

NATO escalates attack on Yugoslav sovereignty

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NATO intensified its bombing of Yugoslavia on Monday after talks between NATO and Serbian military officials in Macedonia broke off without an agreement on terms for the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo.

“You'll see an intensification of the campaign today, tomorrow and in the future,” said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon. He said NATO planes carried out 93 missions Sunday and plans called for doubling or tripling that number over the next several days.

“We're going back to a full range of targets,” another senior Pentagon official said, implying new attacks on Belgrade and other major cities were in the offing.

Most of the strikes over the weekend were concentrated in southwestern Kosovo near the border with Albania, where NATO is coordinating its air assault with Kosovo Liberation Army forces fighting Serb troops on the ground. American B-52s dropped anti-personnel cluster bombs and missiles aimed at Serb tanks and artillery.

NATO continued to bomb civilian targets, hitting a number of villages in Kosovo and the district of Gornji Milanovac. One civilian was killed and another seriously injured in the attacks, according to the Serb news agency. NATO planes also hit Serb radio and television transmitters.

As has been the case throughout the 11-week war, US and NATO officials insisted they were not negotiating with the Serbs, but rather presenting “non-negotiable instructions.” The price for Serb recalcitrance was more death and destruction.

Later on Monday Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic gave new assurances to NATO foreign ministers meeting in Bonn that he intended to comply with the agreement he approved last week, providing for the withdrawal of all Serb troops and police from

Kosovo and the occupation of the province by a NATO-led military force.

NATO leaders and the Western media are depicting the breakdown in the talks in Macedonia as a product of Milosevic's penchant for stalling and deception. In fact the issues raised by the Yugoslav generals are entirely legitimate, from the standpoint both of protecting their forces during a retreat from Kosovo, and maintaining what remains of Yugoslav sovereignty.

According to various press reports on the talks, the Yugoslav side wanted firm guarantees for the safety of its forces. This is reasonable, under conditions in which NATO has been arming the KLA and the separatist guerrillas are champing at the bit to occupy the vacuum left by retreating Serb forces. It is doubly so given NATO's insistence that it has a right to use force in the event of any Serb violation of an eventual agreement. NATO would be judge, jury and executioner in overseeing the entire process.

The Yugoslavs also argued they would need more than the seven days allotted by NATO to remove some 40,000 troops, tanks and artillery from the province. They cited the difficulties created by the destructive impact of the NATO air assault on roads, bridges and rail lines, as well as a shortage of oil caused by NATO attacks on Serb oil facilities. They proposed a 15-day pullback period.

Another point of contention was the provision, mentioned in the agreement accepted by Milosevic but not elaborated on, requiring Yugoslav forces to pull back beyond a buffer zone within Serbia and Montenegro that would separate the Yugoslav military from Kosovo. The size of this buffer zone was not spelled out, nor was any limit indicated for its duration.

This provision is, on its face, a violation of Yugoslav sovereignty and opens up the possibility for NATO to

impose a “no-go” area within Yugoslavia similar to the “no-fly” zones the allies have imposed on Iraq. The Serb generals, however, did not reject the provision. They merely argued for a buffer zone of three miles, instead of the fifteen miles demanded by NATO.

A further indication of NATO's attitude toward Yugoslav sovereignty, which is formally acknowledged in the agreement accepted last week by Belgrade, came when Lieut. Gen. Sir Michael Jackson, representing the NATO military leadership, instructed his Yugoslav counterparts that they were to withdraw all of their troops to Serbia, and would not be permitted to transfer any portion to Montenegro, the other constituent republic of Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslavs apparently balked at attempts to force them to accept the NATO military's outline for the US-European occupation of Kosovo that is to follow the Serb withdrawal. They insisted, citing the text of last week's agreement, that such provisions fell within the purview of the United Nations Security Council, which is nominally to have overall authority over Kosovo.

Both Belgrade and Moscow want to delay the withdrawal of Serb forces until after the passage of a UN Security Council resolution on Kosovo, thereby underscoring the legal authority of the UN, as opposed to NATO. The US and Britain, on the other hand, want to begin moving NATO forces into Kosovo with or without—and preferably in advance of—a UN resolution, thereby underscoring the de facto supremacy of NATO in the Kosovan protectorate that is to be established.

According to some reports, the Yugoslav military leaders also objected to the demand for the total withdrawal of their forces from Kosovo, suggesting they be allowed to retain some 15,000 troops. This apparently took NATO by surprise and suggested differences between Milosevic and his military commanders. On Monday White House press secretary Joe Lockhart, responding to a reporter's question, denied there were any indications Milosevic was not in control of the generals representing Yugoslavia at the pullout talks.

Meanwhile on Monday, the foreign ministers of the G-7 countries and Russia, meeting in Bonn, were unable to agree on a resolution to bring before the UN Security Council because of differences raised by Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov. However Russian President Yeltsin assured Bill Clinton that Moscow

would not block a UN resolution to provide a legal cover for the US-NATO occupation of Kosovo.



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