

Intelligence Report

DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force

1 June 1995



Bosnian Military Situation After the Withdrawal of UN Peacekeepers



The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Bosnia would lead to an increase in fighting throughout the country as the Bosnian Serbs step up pressure on the Bosnian Government and the government forces attempt to seize additional territory. Under current conditions, neither side has the military wherewithal to deliver a knockout blow, and a UN withdrawal would almost certainly result in a military stalemate at a higher level of violence. Over time, however, the steady improvements in the leadership, supply, and training of the Bosnian Government forces may allow them to make major gains against the Bosnian Serbs--provided Belgrade does not step up its support. Serbia and Croatia will play a crucial role in determining the military outcome in Bosnia by controlling the amount of outside assistance available to the warring factions.



- In the most likely scenario, Belgrade will almost certainly maintain enough support to the Bosnian Serbs to ensure that they are not defeated by the Bosnian Government. Zagreb will also allow a steady flow of supplies to the Bosnian Government to tie down much of the Bosnian Serb Army, at least as long as the Krajina issue remains unresolved.
- The military balance would decisively shift in favor of the Bosnian Government forces if Belgrade ceased all support to the Bosnian Serbs and the flow of arms to the Muslims were increased.
- A decision by Belgrade to intervene directly in the conflict could eventually overwhelm the Bosnian Government forces, but would probably require a substantial and sustained commitment by the Yugoslav Army.
- A decision by Zagreb and Belgrade to end the conflict--either by direct involvement of both countries' forces against the Muslims or a Serb attack--coupled with Croatia cutting off outside support to the government, would lead to a relatively quick military defeat for most government forces.

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- Other nations could influence the level of fighting by providing funds and supplies, but probably would not be able to change the military situation fundamentally unless they were prepared to deploy substantial forces. [redacted]

Strategy, Goals, Strengths and Weaknesses of the Warring Factions

The warring factions in Bosnia continue to pursue conflicting war aims leaving little room for a negotiated settlement. The frontlines in Bosnia have remained relatively static since the spring of 1993. Fighting has been seasonal, with the largest clashes during the dry season in the summer and fall, tapering off during the Bosnian winter because of heavy snow in the mountains. Both the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Government, however, believe that the military balance is steadily tilting in favor of the Muslims.

- Bosnian Government forces are now better organized, led, and trained than they were at the start of the conflict. In addition, the federation agreement between the Bosnian Muslims and Croats has reopened supply lines to outside supporters.
- Bosnian Serb forces have been stretched thin trying to defend a long confrontation line with the Bosnian Government. Their overwhelming advantage in heavy weapons at the start of the conflict has been slowly undercut by improvement in the Bosnian Government forces. Manpower reserves have probably been used up and troop morale is reportedly shaky. Moreover, Belgrade's curtailment of support has reportedly led to some supply shortages.
- Bosnian Government forces have been able to launch a series of successful attacks this spring capturing much of Mt. Vlasic in central Bosnia, some 100 square kilometers of territory around Bihac, and limited territory elsewhere. Nevertheless, as the unsuccessful and costly attack in March around Stolice northeast of Tuzla demonstrated, improvements in Bosnian Government forces have not yet offset completely the Bosnian Serb Army's (BSA) superiority in heavy weapons. [redacted]

¹ This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Norm Schindler, Chief, DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force [redacted]

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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." Their military strategy over the last two years has been focused on defending territory they currently hold, launching occasional offensives to increase pressure on the Bosnian Government, and staging local counter-attacks to blunt government strikes. The Serbs consistently have sought an extended cease-fire in place that would effectively codify their territorial gains.

- Bosnian Serb forces continue to rely on their substantial advantage in heavy weapons--especially artillery--to blunt Bosnian Government attacks (see table). The Serbs are also better organized and have a more professional, experienced military leadership than their opponents in Bosnia. Nevertheless, the Bosnian Serb military suffers from a shortage of manpower and some morale problems.
- At the start of the conflict, the BSA inherited a substantial inventory of heavy weapons and ammunition from the Yugoslav Army. It has been able to use this stockpile for most of the conflict, but a variety of sources indicate that some units are now suffering from supply problems. The BSA is almost totally dependent on Serbia for fuel and some crucial spare parts for its heavy weapons, and Belgrade reportedly pays the salary of some officers. A total cutoff of support from Serbia would quickly undercut the BSA's ability to hold all of the territory that it currently occupies, but the Bosnian Serbs probably still have substantial stores of ammunition to defend areas they consider crucial.
- The Bosnian Serb military and political leadership has expressed increasing concern over the changing military balance. BSA Commander Mladic has indicated that time is not on the side of the Serbs and has called for an offensive to "win the war [redacted] [redacted] Serb leader Karadzic reportedly is concerned that his negotiating position would be undercut if such an attack failed.
- Following a UN withdrawal, the Bosnian Serbs would almost certainly step up their pressure on Sarajevo by shelling the city, launching local attacks to capture key terrain, and attempting to cut off supplies to the 280,000 civilian population. The Serbs view the city as a crucial pressure point for the Bosnian Government and the international community. A total cutoff of supplies to the city could starve the civilian population, but we believe the Bosnian Government forces would continue to fight in the city until driven out. The loss of the city would seriously undercut Bosnian Muslim will to continue the

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conflict, but the Bosnian Serbs are almost certainly unwilling to accept the high cost in casualties and destroyed equipment involved in eliminating resistance in this heavily built-up area that will almost certainly be vigorously defended.

