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Bosnia: Alternative Courses of Action

None of the warring parties in the Bosnian conflict is likely to accept a negotiated settlement in the foreseeable future under current conditions. Fighting is likely to increase throughout the summer and the conflict in Croatia is likely to flare-up by the fall. This paper examines the reactions of the various parties in the former Yugoslavia to a series of scenarios involving greater or lesser international involvement.

As long as the warring parties in Bosnia are unprepared to accept a negotiated settlement, it is unlikely that any new initiatives will lead to a speedy resolution of the conflict.

- **Direct intervention** could quickly lead to a substantial decrease in the overall level of violence, but would not end it entirely. The intervention force would suffer casualties and unless Serbia were deterred from involvement in the conflict, a long-term foreign military commitment would be required to keep peace in the region.
- **Muddling through** does not bring a solution to the conflict any closer. The UN force in Bosnia and continued international attention to the conflict does, however, serve as a check on the fighting and probably helps prevent it from spreading.
- **Tilting towards the Bosnian Serbs** in negotiations would not increase the chances of a settlement and would increase the likelihood that the Bosnian Government would abandon the negotiating track entirely. Croatia would view any shift towards the Serbs as another excuse to speed up its timetable for an attack on the Krajina Serbs.
- **A withdrawal of the UN coupled with a lifting of the arms embargo** would almost certainly result in a continued military stalemate in the near term at a higher level of violence. Bosnian Serb attacks could result in a significant refugee crisis in the remaining government-controlled enclaves.

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Without outside air support, Bosnian success in stopping Serb attacks in the near-term is doubtful. Lifting the arms embargo against only the Bosnian Government would undercut its relationship with Croatia by removing the good offices of the UN in resolving current issues over the federation and exacerbating tensions over the supply of weapons to the Muslims.

Escalation

The introduction of a substantial international force to directly intervene in the conflict in an effort to roll-back Serb gains would significantly alter the military and security situation in Bosnia in the Bosnian Government's favor and increase the prospects for an eventual substantial decrease in the level of violence. The force, however, almost certainly would sustain significant casualties and need to remain in the region for years.

- **The Bosnian Government** would welcome the direct intervention of NATO or other international forces in the conflict, provided the forces were intended to support the government's territorial and political goals. The Bosnians would seek to use the international force to establish their control over all of Bosnia. They would also demand a firm long-term security guarantee from NATO or the United States against potential Serb irredentism.
- **The Bosnian Serbs** would immediately test the resolve of any international intervention force, believing that the international community would be unwilling to suffer major casualties in the conflict. Despite their bellicose rhetoric, if a substantial force deploys for an extended period of time, the Bosnian Serbs are likely to abandon conventional military operations and resort to a long-term strategy of guerrilla/terrorist operations to wear down the resolve of the international community.
- **Serbia** would strongly oppose an international intervention in the Bosnian conflict by stepping up covert support to the Bosnian Serbs such as providing additional funding, supplies, and safe havens for guerrilla bands. Belgrade would be reluctant to risk direct military retaliation by providing overt support to the Bosnian Serbs, but would seek to erode international support for the intervention by appealing to Russia and states in the region.
- **Croatia and the Bosnian Croats**--who basically follow Zagreb's direction--would probably support a military intervention in Bosnia in the short term, provided it was clearly aimed at the Bosnian Serbs. Zagreb probably would take advantage of the intervention to step up its diplomatic pressure on the Krajina Serbs, strengthening its already tough demands for Serb concessions. If the Serbs remain unwilling to come to terms, the presence of international forces in Bosnia is likely to lead Zagreb to step up its timetable for military action in Croatia. Over

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the longer term, the Croats are likely to be concerned that an extended intervention, coupled with security guarantees to the Bosnian Muslims, would undercut their goal of confederation with the Bosnian Croats. They would seek to limit the size and duration of the intervention by placing bureaucratic obstacles in the way of the deployment and resupply of the international force.

- A military intervention by an international military force against the Bosnian Serbs almost certainly would seriously shake the morale of the **Krajina Serb** leadership and make them more willing to make additional concessions to Zagreb; however, they would still strongly resist formal reintegration.
 - The **Russians** will strongly resist any move to have NATO or the US directly intervene in the conflict in Bosnia. Most **NATO Allies** will adamantly oppose such a military operation, either by the Alliance or by the United States alone.
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More Muddling Through

A decision to allow the conflict to continue with the current level of UN/NATO peacekeeping involvement until the warring parties are prepared to agree to a negotiated settlement implies several more years of conflict in Bosnia and a renewal of the fighting in Croatia. There is no guarantee that the situation will improve.

