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### The Northern Corridor: The Bosnian Serbs' Achilles Heel

Maintaining a secure corridor of contiguous territory from Serbia to the Bosnian and Croatian Krajinas has been an overriding Serb military and political goal throughout the Bosnian conflict.

- The so-called "northern corridor" comprises a network of roads roughly paralleling the Sava River through Serb-held northern Bosnia. It constitutes the only secure ground link for military and economic traffic from the Serbian border and Serb-held eastern Bosnia to Banja Luka, western Bosnia, and the Krajina. At its narrowest point--near Brcko--the corridor is only about 5 kilometers wide, with a limited number of roads.
- Because of the corridor's critical importance to the military and economic viability of a "Greater Serbia", the Bosnian Serbs would respond with force to prevent its closure. At the same time, however, a sustained and credible threat to that lifeline almost certainly would affect the Serbs' calculus of how best to achieve a viable "Greater Serbia." such a threat could prompt them to be more forthcoming in reaching a territorial settlement that ensures their control of this vital area.

#### Economic Lifeline

Closing the northern corridor through Bosnia at Brcko would cut the crucial supply lines between Serbia and Serb-held areas in both western Bosnia and in Sectors South, North, and West in Croatia. The closure of the corridor would isolate most of the Bosnian Serbs' major industrial centers, including Banja Luka, Bosanski Brod, Derventa, and Jajce. Moreover, the Serbs in western Bosnia would no longer have access to the Adriatic, restricting their ability to import critical supplies such as petroleum.

- Both Serbia and the eastern sector of the Bosnian Serb territory would lose access to bauxite deposits at Bosanska-Krupa--which must be transported to Zvornik for processing--and to low-grade iron ore deposits at Omarska and Ljubija--from which a substantial portion of the former Yugoslavia's steel was produced.

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- Most parts of the Serb Krajina in Croatia would also be cut off from supplies from Serbia. While the most populous areas in Sector East have direct access to Serbia, the other three sectors must rely on trade with Bosnia, and probably only marginally on smuggling through Croatia and Croat-controlled areas in Bosnia.

#### Efforts to Control the Corridor

Bosnian Serb forces have fought a near-continuous campaign to retain the corridor, which parallels the front lines with Muslim and Croat forces from an area east of Brcko to just west of Doboj. Securing the towns and main roads in the area was one of the first objectives of the Bosnian Serbs when fighting broke out in the spring of 1992. They captured Bosanski Samac, Modrica, and Derventa in the summer of 1992, and continuously attacked around Brcko and Gradacac. By late 1992, Muslim and Croat forces had succeeded in narrowing the corridor near Brcko to only a few kilometers wide. A major Serb effort in mid-1993 succeeded in widening it again.

- Bosnian Serb military leaders recently have warned of renewed Muslim and Croat efforts to close the corridor, and boasted of plans to expand Serb control there. [REDACTED], senior "Yugoslav" officials expect the Bosnian Serbs to try to widen the corridor by ten to fifteen kilometers. [REDACTED]

The Bosnian Serb Army traditionally has deployed a substantial portion of its armor and artillery assets, and some of its best units, in the northern corridor area to ensure continued Serb control.

- The Bosnian Serbs routinely deploy about 25,000 troops in the most heavily-contested part of the corridor area running from Derventa, Doboj, and Maglaj east to Bijeljina. Bosnian Serb forces in this area probably include some 330 tanks and armored vehicles, and as many as 500 artillery pieces.
- In part because of their common interest in hindering Serb use of the corridor, Muslim and Bosnian Croat forces in northern Bosnia have fought well together throughout the conflict, even at the peak of Muslim-Croat fighting in central and southern Bosnia late last year. In the northern corridor region there are some

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20,000 to 25,000 Muslim troops and 3,000 Bosnian Croat forces equipped with limited amounts of heavy weapons. In the Orasje region, just north of the corridor, there are also some 7,000 Bosnian Croat troops who have not taken part in recent battles but could become involved if fighting expands.

#### Potential Impact of Threats to the Corridor

To be credible, a threat to shut down the corridor would require a tangible commitment to carry out and sustain interdiction efforts over time. A variety of reporting suggests that Bosnian Serb leaders are disdainful of recent UN/NATO military actions, and we believe that a few isolated airstrikes would be insufficient to affect Serb behavior.

A credible threat to the corridor probably would make Serbian President Milosevic and some Bosnian Serb leaders, such as Karadzic and Koljevic, more willing to make territorial concessions to the Muslims in order to achieve a negotiated settlement. The fluidity of the situation makes it difficult to gauge where the Bosnian Serbs would make such concessions, but their first impulse probably would be to "fatten up" their offers to add territory to the Muslim "core" in central Bosnia. Such an offer probably would be unsatisfactory to the Bosnian Government.

- They may be willing to give up more of Sarajevo to the Muslims, or more territory near Orasje to the Croats. The Serbs also may offer territory around the Bihac pocket.
- Belgrade and Pale, however, would reject any territorial arrangement that would further reduce the width of the corridor. They also probably would resist more territorial concessions in eastern Bosnia, but could offer to return the Gorazde enclave as a bargaining chip.

Threatening the lifeline between "eastern and western Serbs" would carry substantial risks in addition to possible benefits.

- Bosnian Government forces probably would take advantage of any outside military action in the corridor to try to expand the territory they control there and elsewhere in Bosnia.
- The Bosnian Serb Army almost certainly would seek to prevent a government offensive in the northern corridor by pursuing operations which would force the Muslims to redeploy forces, or

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at least reaffirm the message that taking on the Serbs would mean further loss of territory in eastern Bosnia. If the corridor was closed, the Serbs might attempt to open a new corridor to the Bosnian Krajina, possibly by linking Olovo to the Doboje area via Ribnica.

- Efforts to interdict the corridor also would reinforce Serb paranoia and confirm their belief that they are at war with the UN and NATO. Bosnian Serb forces, probably aided by Krajina Serb and possibly regular "Yugoslav" forces, would fight tenaciously against the interdicting forces. They would also target UN forces and NATO aircraft.
- Milosevic probably would be compelled to increase aid to the Bosnian Serb Army-- especially additional air defense and heavy weapons--particularly if he believed interdiction of the corridor threatened his goal of a "Greater Serbia." Airstrikes against the bridges over the Sava or Drina rivers probably would draw the Yugoslav Army directly into the fray.
- Closure of the corridor also would alarm the Krajina Serbs and could spark them into pushing for unity with the Bosnian Serbs to prevent being "strangled" into accepting Croatian rule.

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