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Morning Briefings

NATO HQ

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## Morning Briefing

By Jamie Shea

**Jamie Shea:** Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

As always, apart from wishing you good morning, let me also hope that you have all received the daily printout of the overnight activities. Good. Let me again mention that today is the day when we have the Force Generation Conference at SHAPE. Senior military representatives from all 19 NATO Allies and 12 Partner countries are gathering today at NATO's military headquarters in Mons and their job will be to assemble the first picture of the international security force that will guarantee the safety and security of the Kosovar Albanians when they return to their homes at the end of the conflict.

And the refugees will return to their homes. Even as NATO Allies today begin to work through the process of assembling a complex, multi-national peacekeeping force, the combined military and diplomatic squeeze on the Milosevic regime is tightening as we begin day 70 of Operation Allied Force.

As you have seen from the overnight update, the last 24 hours was another period of sustained operations against Milosevic's forces on the ground in Kosovo. At the same time, today is an important day for the diplomatic efforts as well as the President of Finland, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, Russia's Special Envoy to the Balkans, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and Deputy Secretary, Strobe Talbott, meet together in Bonn and later on also meet with Chancellor Schroeder as the President of the EU and the G8.

As President Ahtisaari made clear over the weekend if, and when, he goes to Belgrade it is not going to be to negotiate. It is going to be to present the firm, unbending, unconditional demands of the international community to Milosevic and to determine how close Milosevic now is to accepting those requirements which remain the same: to stop the killing, withdraw all of his military, paramilitary and police forces, accept an international security force with NATO at its core, to allow the unrestricted return of every refugee and to work towards a permanent, political solution.

At the same time today, as you know, we are receiving this afternoon the visit of the Prime Minister of Slovenia and he will be meeting the Secretary General at 4.30 p.m. and the Secretary General and the Prime Minister will meet the press at the main entrance at around 5.15 p.m., 5.15 p.m. today.

Finally let me also just draw your attention to an important declaration that was made in Warsaw yesterday afternoon by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. As you know, this is a parliamentary assembly which brings together parliamentarians, not only of all of the 19 NATO countries, but also of our Partner countries as well and they produced a very firm statement of support for NATO's action last night in which they totally condemn, I quote "the policies of President Milosevic and his regime" and say that this campaign of terror cannot be allowed to succeed and also make it clear in paragraph 7 of their declaration that we, I quote "fully support the objectives being pursued by the military action undertaken by NATO", and that the policies of the regime in Belgrade are solely responsible for the situation that has arisen. So we welcome that very strong statement of support from the parliamentary voices of the Alliance.

Now let me go directly to questions.

**Julie:** Jamie, with all the reports of the war raging along the Albanian border and seem to be getting more intense, and with Belgrade seeming to pursue an interpretation of the G8 plan that is at wide variance with what NATO's idea was that G8 plan says, what are the prospects that the Secretary General believes and that the NAC believes, what are the prospects for a pursuit of diplomacy right now and to resolve this thing? Diplomacy seems to be put on a fast track, but where is it going?

**Jamie Shea:** That is something, Julie, which we are going to have to wait to see this week. Obviously if, as has been suggested, President Ahtisaari goes with Mr. Chernomyrdin to Belgrade tomorrow, that will be a good signal of a developing and emerging united position of the international community. And then of course that will be an important visit to determine, as I've said, to what degree Milosevic has the same understanding of what the G8 principles really mean as we do. And once they come back from Belgrade, there will obviously be a further meeting to evaluate exactly how flexible Milosevic now is and what the gaps may still be.

So obviously I can't predict that in advance. The whole purpose of such a high level mission to Belgrade will be to put Milosevic to the test. First of all, of course, to make it clear to him that our understanding of these principles is firm and non-negotiable and that therefore he has to accept them. And secondly to assess how close now Belgrade is to accepting those principles. But I am not going to try to speculate in advance where we are going to come out of that.

**Question:** In the daily update there was no mention of the sorties. Apparently from Aviano they tell us that there has been a record number of sorties yesterday. Can you say that this was a new record or something?

**Jamie Shea:** No, and to be frank I don't really want to speak in terms of a record. This is not the Guinness Book of Records or the Olympics, it's a much more serious business unfortunately and it's not a question of trying to beat any records. What we are really trying to do is simply keep up an intensive momentum of operations. Now I am afraid I don't have the number of sorties, I tried to find this out before coming down, but of

course this is a figure that we will make available as soon as I have it from SHAPE. But you can obviously see from the extensive list of targets last night, the list runs to two full pages in our morning update, that it was obviously an active night of operations.

**Mark Laity, BBC:** A couple of points. With regard to all the attacks yesterday on the Albanian border, can you give us some kind of sit-rep on where NATO think the KLA are? Have they managed to get their second corridor and so on, some kind of assessment of that? And in all the language that President Milosevic has used, has he actually used any new language that you haven't heard before, he has talked about G8 principles before, so is there actually anything new in anything that he has come out with over the last couple of days?

**Jamie Shea:** Mark, let me as always answer the second question first. What is perhaps new is that first of all Milosevic has repeated that he is willing to accept the G8 principles, and even people like Ceseshel, who can hardly be accused of being a man of flexibility in dealing with the international community, has said the same thing as well. Secondly, we understand, although we haven't seen this yet, but we understand that there has been some communication officially from the government to Germany as President of the G8 and as President of the EU. As I have said before, anything which implies that Belgrade is moving closer to the position of the international community is clearly a step in the right direction, even if we have to evaluate what it means in practice. The details in this business are naturally all important, the substance is in the details as much as it in the principles. So that is what we will test this week.

On the question about the activities on the Albanian border, what we know is that the Kosovo Liberation Army has been trying to move off of its positions on Mount Pastrik along the Albanian border to try to link up with the existing corridor around Kosare. They haven't been successful in doing that at the moment, they have been using mortars and some 75 mm artillery in an attempt to outflank some VJ troops in the Mount Pastrik area, but my information is that these have not been successful and indeed the VJ have already tried to mount some attacks on Mount Pastrik itself. So fierce fighting is going on along that border there. That, by the way, is one of the reasons why the flow of refugees into Albania has become significantly less in the last few days. For example yesterday only 159 refugees arrived in Albania because clearly with that upsurge of fighting, and of course the fact that Serb tanks are shelling across the border into Albania and indeed destroyed a border post yesterday, means that it is now very dangerous for refugees to be in that area and to try to make a crossing. I am sure that when General Jertz comes at 3.00 pm he will have some more information about those UCK activities. The UCK doesn't seem to be losing ground, but doesn't seem to be gaining any either at the present time.

**Mark:** Is there any indication of levels of activity elsewhere? That is obviously where they are focused, how busy is the assessment as to UCK activity in the rest of Kosovo because the reports we are reading suggest there is a lot more sniping and small scale actions elsewhere?

**Jamie Shea:** Yes. What I have is that there is also fighting in the vicinity

of Djakovica. The UCK has achieved some successes further north in the area of Batusa, according to the reports that we have. And there is also extensive fighting in northern Kosovo where VJ and MUP, in combined operations, are pressing the Kosovo Liberation Army in the Srbica area. So yes, sporadic fighting in a number of areas, but it seems that around Mount Pastrik that the most extensive battle is going on for the time being.

**Greg:** AFP are reporting that witnesses are saying that NATO bombs actually dropped on the Albanian side of the border near Morino. We are getting word from SHAPE that maybe, they don't have confirmation on that, I don't know if you know any more on that. And is that the kind of thing that is maybe pushing your efforts to evacuate refugees even further? And you talked about today being the first picture of that international security force coming out of the SHAPE meeting, do you anticipate follow-up meetings?

**Jamie Shea:** Yes. On that last question, yes. It would be good if we could get all of the units and specialist forces that we need today, but the reality of the process is it often takes a few meetings. But this is going ahead expeditiously. On the other question, I have no information at the moment, I haven't seen this in any report this morning, of any NATO ordnance dropping in Albania. What I can say is that of course NATO forces are attacking Yugoslav forces along the Albanian border, we have been doing that consistently, and that is one factor which of course is helping the Kosovo Liberation Army indirectly to consolidate its positions on Mount Pastrik. But yes, clearly our concern is to make sure that the refugees from Kukes are evacuated to the south, notably to the Hamula 2 Camp which is situated just outside the port of Dures. I can tell you that since 21 April, AFOR forces have moved 5,600 refugees out of the Kukes area. About 30,000 of those refugees are still in tents. One problem is persuading them to leave because they want to be as close to their homeland as possible, even where it is not always in the interests of their safety to be in those areas. And still there are a large number of people living with families in Kukes too that should be moved.

**Doug Hamilton, Reuters:** Do you have anything on a new Yugoslav Army offensive in the Drenica, Malesevo area, where there are said to be tens of thousands, the KLA says 200,000, IDPs? I don't know exactly what they are doing there but they say there is some new offensive going on.

**Jamie Shea:** Yes, I have seen some reports of fighting around Malesevo. A clean and sweep operation, according to one report we had, which is focused on the Malesevo, Orehovac, Suva Reka triangle. This has been an area of fighting for some days. As you know, Malaveso has traditionally been a stronghold of the Kosovo Liberation Army, right from the beginning of the crisis in March of last year. But as to the IDP figures in that particular area, I don't have anything on that. We know that there are about 550,000 displaced persons currently inside Kosovo but I don't have an update on the exact localisation.

**Philippe Rater, AFP:** Est-ce que la reunion de cet aprs-midi au SHAPE est limite au pays de l'OTAN ou est-ce qu'elle est dj largie aux partenaires?

**Jamie Shea:** Non, j'ai dit dans mon introduction que les dernières informations dont je dispose c'est que les 12 pays partenaires qui ont déjà montré un certain intérêt participeront à l'opération. Ils participeront à cette conférence de génération.

**Philippe Rater:** Mais dont la Russie?

**Jamie Shea:** Je ne sais pas. Je n'ai pas les noms de ces pays-là, simplement qu'il y a douze pays partenaires qui sont là aujourd'hui.

**Philippe Rater:** Est-ce que vous avez déjà des indications sur la contribution américaine qui pourrait être faite pour cette force?

**Jamie Shea:** Non, il est impossible de donner le résultat avant le match, Philippe.

