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DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force
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The Bosnian Serbs: Likely Next Steps

Serb outrage over NATO air strikes appears to be evolving into a diplomatic strategy designed to get negotiations back on track--but on Serb terms.

- Serb leaders probably calculate that their detention of some 150-200 UN personnel, threats against UNPROFOR forces if air strikes continue, and harassment activities in Sarajevo will help deter further UN/NATO military action by demonstrating the risks of confrontation.
- For now, however, this game of brinkmanship seems calculated to frighten but not harm UN personnel. Perhaps the most flagrant act of defiance--yesterday's standoff between a Serb tank and French forces controlling a group of Serb heavy weapons near Sarajevo--ended with the tank backing down when confronted with the threat of NATO air-strikes.
- Even while pursuing a campaign of intimidation against UNPROFOR, the Serbs are discussing the possibility of resuming peace talks with Russian envoy Churkin, UN/EC mediators Owen and Stoltenberg, and UN envoy Akashi, according to press [redacted]

Serb leaders intend to press for maximalist concessions in exchange for their agreement to resume talks or withdraw from Gorazde, [redacted] and they believe that they will have Russia's support. Moreover, they may judge that the West Europeans--skittish about Serb threats to their UNPROFOR forces and less sympathetic than Washington to the territorial demands of the Bosnian Government--will accede to the following Serb demands:

- No Serb withdrawals from Gorazde prior to the talks, unless such withdrawals are directly linked to sanctions relief.
- A Serb decision to participate in new talks on a general Bosnia settlement must be rewarded with sanctions relief.
- Talks must occur under UN or Russian auspices. Bosnian Serb leader Karadzic said publicly yesterday that he considered Akashi, Churkin, or [redacted]

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Owen and Stoltenberg as acceptable mediators. The Serbs have rejected Washington's lead in negotiations;

they believe that the US ordered the Gorazde air-strikes. The Serbs are likely to call for the replacement of US Special Envoy Redman, who Serbian President Milosevic believes has lost his credibility with the Bosnian Serbs,

At the same time, the Serbs are prepared to counter Muslim offensives and, as they demonstrated in Gorazde, go on the offensive themselves to put pressure on the Muslims to negotiate. Indeed, the Serbs believe that the Bosnian Army is in the initial stages of an offensive against Bosnian Serb forces, according to a variety of sources, and they will attempt to anticipate and counter Muslim attacks even if negotiations resume.

-- a sinking pessimism that the war in Bosnia will escalate has taken hold in Pale.

-- The Bosnian Serbs reportedly believe that the Maglaj-Tesanj, Donji Vakuf, Doboje, Olovo, and Bihac areas are likely to continue to be centers of Serb-Muslim fighting.

If negotiations do not resume soon, we believe the Serbs might even go on the offensive to gain additional territory, particularly if they conclude that the international community is not willing to go beyond limited air-strikes in an attempt to stop them.

-- the "Yugoslav" Supreme Defense Council met earlier this week and concluded that the Bosnian Serb Army will attempt to widen the Doboje-Brcko corridor by another 10 to 15 kilometers to provide more secure access to Northwestern Serbia.

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