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## National Intelligence Council Memorandum

### Lifting the Arms Embargo: Impact on the War in Bosnia

**Key Points** A UN Security Council decision to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia would intensify the fighting and would not lead to early termination of the conflict.

- It would help Bosnian Government forces to defend the main body of government-held territory but would not enable them to retake significant amounts of lost territory or defend their enclaves against determined Serb offensives.

Croatia's acquiescence would be necessary before large quantities of arms could reach Bosnian forces. The Croats are permitting additional deliveries of light weapons—small arms, mortars, and antitank missiles—but would be leery of large amounts of heavy weaponry—tanks and artillery.

Bosnian Serbs would not be cowed into concessions if the embargo were lifted. They would bank on Belgrade's sending more weapons and supplies to offset major shipments of heavy weapons to Bosnian Government forces.

- The Bosnian Serbs would respond forcefully, attacking isolated enclaves and detaining UN personnel.

UNPROFOR's operations would be subject to Bosnian Serb retaliatory attacks. Many states would withdraw their forces, and the mission would collapse.

*This memorandum was prepared by the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces and the National Intelligence Officer for Europe. It was coordinated with representatives of CIA, DIA, State/INR, NSA, and the military services.*

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## Lifting the Arms Embargo: Impact on the War in Bosnia

SCOPE NOTE: This memorandum assumes that the arms embargo is lifted by the UN Security Council, and that it is lifted selectively against Bosnia (and perhaps Croatia) but remains in force, along with other sanctions, against Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs. We do not address the prospects for, or obstacles to, achieving such agreement in the United Nations.

Lifting the arms embargo would require redefining the no fly zone (NFZ), safe areas, and exclusion zones and the role of NATO in enforcing them. If these were not changed, NATO would become directly engaged with the Bosnian Serbs. Our analysis assumes that the NFZ, safe areas, and exclusion zones will fundamentally change with the lifting of the embargo.

### Effect of the Embargo

#### *One-sided impact*

The main impact of the embargo on supplying arms to governments of the former Yugoslavia has been to limit the Bosnian Government's military capabilities. It has had little impact on Croatia, and virtually no effect on Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs.

### The UN Arms Embargo

The United Nations imposed a general and complete embargo on all deliveries of arms and military equipment to Yugoslavia on September 25, 1991, under Security Council Resolution 713. The Resolution did not specify embargoed items, but most Western nations use the COCOM International Munitions List or more comprehensive national laws. Other nations have similar lists of items considered war materiel, although they are usually less detailed and may omit some dual-use items. Russia, for example, probably uses a list inherited from the USSR that does not include military transport helicopters.

Security Council resolution 724 of December 1991 created a committee to oversee the embargo. In January 1992, Resolution 727 declared that the embargo applies to all successor states of Yugoslavia.

#### *Some leakage to Bosnian forces*

Since Croatia cut off arms deliveries in April 1993 the Bosnian Government has been sustained by weapons stockpiled in Bosnia by the former Yugoslavia, by limited indigenous production of arms, and by captured small caliber weapons and ammunition. Malaysia and

Iran have smuggled in limited amounts of ordnance and munition components. In addition, the Bosnian Government probably is purchasing some military goods on the gray market. For example, it has obtained Red Arrow antitank guided missiles—limited quantities of both launchers and missiles.

The success of the embargo in denying armaments to Bosnian Government forces stems from their geographic isolation: they are surrounded by Serbs and Croats.

*Serbs largely self-sufficient*

The Bosnian Serbs are largely self sufficient in armaments. When Yugoslavia collapsed, they inherited most of the Yugoslav Army's military stockpile in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was scaled to fight a war of attrition against a Soviet invasion and so was very large. In fact, the Bosnian Serbs are largely fighting the war out of in-country Yugoslav inventory, which at the current rate will permit them to fight on for years.

- Serbia has obtained small amounts of equipment, mostly components used in arms production, in violation of the arms embargo.

#### **The Bosnian Government's Wishlist**

The Bosnian government seeks a range of light and heavy armament, ammunition, and basic supplies. It wants first the weapons it can quickly absorb; Bosnian forces have the experience and infrastructure needed to use mortars, recoilless rifles, and antitank missiles effectively.

*Light armament more easily absorbed*

- Small-caliber armaments, mortars, antitank weapons, and shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile systems are already in the Bosnian Government arsenal, and more could be assimilated quickly. These weapons provide an increased—but not assured—capability to protect existing territory and population centers. Moreover, these kinds of weapons are plentiful on the world market through official and private sources; Turkey has stockpiled such weapons in Istanbul, for example, and earmarked them for Bosnian Government forces.



