

Ratko Mladic plotted to 'raze Sarajevo to the ground'

Ratko Mladic plotted to "raze Sarajevo to the ground" unless he could divide the city along ethnic lines as he orchestrated a three-and-a-half year "terror campaign" that left thousands dead, the trial heard.



The 'Momo' and 'Uzeir' towers burn on Sniper Alley in downtown Sarajevo as heavy shellings and fightings raged throughout the Bosnian capital in 1992 Photo: GEORGES GOBET/AFP/Getty Images

By Bruno Waterfield

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UN prosecutors have accused the former general of responsibility for the 44-month siege of Bosnia's capital, between 1992 and 1995, during which up to 10,000 civilians were killed by Serb forces using snipers, artillery and mortar fire. "There can be no doubt that Mladic controlled the shelling of Sarajevo," said Dermot Groome, the UN prosecutor. "Mladic participated in a campaign of sniping and shelling against the besieged city of Sarajevo in order to spread terror among its civilian population."

He said that Mladic's personal notebooks would be shown in evidence to prove that he and Radovan Karadzic, the former Bosnian Serb president, planned the siege of Sarajevo as key part of their ethnic cleansing strategy. One command, written in the notebooks and agreed by the pair, said: "Sarajevo must either be divided or razed to the ground."

Prosecutors said that Mladic and Karadzic struck at Sarajevo because the Bosnian capital embodied Serbs, Muslims and Croats living together in a multi-ethnic state.

"Sarajevo was a model of diversity, a cosmopolitan city," said Mr Groome. "They sought to destroy it, to sever the city in half, with the Serbs living in one part and the non-Serbs in another part."

Mr Groome read out a threat by Mladic that "Sarajevo will shake", made in 1992 as the siege opened. As the quote was read out, the former Bosnian Serb commander nodded, smiling approvingly to the court.

The court was also shown shocking video images of seven-year-old Nermin Divovic, who was shot by a Bosnian Serb sniper while out walking with his mother. The boy, who was hit in the face, was captured on television holding on to his mother's hand as they ran past a United Nations armoured personnel carrier. He eventually died.

In Sarajevo, giant screens relayed the hearing back to the city that prosecutors say was held under Mladic's boot. People watching gasped as prosecutors showed video footage, filmed by a Canadian Serb nationalist supporter in 1994, that showed the former general boasting about his snipers.

"Whenever I come by Sarajevo. I kill someone in passing...I go kick the hell out the Turks... I f--- them," he said.

British television images were also shown of Mladic inspecting artillery dug into hills encircling Sarajevo. "I did not take part in any crimes. I have only defended my people," he said when asked about the shelling campaign.

A video of the bloody aftermath of a notorious mortar shelling of a market in Sarajevo, in which dozens died, was shown as evidence of an "overarching" plan to ethnically cleanse large parts of Bosnia of non-Serbs.

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