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DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force  
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Prospects for "Ethnic Cleansing" in Sector East

In the event Croatian forces attack Sector East, even if Zagreb does not direct the systematic expulsion or abuse of ethnic Serbs, the history of violence and ethnic displacement in the sector suggests that the potential for human rights abuses and significant population movements remains high.



- Publicized reports of Croatian atrocities in Sector South are likely to incite panic and a mass exodus of Serbs from Sector East, especially if Croatia's attack appears likely to succeed.
- Reports of organized Croatian burning of Serb homes and apparent mass graves in Sector South at a minimum indicate that high-level Croatian authorities are willing to tolerate--if not condone--human rights violations by the Croatian Army and may augur similar human rights violations in Sector East.
- Atrocities by Serbs against Croats in Sector East in 1991-92--especially in Vukovar--increase the chances that rogue Croatian troops will visit "private retribution" on ethnic Serbs they encounter in the sector.
- The Krajina Serbs would likely retaliate against the estimated 8,000 to 24,000 non-Serbs remaining in Sector East, the 12,000-40,000 non-Serbs left in the Banja Luka area, and the up to 70,000 ethnic Croats in the Vojvodina region of Serbia.

Legacy of Past "Ethnic Cleansing" and Atrocities in Sector East...

The record of Serb atrocities in Sector East may make the Croats more likely to commit human rights violations against Serbs in the sector if they have the opportunity to do so. The Krajina Serbs expelled or killed the vast majority of the non-Serb population from the UN Protected Areas (UNPAs) by December 1992.

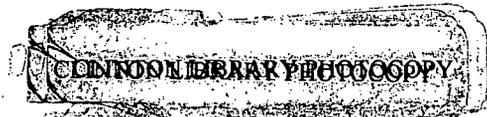
The most well-known example of Serb ethnic cleansing in the area occurred in Vukovar, which fell to Serb forces on 19 November 1991, after being largely destroyed during intense fighting.

- In 1992, the Vukovar opstina had a population of 83,274, of which Serbs comprised only 37 percent<sup>1</sup>, according to an UNPROFOR report.

<sup>1</sup> Croats were 44 percent of the Vukovar opstina's pre-war population, based on a 1991 census.

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[REDACTED] in 1993 that the opstina's population had dropped to about 65,000, of which 90 percent were ethnic Serbs.

- UN officials believe a mass grave discovered near Vukovar in 1992 contains the remains of more than 170 wounded Croatian soldiers who were taken from a Vukovar hospital in November 1991 and summarily executed by the Yugoslav Army and Serb paramilitaries.
- Croatians who remained in Vukovar reportedly were subjected to physical intimidation, rape, and murder, according to US diplomats, press reports [REDACTED]  
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Other reports indicate that ethnic violence aimed at non-Serbs took place throughout Sector East.

- UNPROFOR civilian authorities told US diplomats in Zagreb in October 1992 that Serb authorities in Sector East allowed local Serbs to terrorize the remaining Croats to force them off their land.

### ...And Who Would Be Most Affected Now

UN Sector East was the most densely populated area of the so-called Republic of Serb Krajina—now the only remaining Serb-held area in Croatia. Its population went from a 44 percent ethnic Croat plurality to a roughly 70-85 percent ethnic Serb majority since 1991, in large part due to Krajina Serb ethnic cleansing [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

- Bosnian Serb refugees and Croatian Serbs displaced from western Slavonia make up at least one-quarter of the sector's roughly 160,000 people [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### Croatian Violence Against Krajina Serbs Increases Climate of Fear

Reports of Croatian intimidation and abuse of ethnic Serbs in Sector West since May 1995 have undermined Zagreb's pledge that it will treat fairly Serbs living in Krajina lands recently reclaimed by Croatia.

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- An international human rights organization on 7 July accused Croatian forces of committing serious violations of international humanitarian law during and immediately after their May offensive in Sector West, including the targeting of Krajina Serb soldiers attempting to flee the region.
- Tadeusz Mazowiecki, then-UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for the Former Yugoslavia, stated on 25 May that Croatian troops appeared to have killed some Serb civilians without cause, according to press reports. Mazowiecki claimed Croatian forces looted and destroyed Serb property and mistreated Serb prisoners.
- While an estimated 10,000 Serbs fled the sector, it appears that most of them fled in advance of Croatian troops and were not mistreated, according to press reports. Moreover, both the UN official and an international human rights organization noted that Croatian human rights abuses during and after the Sector West operation were not systematic or widespread. [redacted]

Croatia's attack in August on Sectors North and South spurred the exodus of some 150,000-200,000 Serbs and resulted in more serious allegations of Croatian human rights abuses, according to press reports. Although most Serb refugees from the region reportedly were not mistreated [redacted]

[redacted] British and French officials publicly have characterized this military effort as ethnic cleansing, according to press reports.

- [redacted] Croatian forces fired on refugee columns [redacted] A senior Croatian official recently acknowledged to US diplomats in Zagreb that such actions appear to have occurred, but he vowed that those responsible would be disciplined.
- [redacted] Croatian forces summarily executed some refugees fleeing Sectors North and South [redacted] A Danish official related a similar account to US diplomats in Copenhagen.

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- [REDACTED]
- Despite Zagreb's insistence that its troops did not commit humanitarian violations during Croatia's attack on Sectors North and South, an international human rights group issued a report [REDACTED] accusing Croatia of spreading disinformation concerning mass graves, executions, and atrocities in the Knin area. [REDACTED]

### Serb Retaliation for Croatia's Reclaiming of Krajina Lands

Bosnian Serbs responded to the Croatian actions in Sectors West, North, and South by stepping up violent attacks against ethnic Croats living in Banja Luka.

- Following Croatia's attack on Sector West last May until the end of June, the Bosnian Serbs destroyed six churches, sacked three convents, killed eight people--including several elderly Roman Catholic nuns and priests--and expelled 800 from in the Banja Luka area, according to military reporting and press reports.
- Krajina Serbs responded to the Croatian Sector West attack by firing rockets on Zagreb, killing six people and wounding 200, according to press reports.

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The Bosnian Serbs reacted to the August invasion of Sectors North and South by stepping up expulsions of ethnic Croats from Banja Luka.

- UNHCR estimates that the Serbs have evicted some 17,500 non-Serbs--70 percent of them ethnic Croats--from the Banja Luka area since 13 August<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> UN officials estimated that 12,000 to 30,000 non Serbs remained in Banja Luka in early August 1995, according to press reports. [REDACTED]

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