly discussed. Firstly, it was not literally the entire world that denied Bosnia’s right to self-defense but was the five nations who controlled the UN Security Council: Britain, France, United States, Germany and Russia. This really questions democracy and credibility of the United Nations. While most of the members of the General Assembly and even some members of the Security Council voted to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia the permanent members denied it. What gives them the right to override established International Laws of the United Nations? And why were they so stubborn in not lifting the arms embargo? The Bosnians constantly made it clear that they didn’t want foreign troops to help them – they only wanted the right to defend themselves. Sefer Halilovic, at the time the Commander of the Bosnian Army, repeatedly stated that Bosnia did not want the United States or any other power to deploy its ground forces in the Balkans.18 If the United States or Europe would not assist Bosnia in defending its integrity as an integral state or believed they were under no obligation to forcefully deter acts of genocide, then at the very least these Great Powers should cease to deliberately obstruct the ability of Bosnia to act in its own self-defense.19 The Bosnians simply pleaded: If you cannot or will not help us, then have the moral decency to cause us no harm.

    The reason why the United States and the select few hegemonic European Powers took actions to guarantee the destruction of Bosnia may lie in cynicism and systematic prejudice. If the victims of genocide had been Christians (in which most of the Europeans share in religion) instead of Muslims in Bosnia the reaction would have definitely been different. In the words of a French Diplomat, *“Our interests are closer to the Serbs than you think”, “We worry more about the Muslims than about the Serbs”.*20

     With the failure of the World Community and the United Nations to protect Bosnia’s sovereignty and its people from genocide, ethnic cleansing and mass killings, questions arise about what role and for who’s real interest does the United Nations function for? Using Bosnia as a case in point, the United Nations even defied its own International Laws in guaranteeing the direct and indirect destruction of Bosnia and its people. With this evidence of the United Nation’s great failure in preventing genocide and a, virtual, systematic annihilation of its member State, must the UN be radically reformed or simply abolished?

**Footnotes:**

1. Gutman, Roy. (1993). “A Witness to Genocide”, p. xxvii

2. Ibid, p. 14

3. Vulliamy, Ed. (1994). “Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia’s War”, p. 91

4. Ibid, p. 93

5. Ibid, p. 88

6. Ibid, p. 94

7. Gutman, Roy. (1993). “A Witness to Genocide”, p. 34

8. Vulliamy, Ed. (1994). “Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia’s War”, p. 199

9. Ibid, p. 200

10. Pinson, Mark. (1994), “The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia”, p. 1

11. Donia, Robert J. & John V.A. Fine, Jr. (1994), “Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed”, p. 245

12. Ian Williams, “Will Bosnia Break the UN?,” Balkan War Report, April/May 1993, p. 28. See also Williams, “A Shameful Deadlock on Bosnia—And What Else Is New?,” The New York Observer, April 26, 1993.

13. Ibid.

14. Ali, Rabia & Lifschultz, Lawrence. (1993), “Writings on the Balkan War: Why Bosnia?”, p. xxix

15. Michael Gordon, “U.S. Experts Say ‘Safe Havens’ Won’t Help Much,” The New York Times, June 10, 1993.

16. Ali, Rabia & Lifschultz, Lawrence. (1993), “Writings on the Balkan War: Why Bosnia?”, p. xxx

17. Rieff, David. 1995. “Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West”, p. 150-151

18. Ali, Rabia & Lifschultz, Lawrence. (1993), “Writings on the Balkan War: Why Bosnia?”, p. xxviii

19. Ibid, p. xxviii

20. Ibid, p. xlvii

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