

# Israeli Historian to ‘Correct’ Controversial Bosnia Report After Being Accused of Genocide Denial

*Gideon Greif now agrees that 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were murdered by Bosnian Serb forces at Srebrenica in 1995. However, a critic calls the move a ‘desperate attempt at damage control’*

By Sam Sokol  
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An Israeli historian accused of genocide denial says he will revise a controversial war crimes report he co-wrote on behalf of Bosnian Serb nationalists – an attempt critics are calling damage control after a months-long controversy over the report into the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

“We will be publishing a clarification to the report in the coming weeks,” Prof. Gideon Greif told Haaretz on Tuesday, adding that the new document would answer critics who labeled him a revisionist.

In 2019, Greif was tapped by the government of Republika Srpska, a semiautonomous Serb enclave in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to head a commission compiling a report on the mass murder of 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica in July 1995.

His findings, released last summer, were widely panned by scholars, with most of the criticism directed at his claims that the massacre did not constitute an act of genocide and his assertion that “a significant number of remains exhumed from the mass graves belonged to people who were killed outside the context of mass shootings.”

In a television interview last year, Greif said that “the number does not exceed 3,714 victims,” a claim he now calls a mistake; the report quoted estimates of the death toll as low as 3,900.

“We didn’t diminish even one victim. Not even one victim,” Greif said this week. “It was my personal mistake so we are going to correct it to publish the truth, and I think this controversy around the commission will be reduced significantly.”

However, when asked about the planned changes, Greif appeared to play them down, saying that “nothing will be

changed because there is no mistake concerning the number.

“This is the number which is mentioned from the beginning onward, there was no different number: about 8,000. And we do not distort it; we accept it. Of course, we decry the crimes, naturally. And we will do it even more stronger in our clarification.”

His latest comments on the death toll seem at odds with the report, which theorized that some of the dead were executed soldiers rather than civilians.

“It is difficult to know with any precision how many people were killed after the fall of Srebrenica and continuing for several days thereafter,” the report stated.

### **‘Severe reputation damage’**

Prof. Jelena Subotic, a political scientist at Georgia State University who focuses on memory politics in the western Balkans, questioned Greif’s turnaround.

“I read the Greif report. The report specifically, in no uncertain terms, claims that the number of 8,000 victims is incorrect,” she said in an email.

“It is clear that the current backtracking is the result of severe reputation damage the authors of the report have suffered. But this does not change the content of the report and its revisionist nature. The report itself is there for everyone to see,” she said.

Greif's announcement comes only weeks after Germany rescinded an award for his Holocaust research due to his work on behalf of Republika Srpska, whose leaders have drawn criticism for trying to minimize the severity of the Srebrenica massacre.

Bosnian Serb officials have denied the validity of international tribunal rulings describing the killings as genocide, while increasing calls for separatism. Some fear that this could further fracture Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country of around 3.8 million people, along ethnic lines.

While the Bosnian Serb president's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Greif's planned revision, Markus Goldbach, an attorney for the historian and a member of the commission that wrote the report, said Greif had recently visited Banja Luka, the de facto capital of Republika Srpska, to discuss the matter.

"After reviewing the criticism and being aware of the articles which were published, we felt that the criticism [did] us some injustice because we had no bad intentions; we had no intentions of distortion of history, we had no intention of making the perpetrators free of guilt," Greif said.

"We are not changing anything. We stand behind our report, but we will make things more clear for the public."

Menachem Rosensaft, an instructor in genocide law at Columbia Law School in New York and the executive vice president of the World Jewish Congress, believes Greif's new report won't shift perceptions of the historian.

“His promise or threat that he and his hapless commission will be issuing a revised report strikes me as a rather desperate attempt at damage control. On the whole, if I were Milorad Dodik, I’d ask for my money back,” said Rosensaft, referring to the nationalist Serb member of Bosnia’s tripartite presidency.

“No amount of prevarication or sophistry on his part can change the fundamental fact that the parameters of the crime of genocide are set forth in the Genocide Convention and have been repeatedly and consistently applied to Srebrenica by successive tribunals,” Rosensaft added.

In a statement to Haaretz, Bosnian Foreign Minister Bisera Turkovic said that “the genocide in Srebrenica was determined by verdicts of international courts: the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice. Any denial, relativization, or misinterpretation of the genocide must be condemned.”

Bosnia, she added, will cosponsor Israel’s push for a resolution against Holocaust denial at the UN General Assembly later this month.