

US 'very disappointed' at Serb failure to arrest Mladic: Burns

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BELGRADE Oct 14 (AFP) -- The United States regrets Serbia's failure to hand over top Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect Ratko Mladic to the UN war crimes tribunal, a senior US State Department official said Friday on a visit to Belgrade.

"We are very disappointed that general Mladic is not yet given up to The Hague," US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns said after meeting with leaders in the Serbian capital.

"We are (also) disappointed that Radovan Karadzic is still at large and not in the Hague," Burns said, referring to the wartime Bosnian Serb political leader who is also wanted by the UN-mandated tribunal.

"These two individuals are standing in the way of Serbia's progress with NATO and the United States as well as with Europe."

"I've made it very clear at all of my meetings that the strong will of the entire international community is that these men should be held accountable for the war crimes they surely committed in the 1990s," Burns said.

Mladic, 63, and Karadzic, 60, have been in hiding since they were indicted by the UN tribunal at the end of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war over the siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre of an estimated 8,000 Muslim men and youths.

Chief UN tribunal prosecutor Carla Del Ponte has said she believes the former general is being sheltered in Serbia, something which has weighed heavily against Belgrade's bid to integrate with Europe.

"We certainly were given an impression (during my last visit in June) that the arrest of general Mladic was imminent and it did not happen, so we have to judge the Serb government on its actions," said Burns.

"The United States will not support Serbia for membership in the partnership for peace and NATO until Mladic is arrested. That is our policy and it is not going to change," the US diplomat added.

He said Serbia-Montenegro would "suffer the consequences" over its failure to bring about their arrest and extradition to The Hague.

"It's the obligation of the Serb and Serbia-Montenegrin government to find these people and to arrest them," said Burns, who arrived in Serbia on Thursday night.

Mladic and Karadzic are two of the six remaining Serbs wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Former Croatian general Ante Gotovina is also sought.

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