- In other areas, the Serbs would shell and probably launch infantry attacks on the three eastern enclaves of Gorazde, Zepa, and Srebrenica in a move to drive the 120,000 Muslim civilians out of the region. The Bosnian Serbs, with assistance from the Krajina Serbs, would also attempt to break Muslim resistance around Bihac.

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 borders only by military pressure. Their military strategy has been to fight a war of attrition, launching multiple small-scale attacks along the confrontation line to seize key territory from the Bosnian Serbs and facilitate future attacks. Government leaders have indicated that they are prepared to fight on for several more years to achieve their goals.

- After three years of fighting, Bosnian Government forces have substantially improved their organization and training. They rely most heavily on high morale and manpower advantage in attacks on the Bosnian Serbs. Government forces remain hamstrung by a lack of heavy weapons, inexperienced leadership, lack of command and control systems, and a weak supply system that remains dependent on the willingness of Croatia to allow the transshipment of ammunition and equipment.
- After three years of fighting, the Bosnian Government has developed an extensive supply system to sustain their war effort. The government continues to operate a number of domestic defense industries to produce ammunition and some weapons. As stockpiles at these factories have declined, the government has received ammunition and raw materials from a number of outside supporters, especially Iran, Turkey, and Malaysia. The government has also been very active on the international arms market, purchasing weapons, uniforms and other supplies with funds provided by Bosnian Muslims in Europe, private Islamic organizations, and some official government-to-government funds provided by Saudi Arabia and others.

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- The Bosnian Government leadership is increasingly confident--probably over-confident--in the capability of its armed forces. Government commanders believe they can defend their core area against the Bosnian Serbs, or even a combined Bosnian Serb/Yugoslav Army attack [redacted]. They believe that they were able to withstand the Bosnian Serbs when the government forces had virtually nothing, and are now confident that improvements in their forces and their manpower advantage would allow them to defeat any combined Serb attack. This is based on the assessment of government planners of the military balance and their assumption that an attacker needs a substantial manpower advantage--perhaps as high as nine-to-one--to carry out a successful offensive.
- A UN pullout would not substantially alter the Bosnian Government's strategy in the short term. Government forces would launch an offensive to break the siege of Sarajevo and continue their attacks elsewhere along the confrontation line with the Bosnian Serbs. Government military commanders realize that they could not, however, defend the eastern enclaves. After a UN withdrawal, the government would quickly push for lifting the arms embargo and make calls for NATO intervention, but would continue to rely on their own forces to achieve their goals in Bosnia. [redacted]

Bosnian Croats/Croatia. The Bosnian Croats have essentially achieved their goals, but their overall strategy is subservient to Croatia. Zagreb's primary goal remains the reintegration of Serb-controlled territory in Croatia. It views the fighting in Bosnia as a useful means of tying down Bosnian Serb forces, otherwise available to reinforce the Krajina Serbs. To support its efforts in the Krajina, Zagreb has allowed a controlled flow of arms to the Bosnian Government forces, fostered some local cooperation between Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Government units, and even launched an attack in the Livno valley to threaten the Krajina Serb "capital" at Knin. The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Bosnia would not fundamentally alter this strategy.

- The Bosnian Croat army is a mediocre force hampered by poor morale, lack of effective leadership, and a shortage of manpower. The Bosnian Croats are wholly dependent on Zagreb for resupply, heavy equipment, and even military forces to defend their current holdings or launch local attacks. [redacted]

War Without the UN

The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Bosnia would not substantially alter the military balance, but would lead to an increase in fighting. We do not believe that either the Bosnian Serbs or the Bosnian Government have the military wherewithal to decisively defeat its opponent in the next several years. This would change, however, if there were substantial outside intervention. The attitudes and actions of Serbia and Croatia would have the most significant impact on the intensity and length of continued fighting in Bosnia.

