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### The Balkans: The Next Three Months

Current Balkans leaders are pursuing irreconcilable demands that make even the beginning of a meaningful peace process in the next three months unlikely. At most, one or more of the key actors in the two major zones of conflict might be convinced to postpone military action. Postponement, however, is not necessarily a way station on the road to peace. Only a reordering of demands or a significant shift in the military situation on the ground would set the stage for a renewed effort to forge a lasting peace in the region. [ ]

#### The Key Actors: What Drives Them?

**Croatia:** Guided by a vision of his personal historical role, mounting nationalist/political pressures which he has helped generate, and frustration with the international community, President Tudjman is now prepared to initiate large-scale military action to reintegrate the Krajina into Croatia. He is encouraged by claims of military superiority from his generals and his own belief that Serbian President Milosevic will not intervene. We do not have evidence Tudjman is working with a specific time schedule; however, having taken the bit in his teeth, it is unlikely he will stall for long or accept merely paper changes in UNPROFOR's mandate. There is no significant peace faction in the Croatian leadership. [ ]

**Krajina Serbs:** Despite fractious personal differences, the Krajina Serb leadership adamantly refuses any form of reintegration, including the limited "autonomy" Zagreb is willing to offer. They will fight fiercely to protect their homeland and could escalate localized Croatian attacks by shelling major Croatian cities. If attacked, they expect help from the Bosnian Serbs and, in extremis, from Belgrade. There is no significant peace faction in Knin. [ ]

**Bosnian Government:** Bosnian leaders firmly believe that they can regain territory from the Bosnian Serbs and preserve the concept of a unified Bosnia within its internationally recognized boundaries only by military pressure. They are increasingly confident of their own military capabilities and see the tide swinging in their favor as they look out several years. There is no significant politically organized opposition within the Muslim community to this vision. The Bosnian Croats are largely satisfied with the territory they now control and take their guidance from Zagreb, not Sarajevo. The Herzegovinian hardliners leading the Bosnian Croats ultimately hope to be integrated into a Greater Croatia, a vision that Tudjman does not discourage. [ ]

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*Bosnian Serbs:* Bosnian Serb leaders will accept nothing less than an independent state as an interim measure toward the creation of an ill-defined "Greater Serbia." They are willing to give up some of the territory they now control to reach an agreement, but until then will fight to keep what they have. They are committed to helping the Krajina Serbs. If pressed by Bosnian Government forces, they might also consider a major military campaign aimed at dealing the Bosnian Government a severe defeat. Although some divisions among leaders are now being publicized, even those advocating acceptance of the Contact Group plan agree with Karadzic on driving a hard bargain on territory and independence for a Bosnian Serb state. Army Commander Mladic despises Karadzic but also shares his goal for an independent Serbian Bosnia with ties to Serbia. [ ]

*Serbia:* President Milosevic continues to be a cornerstone to a settlement but at the same time is only a secondary player with limited influence on those he helped into power in Pale and Knin. Milosevic is driven by a strong personal desire to remain in power. He seeks to end sanctions but not at the cost of important political values. He continues to support--for political if not necessarily personal reasons--the concept of a "Greater Serbia," which makes it unlikely he could recognize Croatia and Bosnia or refuse help to the Bosnian and Krajina Serbs if they appeared to be on the verge of serious setbacks. In the short run, he is unable, not just unwilling, to compel either the Krajina Serb or Bosnian Serb leaders to make compromises that they believe are not in their interest. There is no significant peace party in Serbia. [ ]

*Russia:* Moscow's overall objectives will be to maintain an influential role in the international decision-making process on the Balkans as the Contact Group process wanes, while trying to keep the conflict contained and minimizing NATO's role. Tactically, Russian leaders will want to increase Russian leverage and head off all domestic criticism by pressing for full sanctions relief for Serbia. Moscow has limited influence with Belgrade--and even less with Pale--but the Russians have the capacity to play a spoiler role. They may pose obstacles to any international actions if they believe that the West is not accounting for Russian interests. [ ]

*EU Contact Group Members:* Fearing renewed violence and a broader Balkan conflict, the European Union members of the Contact Group are desperate to keep the negotiating process alive but are increasingly frustrated with the intransigence of the feuding parties. Germany, Britain, and France--which holds the EU presidency and has the largest troop contingent in the former Yugoslavia--will focus on offering incentives for peace, wooing Zagreb with the prospect of EU aid and Belgrade with the promise of lifting sanctions. Despite differing views, European Contact Group members agree on the need for Contact Group unity and are likely to maintain a coordinated position among themselves under French leadership. [ ]

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## Three Scenarios

## Renewed Fighting

It is likely that fighting will resume in Bosnia in the next two months, and clashes could then follow quickly in Croatia.

