

Intelligence Report

DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force

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Impact of the NATO Air Campaign in Bosnia



Steady battlefield gains by Federation forces, coupled with the NATO airstrikes, almost certainly led to Serb concessions around Sarajevo. The BSA's most sensitive pressure point--serious military and territorial losses--will remain primarily a function of successful Federation military offensives rather than the NATO airstrikes. Although Bosnian Serb military capabilities have been degraded in several functional areas, the BSA retains the capability to conduct combat operations at the present level of fighting. Concentrating on targets in eastern Bosnia, the air strikes caused moderate to severe damage. Nevertheless, the threat of renewed airstrikes will almost certainly lead the Serbs to at least appear to be implementing the UN and NATO demands.



UN Objectives

The principal objectives of the NATO air campaign were outlined by UN Peace Forces (UNPF) Commander General Janvier on 30 August 1995 as:

- An end to BSA attacks on Sarajevo and other UN-declared safe areas.
- Bosnian Serb withdrawal of all heavy weapons from the 20 km Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) around the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. Initially this was to be all heavy weapons 12.7 mm and above, but was later changed to artillery 100 mm and greater and mortars 82 mm and above.
- Complete freedom of movement for authorized humanitarian relief organizations and unrestricted use of Sarajevo Airport.

In addition to these stated objectives, some observers have perceived the campaign as being designed to force the Bosnian Serbs to enter into serious negotiations that would lead to an end of the Bosnian conflict.

This memorandum was prepared by _____ of the DCI Interagency
Balkan Task Force: _____

Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Norm
Schindler, Chief, DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force _____

Impact on Military Capabilities

The NATO air campaign attacked key Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) infrastructure, including: command, control, and communications (C3); air defense systems; lines of communication; and, logistics and ammunition storage. Concentrating on targets in Eastern Bosnia, the airstrikes have caused moderate to severe damage.

- **C3.** There has been moderate success in degrading the Bosnian Serbs' communications infrastructure; the recent Federation success in western Bosnia was almost certainly aided by the inability of the BSA to communicate and coordinate responses with subordinate commands. The Bosnian Serbs have quickly reconstituted many of their tactical and operational communications networks with assistance from Serbia.
- **Air Defense.** The Bosnian Serb air defense network has been moderately degraded, but the Serbs retain the ability to use the high mobility of their air defense systems to avoid pre-planned air attacks.
- **Lines of Communication.** The airstrikes have destroyed several bridges, but with numerous resupply routes available, the BSA retains the capability to resupply its front-line forces. The strikes, however, have reduced the ability of the BSA to respond to any Croatian military moves in southeastern Bosnia.
- **Logistics.** Despite severe damage to many Serb ammunition depots, there is no evidence that the air campaign has seriously affected the overwhelming BSA superiority in heavy weapons and ammunition. While the airstrikes have severely damaged BSA ammo and logistics depots, this has not fundamentally altered the BSA's ability to fight a defensive war. Few of the ammo depot strikes have triggered secondary explosions, indicating that the strikes destroyed few ammunition stocks. (Much of the BSA ammunition is probably dispersed to field sites due to the requirements of the lengthy Bosnian confrontation line.)

NATO air attacks have somewhat accelerated the ongoing shift in the overall military balance against the BSA. Both the Muslims and the Croats have launched successful attacks which may have been aided by the NATO air campaign.

- Croatian units with support from the Bosnian Government have taken over 3,000 square kilometers of territory from the Bosnian Serbs in western Bosnia and are threatening the major Serb city of Banja Luka.

- **Bosnian Army operations in the Ozren mountains** have resulted in the capture of a critical stretch of highway that would greatly improve transit between central Bosnia and Tuzla, and Bosnian Government forces threaten to take the entire region from the Bosnian Serbs.
[]

Impact on the Warring Parties

Bosnian Serbs. The Serbs viewed the airstrikes as the latest in a long line of confrontations with the international community they must endure in order to achieve their objective of an independent Serb state. The air campaign, coupled with the major losses in western Bosnia almost certainly became unbearable for the Serbs and made them more willing to compromise on the withdrawal of heavy weapons. The Bosnian Serb leadership remains anxious to prevent the renewal of the airstrikes, but will not abandon their claim to parts of the city. While stating that they will allow the free flow of supplies to Sarajevo, reopen the airfield, and remove their heavy weapons, the Bosnian Serbs will continue to use their control over access to the city as key leverage over the international community and the Muslims. []

The Serbs have already relied on some of their traditional tactics in an attempt to prevent the renewal of airstrikes without having to give up their military advantage.

