

Bosnia Early Aug
AID 8963DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force
3 August 1995**An Evaluation of the Washington Post Article
"Would Lifting Embargo Help Bosnia?"**Approved for Release CIA Historical
Collections Division AR 70-14 1OCT2013**Summary**

Overall, the 31 July Washington Post article exaggerates the Bosnian Army's problems and downplays its strengths or improvements. Several of the problems cited in the article, such as command and control weaknesses, politicization, and problems in battlefield tactics, continue to hamper Bosnian Army operations. However, the article does little to place the Bosnian Army's limited success in conducting offensive operations in the context of this war's nature and does not discuss Bosnian Army defensive capabilities. The article also does not differentiate between Government forces in the eastern enclaves-- which have been cut off since 1993--from the rest of the Army.

**Srebrenica**

The article claims that the more than 9,000 troops in the Srebrenica enclave did not fight. The Post's estimate that there were 9,000 armed Bosnian Army troops in the enclave is exaggerated. The Intelligence Community- held 3,000 to 4,000 armed government personnel in Srebrenica. Of these, the Bosnian Government claimed privately that only 2,500 attempted to withdraw to Tuzla, not the thousands more stated publicly. There are also a number of reasons why government troops did not conduct a stronger positional defense of the enclave.

- The Bosnian Army forces in the enclave had very few heavy weapons of any type--field artillery or heavy mortars--and little or no ammunition for those they had. A lack of antitank weapons to counter Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) armor was an especially serious shortcoming, leaving the defenders unable to confront even a very small armored column. The Bosnian Army apparently did not remove whatever heavy weapons were in the UN weapons collections area in town, suggesting that the weapons were not operational or that the Bosnian forces lacked ammunition, gasoline, or other key components for them.
- The defenders' fundamentally weak defensive position was aggravated by a lack of effective command and control from the Bosnian Army's 28th Division. The entire divisional staff was killed in a helicopter shootdown in early May--including possibly Naser Oric, the 28th Division commander and military leader in Srebrenica since 1992. The Bosnian Army's evident lack of multi-brigade direction and Naser Oric's apparent absence hindered government attempts to conduct a coordinated defense.

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- Government forces around Srebrenica also lacked strong fortifications and secondary positions, especially when compared with the extensive defensive preparations seen elsewhere in Bosnia. This further undermined the defenders' ability to counter BSA armor or artillery. In addition, BSA forces already held many of the region's key terrain features, making a government defense based on the terrain--as occurred in Zepa--difficult.
- The Bosnian forces in the Srebrenica enclave started off as mostly poorly organized bands formed in late 1992, and probably were not mentally or organizationally prepared to conduct a positional defense of the enclave. Government troops elsewhere have become much more "regularized" since Srebrenica was cut off in early 1993, but the forces in Srebrenica retained their guerrilla-type composition and primarily conducted raids against nearby Serb-held towns and BSA rear areas. When confronted by a BSA force with superior organization and firepower, many Bosnian defenders probably opted to fade into the hills and try to get to friendly lines.
- Perhaps most importantly, Government leaders in the enclave probably were counting on the UN or NATO to do something to stop the BSA before it actually overran the entire UN-declared "safe area." When it became obvious that outside intervention was not going to save Srebrenica, there was no last-ditch fallback plan and it was too late for the defenders to do anything but try to escape. [REDACTED]

Command and Control

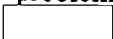
The Post article states that another view of the Bosnian Army is that it is "poorly organized and hampered by persistent command-and-control problems . . . and that the army has little hope on the battlefield." This characterization, in our view, is also exaggerated.

- The Bosnian Army conducted a complete reorganization of its forces during the January-March timeframe, introducing a system of divisional commands under each corps in place of the previous, more ad hoc command structure.
- The Bosnian Army officer cited as a source in the article almost certainly is the Army's nominal Deputy Commander, Brigadier General Jovan Divjak, a Serb. Divjak acts primarily as the leadership's token non-Muslim; he reportedly plays only a minimal role in army operations. Divjak has publicly denigrated the army's capabilities for some time, probably because he had been pushed aside by Muslim officers. [REDACTED]

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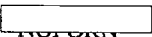

The current Bosnian Army high command--the General Staff and the corps commanders--is almost exclusively a creation of Bosnian Army Commander General Rasim Delic. All current senior officers owe their positions to Delic.

