

## What are the 10 stages of genocide?

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Examining what led to the massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslims, on the 24th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide.

Family members mourn at the mass funeral for newly-identified victims of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide [File: Matej Divizna/Getty Images]

July 11 marks the 24th anniversary of the [Srebrenica genocide](#), the worst atrocity on European soil since the Holocaust.

In July, 1995, Serb forces systematically killed more than 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys in the so-called [UN](#)-protected enclave in Srebrenica, [Bosnia](#).

But what led to the massacre?

In the nineties, genocide scholar Gregory H Stanton, an American, examined the stages of genocide, which eventually became his "[10 stages of genocide](#)" theory.

Genocide is not committed by a small group of individuals, rather a large number of people and the state all contribute to genocide.

At each stage preventive measures can stop the situation from deteriorating further, Stanton noted.

Bosnian-Australian anthropologist Hariz Halilovic later added an eleventh stage particular to Bosnia's case - "trumphalism".

Here is how Stanton's 10 stages - and Halilovic's eleventh - relate to the [Srebrenica genocide](#):

### **Stages 1, 2, 3: Classification, symbolization and discrimination**

The idea of a Greater [Serbia](#) (including the territories of Bosnia, Kosovo, Croatia, Montenegro and other neighbouring countries) dates back to the 19th century, and was revived following the death of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in 1980.

With the decline of the Communist bloc, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and Serbian nationalists saw a chance to mobilise the masses in support of establishing a homogenous Serbian state.

In Milosevic's famous address to a crowd in Belgrade in 1989, he presented himself as the savior of Serbdom and Europe. It enforced the notion of "us [Serbs] vs them".

Bosniaks were typically called Turks, Balije (a slur for a Bosnian Muslim) and branded as terrorists and Islamic "extremists".

#### **Stage 4: Dehumanisation**

Many Serbs dehumanised Bosniaks, regarding them as little more than Muslims who posed a threat to the Serbian hegemonist project.

"In order to mobilise domestic public opinion against the Muslims and to justify future acts against them in the eyes of the West, the Serbian leadership needed an image of Islam as a totalitarian, inherently violent, and culturally alien system on European soil," writes Fikret Karcic, professor at the University of Sarajevo, in his paper "Distorted Images of Islam: the case of former Yugoslavia."

"Such a distorted image had been provided by some influential Serbian orientalists, the Orthodox Church, and some historians."

#### **Stage 5: Organisation**

A plan to destroy Bosnia and "completely exterminate its Muslim people" was drawn up as early as the 1980s by the General Staff of the Yugoslav People's Army, according to Vladimir Srebrov, a politician who cofounded the SDS party with convicted Bosnian Serb war criminal [Radovan Karadzic](#).

Known as the famous RAM (frame) plan, its aim was to carve up Bosnia into a Greater Serbia and a Greater [Croatia](#).

In the plan, the officers explained how artillery, ammunition and military equipment would be stored in strategic locations in Croatia and Bosnia.

A secret police force was planned for arming and training local Serbs to create police and paramilitary units in Bosnia.

One document, written by the army's special services including experts in psychological warfare, stated that the most effective way to create terror and panic among the Bosniak population would be by raping women, minors, and even children.

#### **Stage 6: Polarisation**

Serbian and Bosnian Serb media regularly broadcasted polarising propaganda, to dehumanise victims and marginalise the opposition to war.

In one case, while Serb forces held Sarajevo under siege, state-run Belgrade TV aired a false story intended to fuel hatred, including the line: "Muslim extremists have come up with the most horrifying way in the world of torturing people. Last night they fed the Serb children to the lions in the city's zoo."

This was reported on the evening news and was watched by several million viewers.

### **Stage 7: Preparation**

Organised from Belgrade, Serbia, weapons were distributed to the Serb population by the truckload throughout 1990 and 1991 in Bosnia.

"Weapons and military equipment were even flown in by military helicopters to Serbian military officers. It is said that by the end, almost no Serbian house was without an automatic gun," according to a [UN report](#) from 1994.

"The pretext for the arms deliveries and the rearmament was that this was necessary for the defence against 'the enemies of the people' - the Muslim extremists."

### **Stage 8: Persecution**

Across Bosnia, influential, intellectual Bosniaks were often among the first to be executed, with their names drawn up in death lists.

As Serb troops arrived in each town, they killed non-Serbs, often after torturing them. Bosniak properties were confiscated.

As many as 50,000 Bosniak and Croat women, girls and young children were raped in Bosnia from 1992- 1995.

A woman walks through the cemetery in Potocari, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Wednesday, March 20, 2019 [Marko Drobnjakovic/AP]

In Prijedor, a city in western Bosnia, Bosniaks were forced to wear white armbands to be clearly identified and tie white flags to their doors.

Across the country 200,000 people were deported to concentration camps where they were tortured, starved and killed.

Others living under siege, such as in Sarajevo and Mostar, starved while being targeted by snipers and heavy shelling.

Srebrenica, which was known as the world's biggest detention camp, was under siege for three years, before it fell to Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995.

Serb troops separated boys and men aged between 12 and 77 from the rest of the population and took them to fields, schools and warehouses to be executed.

### **Stage 9: Extermination**

On July 11 at 16:15 General [Ratko Mladic](#) (now a convicted war criminal) entered Srebrenica with Serb forces, including paramilitary units from Serbia, claiming the town for Serbs. Strolling through the streets with the TV cameras rolling, Mladic announced that there will be "revenge against the Turks".

Panicked residents in the enclave fled to the UN Dutch Battalion base only to find that the 400 lightly-armed peacekeepers were unable to defend them. Serb forces had inherited much larger resources of the former Yugoslav army, the fourth largest in the world at the time.

On that day, thousands of Bosniak men start to make their escape through the woods, forming a column and hiking some 100km in an attempt to reach free territory controlled by the Bosnian army.

The journey was known as the death march, as they were ambushed, shot at and attacked by Serb forces. Less than a quarter of them survived.

Over the course of six days, more than 8,000 Bosniaks were killed. Women and small children were deported.

Authorities stand by a mass grave exhumation site near Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina [File: Laurent Van der Stockt/ Getty Images]

### **Stage 10: Denial**

In an attempt to conceal the killings, Serb forces transported the dead bodies with bulldozers and trucks and buried them in numerous locations, leaving the victims' remains fragmented and crushed.

Human bones can be found as far as 20km apart, making it difficult for families to give their loved ones a proper burial.

According to an Al Jazeera Balkans [poll](#) from 2018, 66 percent of Serbs in Republika Srpska deny the genocide.

Genocide denial is common in academic and political circles in Republika Srpska and Serbia.

The genocide is vehemently denied by politicians including Milorad Dodik, the current chairman and Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite presidency and by Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic.

"[Denial] is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres," Stanton wrote.

Mladic supporters demonstrate in Belgrade against Ratko Mladic's arrest [Srdjan Stevanovic/Getty Images]

### **Stage 11: Triumphalism**

Convicted war criminals today are respected and honoured as war heroes.

According to the 2018 poll, 74 percent of Serbs in Republika Srpska consider Bosnian Serb convicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic, guilty of genocide and war crimes to be a hero.