If the UN withdrew, the Bosnian Serbs would almost certainly be able to eliminate the eastern enclaves, but the BSA does not have the forces available to defeat Bosnian Government forces in central Bosnia. The Serbs have been hampered by the curtailment of supplies from Serbia--although they almost certainly have not been completely cut off from Yugoslav logistics support. Over time--probably several years--the improvements in Bosnian Government forces may allow them to make substantial gains against the Bosnian Serbs, but only if Serbia continues to constrain material support. High government troop morale, continued access to outside supplies, and a manpower advantage would probably allow Sarajevo's forces to wear down the Bosnian Serbs and seize additional territory, but not retake the entire country.

- Lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian Government would accelerate the improvement in the government forces, but would not substantially alter the military balance in the short term. The Bosnian Army would require at least three to six months to acquire, distribute, and train on any new weapons and would still be hampered by an untrained leadership and a supply system dependent on Croatia. Over time, however, Bosnian Government forces would be able to use these weapons to make substantial territorial gains from the Bosnian Serbs. Whether they could defeat the BSA would be contingent on Belgrade's level of support to the Bosnian Serbs.
- The Bosnian Serbs have frequently stated that if the arms embargo is lifted they will launch an offensive to "win the war." The Serbs will attempt to eliminate the Bosnian Government military before the additional weapons and training can make a difference on the battlefield and further shift the military balance. We believe the BSA no longer is capable of defeating the government forces but could inflict significant damage on Sarajevo, the eastern enclaves, and other UN-declared safe areas.

- It is unlikely that any Islamic country, especially Iran and Turkey, would be willing and capable of deploying substantial forces to Bosnia. If they were, however, the intervention by 5,000 to 10,000 relatively well-trained and equipped forces could speed up the Bosnian Government's reconquest of territory.

Serbia's actions after a UN pullout will largely determine the future of fighting in Bosnia. If the Serbs substantially curtailed the shipment of supplies--especially ammunition and fuel--to the Bosnian Serbs, government forces could make substantial gains more quickly, perhaps within a year.

- We believe, however, that Serbia would almost certainly ensure that enough supplies are delivered to the Bosnian Serbs to stave off a major defeat leading to several years of continued fighting. A substantial increase in assistance would probably allow the Bosnian Serbs to increase offensive operations and defend more of its territory because the BSA would no longer have to husband resources. If the BSA appeared near collapse, Belgrade probably would send some forces to bolster the Bosnian Serbs.
- In a less likely scenario, Belgrade may decide to send substantial forces to Bosnia to end the war. Such a move would require a major portion of Serbia's military--especially its air force and armored units--to deliver such a blow. We believe that if Belgrade was prepared to send a large force it could compel the Bosnian Government to accept an unfavorable settlement--possibly in six months--although this would be contingent on the size and equipment of the units deployed and the time of year they were committed. The size of the force sent to Bosnia probably would also be constrained by the prospects for a conflict in Croatia.

Croatia's attitudes are almost as crucial as Serbia's in determining the outcome of the conflict in Bosnia. Zagreb remains focused on its goal of reintegrating the Serb-controlled regions of Croatia and views the fighting in Bosnia as subordinate to achieving this aim. At the same time, Croatia does not want to see a vastly improved Bosnian Government army that could threaten Bosnian Croat regions. Because any supplies to the Bosnian Government must transit Croat territory, Zagreb has ultimate controls over the Muslims' access to outside world and will use this control to prevent any actions that it considers threatening.

- Zagreb will allow enough support through to the Muslims to ensure that they can continue to tie down the maximum number of Bosnian Serb forces, thereby maintaining the conflict for several years or until Croatia has retaken the Krajina. It will probably continue to urge Bosnian Croat forces to support the government in retaking territory of mutual interest.
 - Croatia would block any major shipment of heavy weapons to the Bosnian Government because of concern over a substantially strengthened Muslim force. In addition, Zagreb is not likely to allow the deployment or resupply of major Islamic forces to Bosnia.
 - A UN pullout would seriously threaten the survival of the Bosnian Croat/Muslim Federation. UN peacekeepers have played a crucial role in maintaining the cease-fire between the two factions and old animosities could quickly flare following a withdrawal. Renewed Muslim versus Croat fighting coupled with a shut-off of outside support would undercut the government's ability to take the war to the Serbs and over an extended period--perhaps a year--could weaken government forces to the point they could not stave off major Serb attacks.
 - In an extremely unlikely scenario, Croatia, especially if it had already retaken the Krajina, could accelerate the defeat of the Bosnian Government by cutting off outside support completely or through direct intervention against the Muslims. Senior Croat officials continue to worry about the long-term effects of Islamic influence in Bosnia, and a variety of reporting indicates that Serbian leader Milosevic and Croatian President Tudjman have discussed dividing Bosnia. A complete cutoff of supplies, and the intervention of the Serbian Army could lead to the collapse of Bosnian Government resistance in less than six months. If the Croatian Army joined in this assault, Bosnian Government forces could be quickly overwhelmed.
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