- **Intransigence.** The Serbs have been able to rely on serious differences within the international community to temper past UN or NATO demands for action. The Serbs are almost certainly hoping that Russian opposition, plus doubts about the airstrikes being expressed by some UN officials, will quickly break down any consensus for further airstrikes.
- **Negotiate.** The Bosnian Serb political leadership has already made several proposals for negotiations--provided there are no new airstrikes. The Bosnian Serb leaders hope that they can string out any negotiations on potential violations of the withdrawal accord or the freedom of movement around the city. Moreover, the Serbs probably believe that it will be extremely difficult for NATO to restart airstrikes once they have been suspended for any period of time, especially if the Federation offensive continues.
- **Threats and Promises.** The Serbs immediately responded to the start of NATO airstrikes by making various offers for the withdrawal of heavy weapons--provided the international community met a number of demands, including a security guarantee for Serb areas of Sarajevo.

At the same time, the BSA has been bellicose about attacks on UN peacekeepers and the politicians have threatened to pull out of the peace negotiations. Nevertheless, the political leadership is pleased with what it sees as a breakthrough in the negotiations in Geneva involving recognition of a "Serb Republic," and probably wants to keep the talks moving forward. []

Bosnian Government. The Bosnia Government has been greatly encouraged by the NATO airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs and the recent military gains in western Bosnia. Sarajevo almost certainly views the air attacks as fulfillment of something it has been trying to achieve for the past two years--Western military intervention to punish the Serbs and give the Bosnian Army a chance to regain lost territory.

- The Bosnian Government has indicated it will not take advantage of the airstrikes around Sarajevo, but it has launched offensive operations in the northern and western parts of the country. []

The morale of the Bosnian public and the army has clearly been bolstered by the airstrikes following several military setbacks earlier this year, most notably around Sarajevo in June. The Bosnian Government has publicly expressed doubts that the international community will maintain enough pressure on the Serbs to reach an agreement that is acceptable to Sarajevo.

- [Senior Bosnian Government officials are probably divided between those who see the air campaign as an opportunity to achieve a peace agreement along the lines of the recent US initiative, and those who want to hold out for more territory and a unitary Bosnian state.]
- The air campaign will likely exacerbate differences among the Bosnian leaders, and it is uncertain whether the air campaign will make the Bosnian Muslims more amenable to a peace agreement in the near term. Lingering suspicions over long-term Western commitment to Bosnia, coupled with the desire to maintain a unitary state, may make Bosnian Government acceptance of an agreement difficult to achieve. []

Croatia. Croatian leaders probably view the NATO air campaign as further confirmation of Western support for their war aims and as a key opportunity to construct a buffer zone in Bosnia under the pretext of protecting the Federation. The Croats--like all Bosnian combatants--ultimately view possession of key territory as the only issue of substance. Reestablishing Croatian sovereignty over eastern Slavonia remains Zagreb's primary objective. []

Serbia. Belgrade, while publicly condemning the airstrikes, has sought to maintain the momentum for negotiations so that it can receive sanctions relief. Serbian President Milosevic is almost certainly not concerned about whether the Serbs keep heavy weapons around Sarajevo, but he has allowed the Yugoslav military to step-up its support to the BSA.

- Milosevic was instrumental during early September efforts aimed at pressuring the Bosnian Serbs to withdraw, according to multiple sources. Unless the airstrikes significantly increase in intensity and result in substantial casualties, Milosevic is likely to maintain heavy pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to stick with the peace process.

Did the Air Campaign Achieve its Objectives?

The Bosnian Serb leadership eventually agreed to withdraw their heavy weapons from around Sarajevo, almost certainly chiefly to stop the NATO airstrikes at a time when Croatian and Federation forces were on the offensive. The Bosnian Serbs also publicly stated that they would allow free access to Sarajevo and refrain from shelling the city, unless the Bosnian Government launched an offensive. Although Bosnian Serb military capabilities have been degraded in several functional areas, the BSA retains the capability to conduct some combat operations. The Serb defeat in western Bosnia was almost certainly at least partly the result of the impact of the NATO air campaign that disrupted communications and undercut Serb morale.