

From Medic to Mass Murderer (Part II)

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The recent capture of the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadjic, has made headlines for a variety of reasons, not least the timing of his arrest. Given that the handover of Karadjic to the international tribunal for war crimes in The Hague was a necessary precondition to the pursuance of of Serbia's European dream, it can hardly be coincidental that his arrest came at the time it did. And it was long in coming! Although a statement in 2006 by the former Serbian Prime Minister that indicted war criminals were "a stone around Serbia's neck" had raised hopes at that time that the arrests of Karadjic and Mladic were imminent, this proved to be mistaken.

So why did it take so long? According to well-informed sources, Radovan Karadjic was provided with a false identity over 10 years ago by the security services who worked for the former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic. Recent investigation has revealed that the identity card issued in the name of "Dragan Dabic" is an original; and it enabled him to create an entirely new life for himself.

That situation could have gone on for an indefinite period, but essentially Karadjic was handed over as the result of a political decision. He had been living in Belgrade under a different identity, as a practitioner of alternative medicine. And while "Dragan Dabic", as he was now known, did indeed look very different from his formerly suave self, with his long white hair in a top-knot and a bushy white beard effectively disguising his face, there can be little doubt that the authorities were well aware of his real identity. He was working in a private clinic, writing articles for Healthy Life magazine and giving lectures on alternative medicine - which can hardly be described as an undercover existence. He even managed to publish five books during this time!

Long-time Karadjic observers say that this behaviour was typical for a man whose arrogance was one of his defining characteristics; even in his fugitive life, he was unable to resist the urge to attract attention. According to one psychologist based at the Institute of Criminology, "He changed his social and physical identity, but did not change the psychological one...The lectures on spiritual healing all fed into his extrovert cravings... It would be a kind of psychological suicide for him not to address the public and hear applause."

Meanwhile Karadjic's key partner in crime, the former Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic, remains at large. After living freely in Belgrade until the arrest of his protector Slobodan Milosevic in 2001, he subsequently went underground. His capture and handover to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague still remains a key precondition to Serbia's entry into the EU. Mladic is believed to have enjoyed the protection of Serb military intelligence to date, and may currently be living in Belgrade. Would it be so hard to find him? Probably not, given that the Serbian state was paying him a military pension for over a decade during the time he was supposedly on the run!

Serbian officials have been evasive about providing details of Radovan Karadjic's recent past, initially declining to say how long Karadjic had been living in Belgrade and how long he had worked in the private clinic, with investigators claiming that they stumbled upon the fugitive in the process of tracing the network of supporters related to his henchman Mladic. But according to a Serbian human rights advocate, the new head of Serbian security "only had to run through the data already collected and act upon it" in order to "find" Karadjic. Foreign analysts agree that the real reason for this week's events is the changed political climate in Serbia, one that no longer prioritises the protection of war criminals.

There is however reason to believe that the political reasons behind Karadjic's capture represent a far more superficial change than one would like to see, being based primarily on Serbia's desire for EU membership. This is amply demonstrated by some of the initial responses to the capture of Karadjic, which reflect the fragmented legacy of the conflict. While Serbians were profoundly shocked by the revelations of the secret life Karadjic has been living for the last decade, defiant and sensationalistic coverage quickly drowned out any mention of the crimes of which he is accused.

"Radovan Betrayed", "Treason" and "Serb Thugs Arrest Radovan" were among the headlines of popular papers, while only a few TV stations bothered to show any footage of the three-year siege of Sarajevo - let alone the hidden massacre of Muslim boys after the downfall of Srebrenica, the video of which was released in Serbia only 18 months ago. This approach only serves to further fuel the myth of Karadjic as a Serb war hero, one who succeeded in defying the enemies of the Serb nation by his prolonged period of hiding in plain sight under their noses.

By contrast, in Sarajevo the news of Karadjic's arrest was met with immense joy, the president of the rotating Bosnia-Herzegovina presidency stating that "this was at least some satisfaction for the families of victims". This, even as the poisonous legacy of the conflict - reflected in the insanely