



The Srebrenica Genocide and the Massive Failures of the UN and the Netherlands

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BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,666, July 29, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In July 1995, in East Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs massacred more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. In the shadow of this act of evil, attention must also be paid to the gross incompetence, refusal to take responsibility, guilt, and abject failure of both the UN and the Netherlands. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that individuals are responsible for their own actions. It is therefore absurd that belonging to the UN confers impunity on anyone for their own criminal negligence.

Twenty-five years ago this month, in East Bosnia, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were murdered by Bosnian Serbs in Srebrenica. It was the most ignominious act of mass murder to take place in Europe since the Holocaust.

UN soldiers from the UNPROFOR Corps were supposed to protect the Muslim enclaves in Bosnia from the Serb areas, but obviously failed to do so.

In the shadow of the Srebrenica genocide, attention must be paid to the UN's extraordinary incompetence, guilt, and refusal to take responsibility. None of its employees has stood trial for any of these failures. More or less the same is true of the Netherlands, which supplied the Dutchbat military unit to UNPROFOR. That unit was stationed in the Srebrenica enclave when the genocide began.

Before the Dutch troops, a Canadian unit of UNPROFOR was stationed in Srebrenica. When they departed, only the Netherlands were willing to send in an army unit. Various Dutch political parties had asked the government to send soldiers under UN auspices to Yugoslavia during the civil war.

In May 1993, then Minister of Defense Ruud Lubbers (Labour) said the Netherlands were willing to send a battalion of 400 men to UNPROFOR. In November of that year, the Dutch government agreed to send an infantry battalion equipped with armed vehicles to Bosnia.

According to the Dutch Officers Association, the Airmobile Brigade sent to Bosnia was not sufficiently prepared or equipped to protect an enclave. To make matters worse, the Dutch military downgraded the armed vehicles they sent to Bosnia. They dismantled the cannons and downgraded night and day vision equipment and shooter protection. In their place, a slow-moving dome and a machine gun were assembled. Thus, the vehicles sent by the Netherlands were not equipped for the war that was raging in Bosnia.

Dutch military intelligence services opposed sending troops to Bosnia. The Netherlands did not develop any independent intelligence activities concerning Srebrenica.

In March 1994, the first Dutchbat unit of UNPROFOR replaced the Canadians in Srebrenica. They were twice replaced by other Dutchbat battalions. It later became known that there were racist radicals among the Dutch soldiers. Three of them paid a fine rather than face court for their extreme remarks. Five other Dutch soldiers who were suspected of similar statements were not prosecuted. A 1999 report from Dutch military intelligence (MID) said far-right extremists among Dutchbat soldiers had publicly discriminated against not only Muslims but also soldier colleagues. Some Dutch soldiers regularly gave the Hitler salute and used German army terms from WWII.

In August 2014, Ter Beek was succeeded as Minister of Defense by Joris Voorhoeve (VVD, Liberals). He said the Chief of the Defense Staff had told him Srebrenica could not be defended. Shortly thereafter, Voorhoeve visited the enclave himself and came to the same conclusion.

One wonders why Voorhoeve did not propose that the Netherlands give notice to the UN that it was going to withdraw its soldiers by a certain date. Less than two weeks before the Muslims conquered Srebrenica, Voorhoeve said: "I expect that the Bosnian Serbs will show an interest in peace negotiations in the coming half year."

While the Dutch troops were stationed in Srebrenica, war crimes were frequently committed in the area by both Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs.

On July 11, 1995, the Bosnian Serb army conquered the Srebrenica enclave. The Bosnian Muslim army did not fight them. Dutchbat did not even offer symbolic resistance. In fact, the Dutch soldiers helped the Bosnian Serb

occupiers separate Muslim men and boys from the women and children. Though they were under UN command, the Dutch government gave them orders to flee to Zagreb, the Croatian capital, which they did.

Dutchbat lieutenant Ron Rutten took photos on July 13, 1995 inside a house where Bosnian Serbs had detained Muslims. The images showed nine dead Bosnian Muslim men. Rutten smuggled undeveloped photos out of the enclave to provide proof that crimes against humanity were being committed in Srebrenica.

Rumors of a genocide of Muslims were already rife among the Dutch in Zagreb, but the national commander of the Dutch land forces, Gen. Hans Couzy, decided the Dutch soldiers in Zagreb should have a party. Dutch historian Henri Beunders wrote in 1996, "While the Bosnians were standing up to their knees in blood, the Dutchbat soldiers in Zagreb were standing up to their ankles in beer, being applauded by Crown Prince—now King—Willem Alexander, Prime Minister Kok and Minister of Defense Voorhoeve, who all knew about the knee-high blood."

In 1996, the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) was asked to investigate what had happened in Srebrenica, but it lacked the power to interrogate witnesses under oath. Attempts to develop Rutten's undeveloped film failed. NIOD concluded that the events were due to "human error not wished by anyone," which became the official Dutch government line. Then-director of the NIOD, historian Hans Blom, summarized the findings of his institute's study: "A [poorly] thought-through peace mission that was almost impossible to execute."

In 2000, the Dutch parliament appointed an ad hoc committee headed by MP Bert Bakker of the D66 party, a left of center grouping that was part of the Dutch government. The committee's assignment was to investigate Dutch involvement in UN missions. It too, however, could not investigate witnesses under oath.

It took the NIOD five and a half years to complete its study. After its publication in April 2002, the Dutch government of PM Wim Kok (Labour) resigned. This was largely a symbolic act, as parliamentary elections were due to be held soon afterward. The Dutch government thus accepted political responsibility for the failure of Dutch soldiers to prevent the Srebrenica genocide.

In 2015, on the 20th commemoration of the fall of Srebrenica, debate in the Netherlands erupted once again on the subject. This led to a request from the House of Representatives for a further investigation. This was submitted to NIOD and evolved into a formal investigation approved by the Cabinet on March 25, 2016. No major new findings emerged.

Over the years, a number of cases have been brought to Dutch courts by family members of murdered Bosnian Muslims. The courts decided the UN could not be prosecuted because it has legal immunity. Everyone at the UN who should have been brought to trial thus escaped judgment. This is also true of the individuals responsible for the UN's total failure to protect the victims of the Rwandan genocide.

In 2013, the Dutch Supreme Court decided the Dutch State was responsible for the deaths of three Muslim men from Srebrenica. These men had fled to the Dutch army base, but the Dutchbat commanders refused to take them in. They were sent away from the compound on July 13, 1995 and were subsequently murdered by the Bosnian Serb army or paramilitary forces.

Two Dutch courts decided the Netherlands was 30% responsible for the deaths of 350 Muslim men in the neighborhood of the Dutch base after the fall of Srebrenica. This percentage was later reduced by the Supreme Court to 10%. The essence of this judgment is that the behavior of the Dutch army unit makes the Netherlands to some extent co-responsible for elements of the Srebrenica genocide.

Twenty-five years after the genocide, the Dutch government is still not willing to apologize for its many blunders, including those of its soldiers that partly enabled the Srebrenica genocide. Dutch PM Mark Rutte expressed regret in 2000, but there has been nothing more.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that individuals are responsible for their own actions. It is therefore absurd that belonging to the UN confers impunity on anyone for their criminal negligence. This is not only true of UN failures in Bosnia but in many other places as well—particularly in Rwanda, where the scale of killing was massive.

The International Criminal Court in The Hague has an exceptionally poor record. Over the years it has spent more than \$1.5 billion for the sake of a few condemnations. Extending its task to judging UN employees could help it become somewhat more respectable.

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