

After the Washington summit

US, NATO escalate war on Serbia

Martin McLaughlin
28 April 1999

Last weekend's NATO summit in Washington has been followed by a major escalation of the war by the United States and the European NATO powers on Yugoslavia, with intensified bombing of economic as well as military targets throughout Serbia and the deployment of more warplanes, troops and ships to the Balkan region.

According to press reports from the summit, the leaders and defense ministers of the 19 NATO powers gave their approval to a vast increase in the number of targets for bombing April 23, after a closed-door briefing with the alliance's two top generals, Wesley Clark of the United States and Klaus Naumann of Germany.

Naumann, chief military adviser to NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, said that in the briefing on targeting "certain additional categories were mentioned, and they were not objected to by anyone." These included the electricity system and other public utilities, including the water supply, as well as broadcasting stations, facilities owned by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and his family, and Milosevic's personal bodyguard.

The expansion of the air war was signaled even before the summit with last week's attack on the Serb television network, a calculated act of terror which killed dozens of technical workers and destroyed the network's headquarters building in downtown Belgrade. The site was hit again by missiles and bombs over the weekend.

The scope of the air war will increase dramatically following Hungary's agreement to provide bases for 300 additional US warplanes which will be in position to strike at Belgrade and the Serbian heartland just across the Hungarian border. The Clinton administration announced Tuesday that it would begin

calling up 33,000 reservists, mainly pilots and refueling specialists needed to keep up round-the-clock air strikes.

More ships and troops were headed for the region as well. The NATO summit approved a limited blockade of oil supplies to Yugoslavia, which enter the country by ship at the Adriatic port of Bar in Montenegro. While NATO warships will not use force to halt tankers, the stopping of ships on a "voluntary" basis will halt all but Russian vessels. Romania and Bulgaria have agreed to cut off deliveries of oil through Yugoslavia's eastern border. Most Russian oil supplies to Belgrade have come by rail or up the Danube River through Romania.

While the NATO summit avoided any public discussion of the use of ground troops in the war, the total number of NATO soldiers near the border of Kosovo has passed the 20,000 mark, with the arrival of additional British and French troops in Macedonia and another 2,000 American troops and several companies of tanks and armored cars in Albania, including the first Marine units to be stationed in that country.

Fifty US Apache attack helicopters are now deployed in Albania and are expected to go into action against Yugoslav Army tanks and armored cars in Kosovo. The Apaches are a step towards ground warfare, since they usually work in conjunction with motorized infantry.

The brutality of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia was indicated in comments by Naumann Monday. According to the *Washington Post*, the German general "estimated that the bombing so far has set Yugoslavia back economically about 10 years, on top of the roughly 10 years of economic progress it lost as a result of earlier wars this decade in Bosnia and Croatia. He predicted that continued bombing could end up reversing the country's development level by the

equivalent of 50 years."

Yugoslav officials have estimated that the air war has already caused \$100 billion in damage, with the destruction of such facilities as chemical, drug, cigarette, shoe and light aircraft factories, as well as TV transmitters, railway stations and airports. Every bridge across the Danube River has been destroyed, and the collapsed bridges have blocked river traffic on central Europe's most important waterway. Ordinary life in Serbia has come to a standstill, with schools and universities closed, hundreds of thousands of factory workers laid off, and most public transportation halted.

The escalation of the bombing approved by NATO means that the country's electricity and telephone system as well as its water and sewage system--which depend on electrical power for their operation--will soon cease to function. Yugoslavia will soon resemble Iraq, with the conditions for widespread epidemics of cholera and other diseases, and an upsurge in mortality, especially among children, that will dwarf the casualties inflicted directly by bombs and missiles.

NATO warplanes are destroying not only the infrastructure of Yugoslavia, but its capability for rebuilding after the war. On April 14 bombs and missiles destroyed the biggest factory in the industrial city of Krusevac, a plant which makes earth movers and other heavy machinery, but has no military production. The factory's deputy general manager, Nebojsa Toskovic, told visiting reporters, "This was the biggest heavy machinery plant in the Balkans. Without machinery from this factory, the country will be unable to reconstruct all the bridges and everything else that has been destroyed by NATO."

While the war against Serbia was the focus of media coverage of the NATO summit, the conference had a broader political and historical significance. It coincided with the expansion of the US-dominated alliance into Eastern Europe and the launching of the first offensive military operation in the 50 years since NATO was founded.

The speed of the transformation of NATO from a purportedly defensive alliance into the spearhead for military intervention by the United States and the European imperialist powers is breathtaking. For 49 years, NATO united the US, Canada and the countries of Western Europe, together with Greece and Turkey, against the alleged threat of the Soviet Union, but never

fired an actual shot in battle. In its fiftieth year, NATO has taken in its first East European members--Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic; dispatched troops to Macedonia and Albania; launched an air war against the former Yugoslavia; and extended its military umbrella to include every country which borders on Serbia, including Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia, Hungary, Macedonia and Albania.

The last measure is particularly provocative, since there is no Serbian threat to countries like Bulgaria and Romania--which has twice the population and five times the area of the Yugoslav federation. The action, formally approved by the NATO summit leaders, amounts to the declaration of a NATO protectorate over the Balkan peninsula, including the entire area that once formed part of the Warsaw Pact buffer zone on the western border of the Soviet Union.

The communiqué adopted by the 19 NATO powers offered eventual membership to nine additional countries in Eastern Europe, including three former republics of the Soviet Union, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, another flagrant provocation in the eyes of the Russian government. Their applications to join NATO will be reviewed in 2002.

Equally significant is the virtual repudiation of the United Nations, an action hailed by Clinton administration officials. French President Jacques Chirac had sought language that would commit NATO to obtaining approval by the UN Security Council before dispatching ground troops into Kosovo or taking other military action outside of the territory of the NATO member countries. But at the insistence of the US and Britain, the summit communiqué contains only a formula generally recognizing "the primary responsibility of the United Nations Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security," while maintaining NATO's freedom of action.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact