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**by Mr Jamie Shea, NATO Spokesman
and Major General Walter Jertz, SHAPE**

Jamie Shea : Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Good to see you. General Jertz has got a longer presentation than he has normally, so I will spare you my usual introduction, pass the floor directly to him, and come back for the questions. General, it's all yours.

Major General Jertz : Thank you very much, Jamie. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I need to start with a message which I actually tried to avoid. Because of technical reasons there will be no slides during my presentation, so you will all have to stay awake. To be honest, you will get the slides on the way out. We have managed so that everybody will be handed all the slides which I am presenting. I am sorry for that.

I would like to begin today's briefing with a further update on the impact of our air operations against Serb military structure and Serb ground forces in Kosovo. 70 days ago, Serb military possessed a first-rate well equipped Air Force and Army. Today, after 70 days of NATO air operations, the Serb Air Force is a shadow of its original form. Fixed wing and helicopter assets are detected only on very short flights, generally just to disperse for survival.

The Serb army has lost a significant portion of its major equipment and is losing more with each passing day. Life in the field has become less and less tolerable as forces are under constant danger of attacks by NATO Air Forces, and in desperate need of resupply. His garrison support structure has been severely damaged.

As you know, the air campaign commenced with operations directed at the Serbian integrated air defence system. The aim was, and is, to degrade Serb capability in order to create a more secure environment for our aircraft and air crew to operate.

The overall result is that today we can fly against whatever targets we choose, at a risk we can tolerate and still get an outstanding result on the ground. The glue that binds any air defence system together is the command and control network that integrates the air defence system into a co-ordinated strategic and operational defence. Without effective command and control, the system degrades into a number of disjointed, autonomous operations that, although capable of inflicting damage, are much less effective. Early warning radars have been repeatedly targeted. Their effectiveness has been much reduced and more often no early warning radar activity is noted at all.

This is compared to 70 days ago when a robust, multi-layered redundant system was active. Radio relay facilities are an important conduit for the transmission of data and voice communications between the central command and the field commanders. The system has been moderately degraded with 38% of selected sites by now, having been destroyed, or at least suffered significant damage. Additionally, in NATO's air campaign to degrade overall Serb military command and control system, we have selectively targeted electrical grids that distribute power to these facilities, thus effectively disrupting those systems.

Serb surface to air missile capability, including surface to air missiles, number two, and surface to air missiles number three, and also SAM6 systems continue to operate in a degraded mode. The constant threat of attack has forced Serb forces to frequently reposition their assets to avoid NATO targeting, thereby of course reducing their effectiveness. Overall, two thirds of surface to air missiles two and three are destroyed by now. We have damaged 40% of their missile system production and repair facilities. This has resulted in four of their remaining SAM6 radars being non-operational. Three additional SAM6 assets have been destroyed. Keep in mind, however, that especially SAM6 systems are entirely mobile, but we continue to chase them, attack them and destroy them.

We have successfully targeted Serb fighter aircraft whilst on the ground or in the air. Air Forces losses totalling over 100 aircraft, as I have already been mentioning, as with their SAM systems they continue to disperse their operational aircraft to highway strips and other less capable airfields, to avoid NATO attacks. These locations do not possess adequate support facilities, thus degrading aircraft operational effectiveness.

It should also be noted that many of the surviving ground attack aircraft are considered as in derelict condition, or they are stored, which means they are not effective. All nine main airfields have been targeted and all have suffered moderate or severe damage, resulting in an estimated 69% reduction in the operational capability up to now. Air strikes have eliminated most of their maintenance hangars and support facilities. Overall, the integrated air defence system has been significantly degraded, permitting NATO air power to concentrate on our other operational objectives in an environment of reduced risk.

Turning now to Serb ground forces in Kosovo, these forces as you know have been priority targets since the air operation started. Heavy weapons have played a significant role in the repressive operations of Serb military and special police forces.

As of yesterday, we have struck 314 artillery pieces, 203 armoured personnel carriers, and 120 tanks, totalling 637 pieces of heavy weapons. This degrades way over 30% of the assessed Serb heavy weapons in Kosovo. Additionally, we have struck 268 other military vehicles. But once again you will be handed out the viewfoils on the way out.

We have destroyed 14 command posts by now. Command posts are the ones which direct the forces in Kosovo, thereby depriving those forces of key communications and computer equipment and of course personnel.

We do not track Serbian military casualties, as many of you have asked in the past, because we have no reliable means of doing so. But what I can tell you is that there is no evidence of withdrawals from Kosovo, and that with some replacements there remain around 40,000 Serb forces in the region.

Finally, I would like to turn to our operations to cut off support to the Serb forces conducting operations in Kosovo. One of our aims was to deprive the Serb forces of an uninterrupted supply of petroleum products to conduct operations. We have basically eliminated their oil-refining capability forcing them to rely on external sources to replenish their supplies. We are taking action to block fuel imports via the Adriatic, and we recently struck the fuel pumps at Braevo, thus disrupting the offloading of what limited fuel comes in barges up the Danube River. Their fuel reserves have been significantly reduced with 41% of their military's petroleum reserves, and 57% of the joint military/civilian reserves, damaged or destroyed. Their storage facilities have also suffered heavy damage with 37% of their capacity either damaged or even destroyed.

Turning to ammunition storage facilities. To date, 29% of the FRY's total ammunition storage capacity has been destroyed. As of yesterday, we have destroyed, or at least heavily damaged, 34 highway bridges and 11 railway bridges. The two main railroads, and two major road routes from Serbia into Kosovo have been cut effectively, separating Kosovo from southern Serbia. Now Serb military are forced to use secondary routes, increasing their risk to be attacked. But the emphasis has been on the key corridors into Kosovo, lines of communications over, and on, the Danube have been struck, in order to reduce the flow of military supplies from northern Serbia. Overall, to date, NATO operations have delivered a significant blow to the Serbian forces in Kosovo, and the ongoing efforts to support and resupply those support forces. We have degraded their capability and capacity to conduct operations under their terms. They are finding it increasingly difficult to move, and are constantly at risk to NATO's air threat.

I have just described an army, and armed forces, in decline. Let me compare it with an Alliance whose military forces are in the ascent, with reinforcement aircraft flowing into the theatre by the day, with new bases, most recently as you know, in Hungary coming on line for the mounting of combat operations and, as a result, with aircraft sorties and strike rates growing we inflict more and more damage on the Serb military machine, a machine which is the basis of the dictatorship of Milosevic.

I will now provide you with a summary of yesterday's NATO air operations. 778 sorties were flown against strategic and tactical targets. 319 were strike related, plus 89 suppression of enemy air defence. Total sorties adding up now to 31,529. We hit command bunkers at Avelan, at Dobonovski Presidential retreat facility, radio and TV relay sites, an electrical power transformer yard at Nis, and a power transmission tower near Belgrade. We struck a highway bridge, ammunition storage sites and a petroleum refuelling station. Other targeted military facilities included a military barracks, an engineer depot, a training area, a Serb military tunnel staging area, and border posts at Donavo and Burovik. Airfields at

Batanjica and Pristina and surface to air missile support facilities near Belgrade were also struck. There was no Serb aircraft activity and only intermittent use of air defence radars yesterday. However, once again 20 missiles were fired at NATO aircraft yesterday, and the aircraft artillery fire was light. All NATO aircraft returned safely.

The main ground action yesterday involved fierce fighting in the vicinity of Mount Pastrik in south-western Kosovo. The Serbs, massing their forces to combat the UCK offensive, presented NATO with a target rich environment. Our strike aircraft took advantage of that concentration, and struck a wide variety of targets. Artillery pieces, a multiple rocket launcher, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and other military vehicles are among 84 pieces of combat equipment in that area.

This, ladies and gentlemen, concludes my portion of the brief.

Mark Laity, BBC: Two questions, one to General Jertz. You talked about the concentration of forces to fight the KLA providing NATO with a target-rich environment. If there is not fighting going on, is it getting harder for NATO aircraft to find targets unless the KLA force the Serbs to concentrate? Jamie, on collateral damage, this extra number of sorties, is this causing more risks of collateral damage because you are flying more missions, attacking targets of a different kind?