- The Bosnian Government has clearly focused on resupplying, reequipping and reorganizing its forces during the four-month cessation of hostilities (COH) in preparation for launching additional attacks to retake territory in central Bosnia. The Bosnian Serbs also believe that fighting will resume and are taking steps to increase military pressure on the Bihac enclave.
- The Bihac enclave will be the likely focal point of fighting for most of March as the Government V Corps clashes with Krajina Serb and rebel Muslim forces--which did not sign the COH agreement--supported by the Bosnian Serbs. Major gains by either faction around Bihac would probably cause the fighting to spread elsewhere in Bosnia, as the losing faction would attempt to pressure the other by attacking at other points.
- Fighting will probably increase in the rest of Bosnia by late March or early April as the weather improves--temperatures rise into the mid-50s--and the warring factions begin to jockey for military advantage prior to the end of the COH on 30 April. In 1994, fighting picked up substantially in April as the government launched a series of attacks in central Bosnia and the Serbs responded by assaulting Gorazde.
- The Bosnian Serbs will probably make a push for new talks in late April and call for an extension of the COH agreement in an attempt to preempt a government attack. The Bosnian Government may accept additional talks under international pressure but will probably reject any extension of the COH agreement.
- The return of warmer, drier weather by May will probably lead to general fighting throughout Bosnia. Government forces will probably launch a series of local attacks--following their strategy of last year--especially in central and northern Bosnia. Government forces will probably make some territorial gains, as the Bosnian Serbs are stretched thin and essentially remain cut off from Serbia. Serb strategy has been to respond to any government attack with an overwhelming offensive--preferably against an isolated or poorly defended enclave--to press the government to abandon its offensive. The Bosnian Serbs, however, will be reluctant to commit their forces fully to a Bosnian offensive, because some may be needed to reinforce the Krajina Serbs in Croatia.

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- The resumption of fighting will spark renewed discussion of the need to remove UNPROFOR from Bosnia.

The fighting in Bosnia could influence the prospects for renewed clashes in Croatia, but Tudjman's decision on a renewal of the conflict there will be taken independently of the fighting in Bosnia.

- President Tudjman has ordered the UN to begin withdrawing from Croatia after 31 March and complete withdrawal by 30 June. The Croats expect to come under increasingly heavy international pressure in the coming month to extend the UN mandate. They appear prepared to stand firm and exact a high price: an international monitoring force--possibly including forces from NATO or Contact Group states--on the Croatian border with Bosnia and Serbia, recognition of Croatia's international border by Belgrade, and demonstrable progress on reintegration of Serb-held territory. In late March or early April, Tudjman may make a push for new talks with the Krajina Serbs, in hopes that the UN pullout will pressure the Serbs to make additional concessions.
- While the Krajina Serbs may be willing to undertake new negotiations after the deadline is passed, they will not make the concessions necessary to preempt military action by the Croatian armed forces.
- Clashes are likely in late April and early May as the UN begins its withdrawal. A key factor will be the UN pull-out from the Zone of Separation between the warring factions in late April. Krajina Serb and Croat military forces probably will both move to seize key positions along the confrontation line currently occupied by the UN.
- Zagreb will probably attempt to exploit any clashes to place the onus for renewed fighting on the Krajina Serbs. As the clashes escalate, the Krajina Serbs will take steps to impede the withdrawal of UNPROFOR, including taking isolated units as hostages. At this point, the UN may call for NATO to take steps to facilitate the withdrawal of the trapped peacekeepers.
- The Croats will probably try to avoid launching a major offensive until UNPROFOR has withdrawn--slated to be completed by 30 June--but could speed up this timetable if the Krajina Serbs take steps to formally unite with the Bosnian Serbs or they take direct military action against Croatian cities.

  
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- Tudjman may be influenced by events in Bosnia in establishing the timetable for any military operation. Heavy fighting in Bosnia could provide Zagreb with an opportunity to exploit the Krajina Serb weakness in manpower because fewer Bosnian Serbs would be available to reinforce the Krajina. If a settlement appears likely in Bosnia, the Croats may opt for military measures before the International Community eliminates sanctions on Serbia. [ ]

Milosevic's recognition of Croatia and Bosnia--although unlikely--would probably accelerate and increase the fighting in both Bosnia and Croatia.