- Since he assumed command of the army in June 1993, Delic has created a unified senior officer corps comprised almost exclusively of regular ex-JNA officers, and is attempting to further professionalize the force by training mid- and junior-level officers and replacing locally appointed brigade and battalion commanders, according to a variety of reports. If successfully completed, Delic's "purge" will further unify the army, solidify its loyalty to Delic and central authorities, and weaken regional ties. Many local commanders previously were selected because of where they came from rather than for professional expertise.
- In addition, there is a clear chain of command from General Delic, through the General Staff and corps commanders to local units, with little evidence that local units disobey orders on a regular basis.
- Command and control problems during combat remain, however, especially at the tactical level between divisions and brigades and below brigade level. The Bosnian Army lacks sufficient tactical radios, and officers at brigade level and below probably still need additional experience at controlling their units in battle. There also appear to be problems in coordinating fire from the army's few and disparate heavy weapons. 

Politicization

The Post article also claims that the army is over-politicized, stating that "some UN officials and even some Bosnian officers perceive the army as a highly politicized tool of Bosnia's Muslim ruling party." The primary Muslim political party--the Party of Democratic Action (SDA)--has dominated the Army in almost the same way that the Yugoslav League of Communists dominated the JNA. The ex-JNA background of most senior officers makes them more likely to acquiesce in such a political arrangement.

- US Embassy reporting has noted the SDA's takeover of key republic institutions throughout Bosnia, including the army. Opposition parties have claimed that the majority of the General Staff are SDA members. The SDA National Party Congress in January was even scheduled to discuss how the party could facilitate the Army's formation of mobile attack brigades, according to US Embassy Sarajevo reporting.


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- The local power struggle between independent Tuzla Mayor Beslagic and the SDA over power in the Tuzla area and its impact on the Army's II Corps provides a good case study of the SDA's political domination over the Army. Beslagic has complained that the Army has a tendency toward becoming an "SDA party militia." Between August 1994 and January 1995, all senior II Corps officers were asked to join the SDA, according to US Embassy reporting. After Général Sadic, then II Corps commander, reportedly refused to join the party, he was reassigned as defense attaché in Turkey.
- Nevertheless, there is little evidence that the SDA's domination of the Bosnian Army has resulted in the appointment of commanders unqualified for their position. The Post example of Brigadier Sead Delic as a political commander with little military experience is false--Delic was either a Lieutenant Colonel or Major in the JNA and reportedly served as a battalion commander. Delic's performance to date has been mixed, failing to capture the Stolice radio relay tower, but having some success nibbling away at BSA positions elsewhere in the Majevisa Mountains.
- Politicization does not necessarily damage an army's capability. The Croatian and Bosnian Croat Armies (HV/HVO)--which the article acclaims--are heavily politicized, being dominated by the main Croat political party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).
- In addition, complaints about political imperatives driving military planning--especially for the Sarajevo offensive--may be misplaced. Since military operations are designed to achieve national political objectives; a failure to coordinate the two would make the conduct of the war difficult. Because President Izetbegovic and others believe that it will be hard for Sarajevo to survive another winter under siege and consider maintaining Government control of the Sarajevo area as a vital national objective, they therefore regard an offensive to relieve the siege a necessity. [REDACTED]

Government Strategy, Tactics, and the Nature of the War

The author of the Post article may misunderstand the nature of the war in Bosnia. The Bosnian Army never had any intention of implementing a guerrilla warfare strategy against the Bosnian Serbs, a strategy that usually does not involve taking and holding territory. Such an option is politically unacceptable, particularly because all sides believe they will only receive territory at the end of the war which they physically occupy. Instead, the Army has adopted an attrition strategy aimed at wearing down the BSA, seizing territory slowly, and eventually compelling a negotiated settlement on Bosnian Government terms. Such a strategy continues to require central direction from the

Bosnian General Staff, but there are few indications that the General Staff over-controls corps commanders that actually conduct offensive operations.