~~SECRET~~***Heavy armament  
more difficult***

- The Bosnian government also would seek heavy weapons—tanks and artillery. Obtaining these weapons—and the training essential to use them effectively—is fundamental to ultimate Bosnian government aims: rolling back Serb gains and seizing sufficient territory to block the linkage of Serb-held territory in eastern and western Bosnia via Brcko and the Posavina corridor.

The Bosnian Government has millions of dollars set aside for weapons purchases. Dramatic improvement in Bosnian internal distribution systems makes it likely that once in Bosnian government hands, weapons would very quickly reach most forces in the field.

**Role of Croatia*****Croatian support  
would be critical***

Barring an unlikely UN decision to take and hold territory, including airfields, as staging areas for arms deliveries, Croatian acquiescence would be necessary before materiel could be delivered to the Bosnian Government. If the Croats agreed, the arms spigot could be opened almost immediately.

- Zagreb has already allowed weapons and supplies to reach Bosnian Government forces.

***But Croats would  
take a cut...***

The Croats would facilitate movement of light arms primarily because they would take a percentage of everything coming in, especially of items they want themselves—for example, secure communications gear and logistic support equipment, including transport.

***...and would limit  
heavy weapons***

Unless the Croatian government was satisfied with the progress in implementing the Bosnian-Croat Federation in Bosnia, specifically the creation of a joint Bosnian Croat and Government army, it would be reluctant to permit the delivery of heavy weapons to Bosnia. The Croats would fear that such weapons would be turned against the Bosnian Croats. (The two sides fought a bitter struggle over the last year.) Nevertheless, Croatia would not confront what it perceived to be the will of the international community and would not block deliveries in the face of firm US diplomatic pressure—if it also received similar arms.

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~~SECRET~~**Delivery Routes**

Because airfields can be easily closed, especially by artillery attack, airlifts and air drops probably would be able to provide only limited amounts of light weaponry. Therefore, most weapons shipments would be across land from the port of Ploce and perhaps Split.

Bosnia's topography channels most major ground routes from Croatia to the Bosnian interior through a few key roads. If the Serbs interdicted several key roads, for example, they would be able to stop most arms shipments from reaching territory controlled by the Bosnian Government. Because humanitarian relief convoys from Croatia follow the same routes the arms shipments probably would use, interdiction of these routes could slow or block humanitarian aid deliveries to Bosnian Muslims.

At the same time, Bosnia's rugged terrain, heavy forestation, and numerous tracks and trails would make small shipments of arms virtually impossible to block. Early in the conflict, Bosnian Government forces used tracks and trails that crossed Bosnian Serb-controlled territory to deliver significant amounts of food and weapons to the Gorazde enclave.

***Bosnian Serbs  
have the edge*****The Current Military Balance**

Bosnian Serb forces have been effective on the battlefield because they are better organized and equipped. In addition, during early military actions they seized key areas, routes, and equipment stocks that continue to confer a military advantage. Bosnian Government forces have advantages in manpower and morale and have improved their leadership and organization since mid-1993. Bosnian Croat forces are less effective and depend on support from the Croatian Army, which currently has at least several thousand troops and several dozen tanks and artillery pieces deployed in Bosnia (see table).

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**The Military Balance in Bosnia  
March 1994**

	<u>Bosnian Serb Army</u>	<u>Bosnian Government Forces</u>	<u>Bosnian Croat Army</u>
Troops	Up to 85,000	100,000-130,000 <sup>a</sup>	40,000-50,000
Tanks	400-600	20-30	40-50 <sup>b</sup>
Armored vehicles	200	Less than 25	Unknown
Heavy mortars, rocket launchers, and artillery	1,000-1,400 <sup>c</sup>	200-300 <sup>d</sup>	50-80 <sup>b</sup>
Combat aircraft	20	0	0
Helicopters	22	4-5	6 <sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Plus 5,000 formerly in Bosnian Croat Army.

<sup>b</sup>Includes some Croatian Army equipment in Bosnia.

<sup>c</sup>Includes artillery 76mm and larger; mortars 120mm and larger.

<sup>d</sup>Includes heavy mortars 120mm and larger.

<sup>e</sup>Deployed from Croatia

**Impact and Implications of Lifting the Embargo**

Lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Government would intensify the fighting and would not lead to early termination of the conflict. Instead, the apparent international tilt toward the Bosnian Government would embolden it to fight on, leading to a more violent Bosnian Serb reaction.

*Government forces  
would take action*

With additional weapons, the Bosnian Government would expand its current offensive military effort to retake territory from the Bosnian Serbs. Bosnia's leaders would be encouraged to maximize their territorial demands and would reject any negotiating formula that did not meet this goal.

*...but could not  
roll Serbs back*

With additional light weaponry, Government infantry could do more, but without the means to offset the overwhelming Serb advantage in heavy artillery, Bosnian Government forces could not retake significant territory from the Serbs. Additional light arms would help secure Government gains in central Bosnia, but they would not permit Government forces to successfully defend the more isolated Bosnian enclaves—Gorazde, Srebrenica, Zepa, and possibly Bihac—against

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determined Serb offensives. Indeed, if lifting the embargo resulted in the UN's departure from the enclaves—a highly likely outcome—these isolated locations would fall quickly.

Heavy weaponry would be more expensive and difficult to field. While such weapons would provide some immediate help, an extended training period would be required for the Bosnian Army to field units capable of conquering significant amounts of territory. The difficulties of integrating newly delivered weaponry would be compounded if Government forces acquired diverse weapons types and models, or if training programs were not part of the acquisition deals.

***Bosnian Serbs  
would respond***

We judge that the Bosnian Serbs—whose conduct Belgrade cannot completely control—would respond forcefully, and probably preemptively, to a lifting of the arms embargo. They would immediately go on the offensive, attacking Government enclaves and detaining UN and non-government organization personnel, and would call for additional support from Belgrade. In an attempt to prevent or complicate arms shipments via Croatia, Bosnian Serbs might coordinate operations with Krajina Serbs, risking a reopening of the war in Croatia. Bosnian Serbs would break off any active peace negotiations, claiming a lack of good faith and impartiality on the part of the international community and the UN.

***Belgrade would  
increase support***

Belgrade would not be cowed but would be unlikely to act precipitously in the event of a UN decision to lift the arms embargo. For example, Belgrade probably would not extend the geographic scope of the conflict beyond Bosnia. Nevertheless, we judge that Serbia would provide whatever support was needed to keep the Bosnian Serbs from being defeated and might take steps that would escalate the conflict within Bosnia; including:

- Sending in "volunteers."
- Providing more direct logistic—and perhaps lethal—support for Bosnian Serb attacks on enclaves and Bosnian airfields.
- Attempting to mine ports receiving arms shipments.

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**What would it take to make a difference?**

The greatest shortfall Bosnian Government forces face is their firepower disadvantage with Bosnian Serb forces. Government forces are rarely able to respond to Serb artillery attacks or counter Serb armor. This disadvantage is most apparent when Government forces are forced to defend large population centers under siege or challenge determined Serb offensives supported by heavy artillery and armor.

To recapture and hold meaningful amounts of territory from the Serbs, Bosnian Government forces would need:

- Large numbers of tanks, artillery (of caliber greater than 100mm), antitank weapons, and counterbattery radars.
  - C3 and training to use this equipment in coordinated offensive operations (and the time—several months—in which to train).
  - The infrastructure to supply and repair heavy weapons on the battlefield.
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***UN troops  
likely targets***

UN operations on Serb-held territory would quickly collapse if the arms embargo were lifted. UN personnel would become targets for Serbian retribution. For this reason, West European UNPROFOR contributors almost certainly would pull their forces out.

Alternatively, the UN could withdraw its personnel before the lifting of the embargo, but this move would tip off the Serbs and prompt them to act.



~~SECRET~~**Alternatively, a De Facto Lifting of the Embargo**

Without a UN Security Council resolution, the arms embargo could be lifted "de facto," by Western powers turning a "blind eye" to increasingly significant violations or unilaterally by the US. We judge, however, that the ultimate outcome for Bosnia would be much the same as under a formal lifting by the UN, although the dynamics—especially political—would be different.

- Violations of the embargo on a scale large enough to make a difference in Bosnian military capabilities would be noticed and hard for Western governments to plausibly deny.
- Militarily significant violations would elicit most of the same reactions by the parties—especially the Bosnian Serbs—as a formal lifting.
- A unilateral US lifting of the embargo would strain US relations with Russia and the NATO Allies, principally Britain and France.
- It would undermine other UN arms embargoes, for example, in Iraq.

***Wider implications***

In addition to the military effects of lifting the arms embargo, other immediate and longer term ramifications would be likely.

On the **plus** side, lifting the embargo could:

- Boost US and Western credibility with members of the Organization of Islamic Countries, particularly Turkey.
- Force Bosnian Serbs, and to some extent Belgrade, to pay a higher military price to continue the war in Bosnia.
- Put new strains on Belgrade's economic ability to support the Bosnian Serbs.

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On the **negative** side, such action could:

- Lead to renewed fighting between Croatia and Krajina Serbs.
- Highlight the inability of the UN and NATO to end the conflict and bloodshed in Bosnia.
- Further "internationalize" the conflict via introduction of foreign military equipment and trainers.
- Provide opportunities for greater meddling by Iran and other radical states.
- Tempt EU members to wash their hands of the crisis and pin the blame for greater bloodshed on the United States--which will be viewed as responsible for post-embargo developments in Bosnia.
- Undermine economic sanctions and arms embargoes against Serbia.
- Encourage other non-Serb minorities (for example, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo) to challenge Belgrade's authority in hopes of attracting Western military assistance.

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