- The **Bosnian Government** already believes that the international community has little to offer toward solving the conflict, according to multiple sources, and is focusing on its own military efforts to force the Serbs to make further concessions. The Bosnian Government is increasingly confident of its military capabilities and believes it can achieve major territorial gains on the battlefield. Senior government officials, including Prime Minister Silajdzic, have stated that they believe their strategy of attrition will work against the Bosnian Serbs, but that it will take years. If the government begins to make substantial gains without the West's direct assistance, it almost certainly will increase its requirements for a negotiated settlement beyond those in the Contact Group plan.
- The **Bosnian Serbs** increasingly are concerned that the military balance is turning against them and view the status quo as inimical to their long-term interests. For now, they will continue to rely on their advantage in heavy weapons to blunt government attacks and occasionally punish vulnerable government positions in the remaining eastern enclaves or Sarajevo. At the political level, while troubled by their isolation from Serbia, they clearly have indicated that they are prepared to continue the conflict until the international community and the

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Bosnian Government are prepared to make new concessions. The Bosnian Serbs are debating whether to make a major military move to force the government to accept a permanent cease-fire and return to the bargaining table, and over time may decide to try to cut off Muslim territory in northern Bosnia or conduct a major assault on Sarajevo.

- **Serbia** will attempt to avoid major involvement in the Bosnian conflict until sanctions against it are lifted, but will continue small-scale covert support to the Bosnian Serb military. Over time, Belgrade may decide to step up this support even if sanctions are still in place, and almost certainly will do so if the Bosnian Serbs are in danger of suffering a major defeat. If Belgrade believes international attention to the conflict has waned, it may decide to try to end the conflict by more direct intervention or by cutting a deal with Croatia rather than allow it to continue for an indefinite period.
- **Croatia** and the **Bosnian Croats** already have most of what they want in Bosnia and will support the Bosnian Government's current efforts against the Bosnian Serbs as long as the Krajina issue remains unresolved. A substantial body of evidence indicates that the Croats will support heavy fighting in Bosnia this summer to wear down the Bosnian Serb military prior to a Croat offensive against the Krajina Serbs this fall. If, however, the conflict in Bosnia continues for several more years and international attention to it declines, the Croats--especially if they have retaken the Krajina--may seek an agreement with Serbia to divide Bosnia and end the fighting. Tudjman and Milosevic reportedly have discussed this option off and on over several years, although Croatia would find it more difficult to move forward with such a plan if it believes it would risk opprobrium in the international community, especially from the United States and Germany.
- The **Krajina Serbs** would have little choice but to accept the status quo in Bosnia and Croatia and hope that international community activism would restrain Zagreb from trying to retake Serb-held territory.
- Although the main contributors to the UN peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Croatia are not now planning to withdraw, they are showing clear signs of war weariness. A continued conflict with no movement towards a negotiated settlement could eventually lead to the withdrawal of the UN forces.

New Negotiations--With a Tilt Towards the Serbs

The international community's offer of substantial new concessions to the Bosnian Serbs, particularly over the issue of territory, could persuade them to accept a new peace plan, but would alienate the Bosnian Government and increase concern in Zagreb.

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- The **Bosnian Government** has made clear both publicly and privately that it is not prepared to accept major changes in the Contact Group plan that would favor the Bosnian Serbs. Only the cutoff of all international arms supplies to the government could compel it to return to the bargaining table with major concessions--and even then the government might continue to resist. Government hostility toward such pressure would be enormous and, through diplomatic channels and its extensive access to the press, it would accuse Washington of leading the international community's betrayal. The Bosnian Government almost certainly would step up military operations to undercut any negotiating efforts that were tilting to the Bosnian Serbs. The government would probably count on the Serbs' traditional overreaction to its offensives to persuade the international community to back away from any concessions to the Bosnian Serbs.
- The **Bosnian Serbs**, increasingly concerned over improvements in Bosnian Government military capabilities, would welcome any shift in the negotiations, but would still insist on a settlement that met their key concerns--a wider northern corridor under Serb control across Bosnia, elimination of Zepa and Gorazde, a partition of Sarajevo, and abandonment of the concept of a unitary Bosnia. The Serbs may also demand substantial reconstruction funds. Such concessions would be more difficult to defend if--as is likely--Karadzic and Mladic are indicted as war criminals.
- **Serbia** would strongly support any tilt toward the Bosnian Serbs and would step up its pressure on Pale to accept a settlement. Milosevic would term the shift as a clear victory for his effort to bring the Serbs and the Contact Group closer together and insist that he deserves the immediate lifting of sanctions as a reward.
- **Croatia** would fear that a weakening of the international community's stand on Bosnia would imply that Zagreb cannot count on international support for its goal of regaining control of Serb-held territory in Croatia. Any progress toward a solution in Bosnia would lead the Croatians to speed up their timetable for military action before a cease-fire frees up substantial numbers of Bosnian Serb forces for service in the Krajina. The Bosnian Croats will follow Zagreb's lead, although they are satisfied with the territory they control in Bosnia.
- A shift toward the Bosnian Serbs would encourage the **Krajina Serbs**, who would conclude that Pale's intransigence had paid off. Their primary concern, however, will remain the steady improvement in the Croatian Armed forces and the Krajina Serbs' continuing weaknesses in manpower. If a settlement were