- The Bosnian Army has chosen a "bite and hold" campaign doctrine, making a series of small advances which the army--lacking armor or mechanized infantry--can exploit and defend, rather than seeking to make big gains all at once and becoming overextended, as occurred at Bihac and in the Ozren Mountains in 1994. [REDACTED]

The Bosnian Army moved away from poorly coordinated mass infantry attacks in 1994, and now uses special assault units to disrupt BSA defenses in depth and regular infantry to follow up and seize the disorganized BSA positions. Despite references to the contrary in the article, these are not "guerrilla" tactics, but sophisticated infantry tactics designed to take and hold territory. There are also no indications that the Bosnian Army has stopped using these tactics.

- During 1994, the Army increased its use of sabotage and special assault units which infiltrate behind BSA lines prior to an offensive and spearhead the regular infantry attack, respectively. The sabotage forces hit BSA communications and attack observation posts at the beginning of the drive, while the assault troops push through weak points in the BSA defenses to seize key positions--such as artillery observation points--and interfere with BSA command and control. These units push to the depth of the defensive position, severely disrupting the BSA's ability to mount a coherent defense.
- Destruction of artillery observation posts, command posts, and communications lines are vital to Government doctrine because of the BSA's heavy reliance on firepower and prompt counterattacks to halt Bosnian Army attacks.
- The confusion thus created helps isolate the thinly-spread BSA defensive strong points and makes it easier for second-echelon infantry units to seize the entire front's defensive system. Further advances are then possible because of the lack of depth to BSA positions, resulting from the overextension of their forces. [REDACTED]

Since the opening months of the war--when most of the Serb territorial gains were achieved--the war 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 to penetrate and capture these strong defensive positions before reaching vital objectives--a challenge which has proven very difficult for both the Bosnian Army and the BSA.

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- The BSA relies heavily on strong barrier defenses, incorporating bunker and trench systems and extensive minefields. Government troops have been conducting offensive operations with little or no armor or artillery support--vital to success in positional warfare--and achieved some success, despite suffering heavy casualties.
- The Bosnian Army has had difficulty consolidating some of these gains because the Army is often unable to dig in well-enough or quickly enough to withstand strong BSA counterattacks supported by armor and artillery.
- Nevertheless, Government forces continue to hold key positions overlooking two key BSA roads near Sarajevo captured in June, most of the key heights surrounding Bihac city captured during the spring, and the Mount Vlasic area in central Bosnia also captured this spring. [REDACTED]

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 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 a given sector.

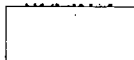
- BSA attacks against the Teocak area, east of Tuzla, and near Brcko this spring made only minor gains, most of which government forces recaptured. In addition, BSA forces were unable to eliminate Government forces around Bihac last fall when the Bosnian Army reoccupied its previous defense lines around the city. Earlier offensives against Bihac in early 1994, against the Maglaj enclave in spring 1994, and against the Olovo area in early 1994 also failed to seize any substantial ground. [REDACTED]

Lack of Response to BSA Offensives

The Post article also charges that the Bosnian Army did not attempt to relieve pressure on government troops during BSA offensives against the eastern enclaves and Bihac. Bosnian Army troops, however, did launch attacks against the Donji Vakuf area in west central Bosnia, the Ozren Mountains in northern Bosnia, the Majevisa Mountains near Tuzla, and near the Treskavica Mountains south of Sarajevo, during this time period.

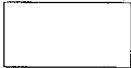
- The Donji Vakuf attack required the government's VII Corps to redeploy some of the troops it had deployed near Sarajevo before launching its attack, which was coordinated with Croat attacks further south, according to defense attache reporting. The VII Corps reportedly is scheduled to take part in a coordinated

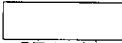
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Croatian-Bosnian Croat-government attack on 3 August toward Donji Vakuf and the town of Sipovo, northwest of Donji Vakuf.

- Government troops captured some territory around Donji Vakuf, in the Ozren area, and in the Majevisa region, but appear to have been able to hold only some of the gains around Majevisa, probably for many of the reasons noted above. In addition, the fighting in the Treskavica has see-sawed back and forth since June, with both sides undertaking attacks and counterattacks, while capturing and losing territory.




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