



Sarajevo under Siege



Sarajevo under siege: the legally adjudicated facts

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(Note: in the third paragraph we refer to the “Zagreb-backed Bosnian Croat militia.” Upon an earlier publication of this paper in 2015, we received a ten page letter from the Croatian Foreign Ministry denying that the Croatian government ever “backed” the illegal Bosnian Croat entity and insisted that Centropa withdraw the document and apologize. As you can see, we will not do that).

The Siege of Sarajevo was the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. After being initially besieged by the forces of the Yugoslav People’s Army, Sarajevo was besieged by the Army of Republika Srpska from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996 during the Bosnian War.

Belgrade-backed Bosnian Serb military forces besieged Sarajevo from late spring 1992 until late-summer 1995. These forces were under the command of General Ratko Mladic and the political direction of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, both of whom are now on trial on genocide charges at the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague.



Bosnian Serb troops controlled the city’s water, electricity, and food supplies and used this control to apply pressure on the Sarajevo government. During the early months of the siege, it was possible to bring goods into the central city through Bosnian-Croat held areas on the city’s western edge. But this lifeline was severed by Bosnian Serb military operations in the late summer of 1992 and by the Zagreb-backed Bosnian Croat militia, which, from October 1992, turned against the mostly Muslim Slav Bosnian government forces in an attempt to force the Sarajevo government to agree to a three-way carve up of the country that would have effectively left the government in control of an unsustainable patch of territory around the capital.

More than 10,000 people were killed and about 50,000 wounded in Sarajevo by snipers or mortar attacks. The deaths included scores of people cut down in Serb mortar attacks on water stations, a bread line in the central city, and the city’s main outdoor market.

Despite shrill international condemnation of the wholesale human rights violations committed by the Bosnian Serb army and Bosnian Croat militia as well as civilian killings carried out by individuals attached to the Bosnian government forces, the outside world undertook no effective action to halt the bloodshed until after Bosnian Serb soldiers and Serbian paramilitary police troops, under General Mladic’s orders, executed more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys, along with a number of women and children, after the takeover of the United Nations safe area at Srebrenica in July 1995.