Major General Jertz : Well, Mark, no, there are still enough targets all over Kosovo which can be attacked and destroyed by NATO aircraft. However of course as a military man, if I see a full and good amount of, as I have said, rich environment military targets, I would go ahead and attack those because they do belong to the whole total force within Kosovo, and that is why of course we put good emphasis on this area.

Jamie Shea : Mark, as you know, when we started this operation we were conducting about 30 strike attacks a night. Now, as General Jertz has pointed out, with the extra aircraft, with the intensification, we are conducting up to 350 attacks a night. So that is a tenfold increase and there certainly has not been a tenfold increase in the number of bombs that have gone astray or the number of instances where NATO has inflicted harm on civilians. If anything therefore the proportion is getting better and that is because NATO planners take every conceivable precaution, as I have said again, hours of preparation to ensure that we strike accurately.

But again, I would like, as I did yesterday, to stress that we need to keep this whole business of unintentional damage to civilians, collateral damage to use this awful term, in perspective. All of you know that the recent stories, the pictures that have been provided by Serb TV, Milosevic's authorities, have captivated the attention of the media. But of course these are pictures which President Milosevic wants you to see because it suits his purpose. NATO cannot, we will not be able to, provide casualty reports, military or civilian. We have not been able to do this in the past, we can't do it at the moment and we won't be able to do this in the future. NATO simply doesn't have personnel on the ground with ballistic and other experts to determine the truth. But I think it is clear to everybody by now that Serb TV and President Milosevic is not a very reliable source in these matters.

Now obviously the international media is going to report civilian casualties that Milosevic's authorities say were killed by NATO, but there is again an enduring and fundamental difference between unintentional civilian casualties, which Milosevic of course allows the international media to film, and the real story, the real tragedy unfolding in Kosovo which he doesn't. And in the last two months, Milosevic's forces have intentionally killed thousands of civilians. Our conservative estimate, and this really is conservative, is that over 5,000 people have been summarily executed, and this is not the result of an accident, this is a deliberately planned, carefully orchestrated, campaign of ethnic cleansing in which over 800,000 men, women and children have been expelled from their homeland; another half a million are living in the woods and mountains of Kosovo as internally displaced persons; the homes of hundreds of thousands of people have been destroyed or severely damaged; we know that there have been rapes of hundreds of women, and this systematic abuse is not simply documented by NATO, it is documented by the people who really know about these things - the United Nations and a number of human rights organisations. And of course Belgrade has made sure that none of this, none of these pictures of this murder, deliberate murder, ever get out of Kosovo to be seen on our TV screens. I continue to believe that this campaign is the most accurate, precise military campaign in the history of human conflict.

Now you are going to ask me, are innocent people going to die in a conflict like this one? The answer is undoubtedly yes. But Milosevic kills and terrorises civilians, not by the dozen, but by the hundreds of thousands, and it is a matter of policy for him to do that. And if anybody is in danger in Yugoslavia today, it is because Milosevic has chosen to put over a million of his own people, Kosovar Albanians, in danger. That is the bottom line. So there are going to be incidents in the future, unfortunately yes, when Belgrade will allege that we have killed innocent civilians. Some of these stories will be false, some will be exaggerated, but some will be true, but that doesn't diminish the fact that this is a conflict and that we have right on our side.

Bill Drozdiak, Washington Post: Jamie, for the past few weeks you have been describing the escalating nature of the attacks on Serb forces in Kosovo, and even accounts of substantial desertions. Yet Major General Jertz cited that there are still 40,000 Serb forces, which I believe is the same number that you were citing at the outset of the conflict. How do you explain this? Is this because there have been substantial reinforcements coming in from the Second Army in Montenegro or elsewhere, or is it because the casualties that you first said may have been exaggerated?

Jamie Shea : No, it is because there has been a kind of systematic sweep of Yugoslav towns and villages for recruits. I have reported that men over 50 have now in southern Serbia been mobilised into the army, in fact much of the unrest that we have seen in some of the cities over the last few weeks has been a reaction to the fact that people have begun to be drafted in large numbers for duty in Kosovo, and that of course is one of the reasons why there is this expanded war weariness now. And indeed people from the Second Army in Montenegro have also been called up, that again is another reason for the current increase in tension between Montenegro and Serbia. So it is not that Milosevic isn't taking losses, he

is, it is simply that he is now drawing on his last human resources to keep the numbers level, but he can't do that indefinitely because the reserves of manpower are not inexhaustible.

Major General Jertz : And also bear in mind that a soldier is not a soldier, you know, it depends on how good he is trained and of course it depends on what kind of armoured personnel carriers, tanks, or what kind of equipment he has. Bringing in persons, soldiers, is much easier because I told you, and several times Jamie also did, that of course the main lines of communication are no longer available but for a soldier to be brought in, maybe even in a civilian car, which we have evidence of, they can of course come into Kosovo. But once again, if the tanks are out of fuel, if the tanks are out of ammunition, if the tanks don't move any more, this soldier is not as capable to fight as one with more military assets.

Jamie Shea : But Bill, if I can just add, in Krusevac this week you have had 24 reservists who have refused to be mobilised. So far 4 of them have been sentenced to a term of 4 years, 10 months imprisonment. I know it is only 4, but again it is indicative of a growing mood and it is also indicative of the rather extreme measures to which the Yugoslav authorities have to go to press-gang the others into service.

Neil King, The Wall Street Journal: On the diplomatic front, what hopes do you hold for tomorrow and if it is the case that Mr. Ahtisaari accompanies Mr. Chernomyrdin to Belgrade, what should we read into that? If it is, which I suppose is the case, that Moscow and NATO have come to some sort of allied opinion about what should happen, if that is the case, how important will that be towards the resolution of this matter or some kind of settlement?

Jamie Shea : Neil, NATO will always be hopeful but we will also always be realistic. If President Ahtisaari does make the trip to Belgrade tomorrow, and the decision is still his to make of course, then I do think that that would be a sign of an increasingly united position of the international community and of course that would be another factor to put pressure on Milosevic.

Having said that, I am quite sure that if President Ahtisaari does go, he will carry a firm message that he is not there to negotiate, that he is there to obtain from Milosevic an unambiguous, clear and verifiable pledge that Belgrade is willing, not simply to accept the principles of the G8, but to put them into practice. As I said earlier, the detail is as important as the substance in this matter. But NATO will always work for a diplomatic solution and will lend every effort to President Ahtisaari if he makes the trip with Mr. Chernomyrdin.

Antonio Esteves-Martins, RTP: Thank you Jamie. Just to follow up on Neil's question, what are we really waiting for? A declaration of Milosevic or a combination of the fact that he says I accept the G8 resolution the first 2 points of NATO which is the end of the violence and the retreat of the troops? And General I am trying not to put an 'if' in the question because I know what your answer when I put 'if', so when this happens, how can we deal with the stopping of bombing.

Jamie Shea : Antonio, obviously as you know there is a meeting this afternoon in Bonn, a very important meeting, of Mr. Strobe Talbott, President Ahtisaari, Mr. Chernomyrdin and Chancellor Schroeder. That will be the meeting when a decision is taken who to send to Belgrade and when. Of course, the purpose of that mission, I am certain, will be once again to make it clear to Milosevic that we are not wavering in our insistence on him to agree to the 5 essential conditions of NATO and to test how close he is now to meeting those conditions and what his understanding is of the practical consequences of accepting those conditions. The conditions in themselves are fine but implementing them is even finer. And that's what we are going to insist on. But I wouldn't like to second guess what President Ahtisaari will decide to do and I am not going to speculate. Let's see how the discussions in Bonn go today and what they decide to announce this evening.

Major General Jertz : Antonio, let me start with the military answer. The air campaign and the NATO bombing will continue until the political masters decide that everything which has been discussed at Belgrade or wherever, is in a state where we can stop the bombing. The bombing will not be altered. We have to continue until we finally have the word from Milosevic and all the other ingredients which we need to really stop the bombing, but the air campaign will continue and then the political masters will decide and the military will obey.

Jake Lynch, Sky News: General, your predecessor as Military Briefing Officer, General Marani, told us some weeks ago that in order to carry out ethnic cleansing you don't need a very sophisticated command and control structure. Now isn't all the evidence that really the only task that Yugoslav forces are trying to carry out in Kosovo is the very simple one of ethnically cleansing Kosovo and holding territory and that for all the damage sustained which you describe by the command and control structure, their success in pinning down the KLA on Mount Pastrik proves that they are continuing to do so virtually unimpaired.

And secondly Jamie we haven't yet heard any reason why the bridge at Varvarin was hit at lunchtime and not in the middle of the night and if there is no military reason for that, it can't possibly be so, can it, that NATO takes every precaution to avoid civilian casualties?

Major General Jertz : You know that pretty soon we had to admit that ethnic cleansing we couldn't stop. But we did and we are still doing our military best and also of course on the political side to bring those Kosovar refugees back home to their homes. And that is why we do have to continue the air campaign and that's why we do have to continue to attack the military forces. And I explained several times that once the heavy military forces are no longer existing and are no longer available to the MUP, to the special police and the paramilitary. I think we already have gained the very step forward into, let's say, putting the basis on bringing those Kosovar refugees back home to their country.

Jamie Shea : Jake, we take the same precautions at midday as we do at midnight.

Douglas Hamilton, Reuters: Jamie, can you tell us anything about the NATO mission to Bulgaria and has any agreement been made on how

many Kfor troops could be deployed there and has Macedonia come to any agreement with NATO on a new ceiling for Kfor troops in its country?

Jamie Shea : Doug, as regards to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Secretary General will be replying very shortly to Foreign Minister Demisrov regarding our request to have an increase in the ceiling. There are discussions which will be ongoing regarding the practicalities of that. Certainly we want these forces to be able to benefit the local economy and to be helpful to the stability of the country.

Let me point out that NATO forces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia spend over a million deutschmarks a day on local goods and services in that country. And we are counting on the solidarity of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of course these are troops which are there for preparing a peacekeeping mission. Not an invasion force, a peacekeeping mission.

Now as regards Bulgaria and some other countries in the region, there could be discussions on transit for certain troops or facilities en route to a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. Those discussions are ongoing and I wouldn't like to speculate but I again am certain, given the enormous co-operation and solidarity from those neighbouring countries that the responses would be positive. They all have a vested interest in making sure that Milosevic is defeated in Kosovo. They realise that their stability depends on that. I think I quoted Winston Churchill, I should have quoted Benjamin Franklin when I said the other day that either we all hang together or we all hang separately.

Roy Gutman: Jamie, first on Surdulica could you explain to us at this point what you think did happen? Was the military facility you were targeting and fairly hit close by the rest home and old age home or was it a secondary explosion or what was the factor? Second question, perhaps for General Jertz, in the statistics you gave us about the destruction of fuel reserves, if one looked at the figures the other way around, the Yugoslav Army still has 59% of its military fuel reserves and 63% of its storage capacity. It seems awfully high after 70 days and I was just wondering if you could enlighten us as to why those figures do seem so high?

Jamie Shea : Roy, as we made clear yesterday, when we looked at this incident we clearly saw that the 4 missiles, precision guided missiles, which were fired at the facilities in Surdulica, all hit the target, the military target, the legitimate military target, accurately. There were no errant weapons in this situation.

Major General Jertz : On the figures, as you know we are not on the ground so we have to go ahead with what our intelligence and our other sources really can find out on how the figures would look like and these are the figures which I gave to you and that's the best estimate we can get.

Greg: Jamie regarding the intense fighting between the Serbs, the KLA along the border of Kosovo and Albania, a lot of NATO bombing there, apparent co-ordinated bombing, I mean wouldn't it be just much more

simple and straightforward to say that there is indeed a real co-ordination between NATO and the KLA? If you do not share their political aims of an independent Kosovo, surely you share their military aims which is to get the Serbs out of Kosovo?

Jamie Shea : Greg, as I made it clear, I cannot claim a link where one doesn't exist and we have no formal links with the Kosovo Liberation Army. But obviously they take advantage of the way in which NATO, as General Jertz has been explaining, has put the Yugoslav forces in a difficult defensive position, they have recently captured three villages for example, which were vacated by the Serbs because of NATO strikes. But we are not formal allies, not at all, in this respect. But again, as long as Milosevic represses his people he is going to have to contend with the UCK, and if this is another means of pressure on him and another factor which makes him think mmm, maybe it's time I thought about pulling my forces out of Kosovo, then so be it.