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reached in Bosnia, the Krajina Serbs would become substantially more intransigent in any talks with Zagreb, believing that large Bosnian Serb reinforcements were now available to defend against a Croat attack.

- **France, the UK, and Russia** would welcome any steps that reinvigorated the negotiating process--even at the Bosnian Government's expense. France is pressing for renewed international contact with the Bosnian Serbs, according to diplomatic reporting, indicating a greater willingness to accept Serb views on a settlement. **Germany**, however, probably would oppose any new concessions to the Bosnian Serbs.

UN Withdrawal and Lifting the Arms Embargo

The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers and a lifting of the arms embargo--a scenario that could develop from the "muddle through" strategy--would lead to a substantial increase in the fighting, a new refugee crisis, and little movement toward a negotiated settlement in the near term. If the Bosnian Government can withstand the initial wave of Serb attacks, over time--several years--and in combination with air strikes, a lift of the arms embargo might represent Sarajevo's best chance for regaining control of significantly more of Bosnia--an outcome that would reduce the need for massive international troop to implement a peace settlement.

- The **Bosnian Government** remains committed to the concept of lifting the arms embargo and has grown increasingly dissatisfied with the UN peacekeepers. Nevertheless, since it is now able to acquire arms covertly, it would prefer that peacekeepers remain, in part as a check on potential Serb attacks against its isolated enclaves, although the recent Bosnian Serb offensive against Srebrenica will further weaken its support for maintaining the UN in Bosnia. The government would welcome a lifting of the arms embargo, believing that with additional arms--particularly heavy weapons to match the Serbs' strength in artillery--its forces could make substantial territorial gains. They would seek to use lift as a means of gaining additional military commitments from NATO or the US--such as air strikes--to blunt any major Serb offensives while the arms are being delivered and to deter the Yugoslav Army from entering the war. Indeed, a robust air campaign against Serb targets probably would be essential in allowing the Muslims to hold their own in the aftermath of an UNPROFOR withdrawal associated with lift. The Muslims believe additional arms would help speed up the time when they can defeat the Bosnian Serbs--although they believe this still would take years.

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- The **Bosnian Serbs** would launch major military attacks on the remaining eastern enclaves and Sarajevo if the UN withdraws and the arms embargo is lifted. About one-half of Muslims remaining in Bosnia are in these vulnerable enclaves and many could be forced into refugee status. The Serbs would attempt to increase the pain on the Muslims to force them to accept a permanent cease-fire and may launch a major "win the war" offensive in central Bosnia.
- **Serbia** would attempt to offset any improvements in the Bosnian Government forces as a result of lifting the arms embargo by increasing its support to the Bosnian Serbs. This would include additional supplies, fuel, volunteers and, in some circumstances, military units. Senior Serb leaders have stated both publicly and privately that they will not allow the Bosnian Serbs to be defeated.
- **Croatia** would seek to use the withdrawal of the UN and the lifting of the arms embargo to strengthen its own position in the region. Zagreb would demand that the lifting of the embargo on Croatia as its price for allowing the delivery of arms to the Bosnian Government and because its cause against the Serbs was equally deserving. If this did not take place, Zagreb would use the Bosnian Croats to siphon off arms and ammunition from the Federation--a de facto lifting of the embargo against Croatia. The Croats would still attempt to restrict the flow of arms to the Bosnian Muslims, because of residual concern over renewed Muslim/Croat clashes in Bosnia. The Croats would also attempt to take advantage of increased fighting in Bosnia following lifting of the arms embargo by stepping up military pressure on the Krajina Serbs. The withdrawal of peacekeepers--who have helped the Croats and Muslims implement the federation agreement--and likely tensions over the supply of arms could lead to serious problems in the Federation and perhaps its collapse.
- The withdrawal of the UN and lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia would be another area of concern for the **Krajina Serbs**, but probably would have only a limited impact on their overall strategy.
- The **Allies and Russians** probably would view lifting the arms embargo and the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping forces as an excuse for washing their hands of the Bosnian conflict. They would seek to minimize the potential for the conflict spreading while placing the onus on the United States for the continued fighting--regardless of whether lifting the embargo were a unilateral or multilateral initiative.

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