

US escalates terror-bombing of Yugoslav cities

The Editorial Board
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Within hours of the announcement of an agreement between the NATO powers and Russia on the outlines of a settlement of the war in the Balkans, US and NATO warplanes carried out their most devastating raids yet in seven weeks of increasingly savage bombardment of Yugoslavia.

As the toll of death and destruction mounts, it is harder and harder to sustain the pretense that the bombs which hit homes, hospitals, buses and produce markets represent unintended "collateral damage" of a war against the Yugoslav Army and the government of President Slobodan Milosevic. What is taking place is a deliberate effort to terrorize the entire population of Yugoslavia, as American and NATO warplanes conduct the most barbarous air attacks in Europe since the Nazi blitzkriegs and Allied firebombings of World War II.

In the most ominous single attack, as many as four bombs or missiles slammed into the Chinese embassy in Belgrade late Friday night. Two dozen staff were inside when the blasts hit, and most were injured, although no deaths have yet been reported. Both the embassy and the adjacent Hotel Jugoslavia, also hit by a missile, were in flames.

One Chinese diplomat expressed outrage over the attack, saying that embassy was in a residential neighborhood, far from any likely military target. Yugoslav officials said that the targeting of the Chinese embassy was deliberate, in retaliation for China's opposition to the bombing and its agreement to represent Yugoslav diplomatic interests in Washington for the duration of the war.

Belgrade, the capital, a city of 2.5 million, was without electricity again Friday night, as US warplanes dropped another graphite "blackout bomb," the second time this weapon has been used to shut down the city's

electrical system. The blackout shut down hospitals, the water and sewage system and other vital public services, for a metropolis the size of Boston or Cleveland.

Another blackout bomb was used on Podgorica, capital of Montenegro, the smaller republic which, with Serbia, comprises the Yugoslav Federation. Virtually the entire republic of Montenegro was without electrical power.

Much of the city of Nis, second largest in Serbia, was laid waste Thursday night when air strikes on the city's fuel depot touched off a conflagration. This was followed by even more intense strikes Friday, including the bombing of a hospital and an open-air produce market, in which at least 15 people died and nearly 100 were injured.

Eyewitnesses described elderly people and housewives, killed by shrapnel, lying in the streets next to a few eggs or a bag of fruit, a purchase which cost them their lives. Nis Mayor Zoran Zivkovic said there were no military targets within a kilometer of the market, which was hit by cluster bombs, an anti-personnel weapon. At the hospital the mayor said bombs hit the pathology department, the main teaching building and a parking lot.

Other raids hit the town of Pozarevac in northwest Serbia, where Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was born, and destroyed the main bridge for the railway leading from Belgrade to Romania.

The outlook is for steadily increasing air attacks. US Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced Thursday that an additional 176 aircraft were being dispatched to the Balkans, bringing NATO's aerial armada to more than 1,100 planes--against a Yugoslav air force which has only a dozen jet fighters remaining.

Among the new aircraft are 18 A-10 Thunderbolts,

used in low-flying attacks on tanks and armored vehicles; 18 F-16CJs; 36 F-15Es; 24 FA-18s; and 80 refueling planes, which allow hundreds of attack jets to remain in the air longer and make more sorties. Cohen said many of the added planes will be based in Hungary, which borders on the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, making possible air attacks on Serbia from virtually any direction.

The NATO ground force in the Balkans will be increased by another 1,000 German troops, whose dispatch was approved by the Bundestag Friday, the day after German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer hosted a G-8 foreign ministers meeting in Bonn and announced agreement with Russia.

Meanwhile the Pentagon has confirmed that US aircraft are firing depleted uranium munitions at targets in Yugoslavia. Major-General Chuck Wald, at a Department of Defense briefing Friday, said that US A-10 jets, mainly used against tanks and armored cars, were firing depleted uranium shells.

Depleted uranium is a byproduct of the heavy metal used in atomic reactors and nuclear bombs. Since it is extremely dense, 1.7 times as dense as lead, it can punch through the steel plating of a tank or other armored vehicles.

Depleted uranium weapons were extensively used in the Gulf War against Iraqi tanks. Veterans groups have charged that the radioactive and toxic substance is a major factor in Gulf War syndrome, the complex of health conditions suffered by tens of thousands of US and British soldiers who participated in the ground war.

Southern Iraq, where many of the depleted uranium weapons were used, now reports an enormous increase in stillbirths, birth defects, leukemia and other cancers. The Military Toxics Project at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, has published a study predicting an increase of between 20,000 and 100,000 fatal cancers among Gulf War veterans and Iraqi civilians as a result of depleted uranium.

Now this weapon--whose role as a long-term killer is still denied by the US government--is being used in the air war against Yugoslavia.



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