

DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force
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The Bosnian Army: Requirements for Defending the "Core Area"

The Army of Bosnia and Hercegovina (ABiH) is a competent defensive force capable of holding most of the territory under its control. Its offensive capability is evolving, but still lacks the firepower and mobility necessary to take and hold much additional territory.



- Since the initial Serb territorial gains were achieved at the beginning of the war, the conflict in Bosnia has been highly positional, centering on trench lines and bunkers that encompass the entire confrontation line in northern and central Bosnia. Military operations by either side have had to penetrate and capture these strong defensive positions before reaching vital objectives--a challenge which has proved difficult for both the ABiH and the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA).



- Aside from losses in the eastern enclaves and Bihac--where Government forces were ill-equipped and surrounded--the Bosnian Army has managed to defend nearly all of its holdings since 1993 despite repeated BSA offensives. Government troops also have been able to defend most of their core areas in northern and central Bosnia because of their large troop reserves and strong fortifications, which limit the effectiveness of BSA artillery during an attack.

The Bosnian Serbs, conversely, are a better-equipped and more proficient fighting force, but are thinly stretched along the roughly 1,000 kilometers of front they now hold and lack enough manpower to end the war. The BSA's long frontlines force it to distribute its armor and artillery across a wide area, making it difficult to concentrate its heavy weapons to achieve overwhelming firepower in any given sector.

- Krajina Serb Army units--if able to retreat from Croatia to Bosnia with their heavy equipment--could join the BSA and increase manpower by as much as 35%. It may, however, take time to renovate the force after its disaster in the Krajina before it is an effective addition to the BSA. Additional manpower could help the Serbs in Bosnia to better man their existing lines of confrontation and/or better concentrate their forces for attacks.
- So far the Bosnian Serb have generally used artillery bombardment and armor to make advances, avoiding infantry attacks in well-defended areas with the risk of heavy casualties.

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Requirements to Defend the "Core Area"

Assumptions:

- Any weapons given to the Bosnians will be used for offensive purposes, given the Government's long-term objective of reclaiming traditionally Muslim-held areas.
- Belgrade continues its current level of support to Bosnian Serbs: limited resupply, some VJ special forces, but no major ground force or air intervention in support of the BSA.
- Islamic assistance to Bosnia remains roughly comparable to current levels: moderate tonnage of supplies, no heavy equipment, negligible numbers of fighters.
- The Croatian government becomes willing to allow heavy weapons into central Bosnia and additional supplies into Bihac. The Bosnian Federation remains more or less intact: some Croat-Muslim military cooperation and maintenance of the cease-fire.

The Bosnian Army would not require major material assistance to defend the "core area"--the central region extending roughly from Tuzla to Mostar. The Croatian Army's breakthrough in UN Sector North has greatly improved the Bihac pocket's strategic position, making its prospects for survival excellent. Unless a land corridor is opened to Gorazde, it probably would eventually fall in the face of an all-out BSA attack, although Government forces in the enclave would not give up without a fight.

Equipment:

- To bolster the Bosnian Army and provide a more robust defensive capability, Government forces would require roughly 50 additional tanks, over 100 heavy artillery pieces, medium and heavy mortars, and anti-tank munitions. Improvements in the army's support structure--trucks or buses, jeeps, and communications assets--and fixed defenses--mines, machineguns, and barbed wire--would also significantly improve the force's combat capabilities.

Training:

- Most Government troops are relatively well educated and all adult males have had compulsory military training. The ABiH could assimilate personal weapons immediately and could probably train troops to employ crew-served weapons--artillery, mortars, and anti-tank weapons--in under six months, especially if they were familiar systems. However, it would take longer--perhaps six months or more with outside advisors--for its forces to learn to employ them most effectively and as units. Maintenance and supply would stress the army's existing logistic system and probably require additional training.

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- Continued No-Fly Zone enforcement would be helpful but not critical--so long as Federal "Yugoslav" air forces did not intervene--given the Bosnian Serbs' limited air power and the marginal impact of airpower in the war. The Government would not require air support to hold its core areas against BSA offensives at the current level of fighting. If the BSA were to escalate fighting by trying for a knock-out offensive, Government forces might need limited airstrikes, possibly to help relieve pressure on Sarajevo and Gorazde and disrupt BSA movement along key lines of communication.

Requirements for an Offensive Force**Assumptions:**

- Belgrade provides increased support to the Bosnian Serbs--including overt intervention if necessary--adequate to prevent a decisive Serb military defeat, major loss of support of Serb-majority territory, and/or to counter any Croat-Muslim threat to the Posavina corridor. This would partially offset increased supplies to the Government unless Western aid was so extensive that Belgrade could not keep pace.
- Islamic assistance to Bosnia increases, but is not decisive. More supplies, including some heavy equipment, reach Government forces; however, no outside countries contribute combat troops.
- Croatia and the Bosnian Croats become willing to allow transit of heavy equipment and supplies to the Bosnian Government.

The Bosnian Army is already able to conduct some offensives, and almost any form of material support would--directly or indirectly--improve the ABiH's offensive capabilities. However, to create a Bosnian Army with a genuine capability for sustained offensive operations, it would be necessary to transform many aspects of the fighting force. The Bosnians would require armor and artillery, much better transportation and a true logistics system, and combined-arms training supported by improved communications.

Equipment:

- In order to support successful attacks and regain a significant percentage of the country's territory, the Bosnian Army would require substantial heavy weapons and increased mobility: probably over 100 tanks, hundreds of artillery pieces, enough motorized transport to exploit breakthroughs, mine-clearing and combat engineer units.

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**Training:**

- The Bosnian Army would put any weapons it received to immediate use. However, Government forces probably would require 6-12 months of additional training by large numbers of outside advisors in order to effectively use the new equipment and mount the large-scale, combined arms operations required to capture and hold substantial additional territory.

Airstrikes:

- Airstrikes could significantly support Government offensive operations by blunting Serb counterattacks and destroying Serb resources--especially rear-area supply facilities, logistics infrastructure, and command and control nodes--which the Bosnians could not otherwise attack. A robust Western airstrike campaign would have to be prepared to actively counter Serb air defense threats in Bosnia.

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