- Serbia's recognition of Croatia's borders would cause the Krajina Serbs to announce formal unification with the Bosnian Serbs. This would almost certainly lead to an immediate military assault by the Croats.
- The Bosnian Government forces would be bolstered by recognition but would almost certainly redouble their military efforts against the Bosnian Serbs, who would now be completely cut off from resupply. [ ]

### Postponed Fighting

While the differences between the warring factions in Croatia and Bosnia make another round of fighting likely in the next three months, a combination of factors could postpone the fighting until later this year.

- Introduction of a follow-on peacekeeping force could delay renewed fighting in Croatia. Zagreb will only accept a new force that will take control of Croatia's border with Serbia and Bosnia. The Krajina Serbs are unlikely to accept such a force unless it also is charged with patrolling the current cease-fire line. If both factions compromised on this issue and some minimal international force--probably from the WEU or NATO--were in place in April before UNPROFOR begins withdrawing, fighting could be forestalled while a new round of negotiations took place.
- Zagreb will be reluctant to launch a major attack while substantial UN forces are still in Serb-held territories. If the UN withdrawal in April and May is particularly slow and a large number of peacekeepers remain in the region, Croatia may opt to postpone major military action until the fall, after the tourist season.
- If Croatia is seriously threatened with major economic sanctions in response to military attacks on the Krajina Serbs, Zagreb may delay military action until the international community's focus wanes or until Croatia can point to a serious Serb "provocation" to justify further military operations. [ ]

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[redacted]

Heavy fighting would be postponed in Bosnia if the Bosnian Government decided to delay its likely spring offensives.

- Heavy spring rains could impede resupply and movement of government forces, and they may wait until the drier months of June or July before launching major attacks.
- Government forces may wish to take advantage of the impact on the Serbs of renewed fighting in Croatia. Under such a scenario, they might postpone their attacks until the Bosnian Serbs are heavily engaged in the fighting in the Krajina, probably in June or later.
- The government could rethink its plans for military operations if serious negotiations were about to take place. These would require true concessions from the Bosnian Serbs prior to the start of talks, including removal of forces from key areas such as Sarajevo, and some form of acceptance of the original contact group plan. [redacted]

#### Movement Towards Peace

Despite five years of effort, the international community has not been able to affect the fundamental clashes of interests in the region. Unless the UN, NATO or some other outside actor is prepared for a massive long-term infusion of economic and military resources into the region, such changes are not likely in the near term. If all the warring factions made fundamental changes to their political positions, we would expect to see some of the following signs of movement towards agreement during the next three months.

- Croatia would have to accept the extension of the UNPROFOR mandate or the deployment of a new force that monitored the current cease-fire line by April in order to prevent renewed clashes--especially in the zone of separation this spring.
- By late spring, a new round of negotiations would have to begin, with both sides making major concessions. Croatia and the Krajina Serbs would have to be prepared to redraw existing international borders allowing the Serbs to live outside Croatian control. Alternatively, the complete Krajina Serb leadership would have to be replaced, and probably a substantial portion of the local Serb population removed to Bosnia or Serbia, leaving the Krajina inside Croatia.
- Negotiations could be based on a slightly less extreme scenario if Zagreb accepted significantly more "autonomy" for the Krajina Serbs than is contained in the Z-4 plan and the Krajina Serbs gave up the idea of any "special links" with Belgrade. [redacted]

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Movement towards a solution in Bosnia would almost certainly be tied to developments in Croatia, but any movement towards peace there would also rely on a number of unprecedented developments.

- Initially, the Bosnian Government and Bosnian Serbs would have to accept an extension of the current cessation of hostilities accord after 30 April and begin implementing all of its measures, including the separation of forces and the deployment of peacekeepers between the warring factions.
- To support the talks, the Bosnian Government would have to abandon its goal of maintaining a unified Bosnia. The Serbs would have to back down from their plans for association with Serbia.
- Effective enforcement of the arms embargo, especially the cut-off of Iranian arms deliveries, could make Sarajevo more receptive to a diplomatic settlement.
- As stated earlier, Belgrade's recognition of Croatia and Bosnia is likely to lead to an increase in fighting in the short term. If the Krajina Serbs and Bosnia Serbs are truly and completely cut off from Serbia, however, the weight of forces for the Croatians and Bosnia Government would lead to the eventual military defeat of both Serb groups--but not within the next three months.

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