

National News

Milosevic indictment won't alter NATO goals

By David Briscoe
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The war crimes indictment of Slobodan Milosevic will not change NATO's military objectives but should make clear to Serbs who is responsible for their suffering, President Clinton said Thursday. "He has to be turned over," said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Clinton said charges against the Yugoslav leader and four other top Serb officials "will help to deter future war crimes by establishing that those who give orders will be held accountable."

The indictment was applauded on Capitol Hill and by some of the strongest critics of U.S. leadership of the NATO campaign, who said it underscores the need for a ground assault and for rejecting any compromise with Milosevic.

Announcement of the indictment by the war crimes tribunal in

The Hague, Netherlands, came Thursday as NATO airstrikes hit another record level and diplomatic efforts to deal with the crisis continued in Washington and Moscow.

Just before the announcement, the White House released a taped message by Clinton to the people of Kosovo, promising they would eventually return to their homes in the Yugoslav province.

"They know we will persevere until the Serbian forces leave and you are allowed to return home, with NATO there to prevent a return to violence," said Clinton, on vacation in Yulee, Fla.

Addressing concerns about differences within NATO, Clinton said all 19 member nations are not alike, but all "refuse to be intimidated by a dictator who is trying to revise the worst memories of the century we are leaving."

Albright on Thursday held her third meeting in three days with a

NATO ally concerned about some aspect of alliance strategy in Yugoslavia.

Standing beside Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy of Canada, which has raised concerns about NATO targeting, Albright said Milosevic must be taken to the Hague for trial.

Axworthy agreed the Yugoslav leader "must be held accountable." He said the indictment should also convince Serbs that Milosevic runs "an outlaw regime."

Albright ruled out any immunity deal to end the Kosovo crisis. "He has to be turned over," she said.

On Tuesday, Albright met with German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who opposes the use of any combat troops in the conflict — an option U.S. officials have recently said is open.

On Wednesday, Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou was at the State Department calling for a

bombing pause to encourage Milosevic to accept NATO's demands.

After the indictment and the Axworthy meeting Thursday, Albright indicated that charges against Milosevic would have little impact on the air campaign, NATO humanitarian efforts or "following through on various diplomatic ideas."

Albright did not say whether there would be an effort to apprehend Milosevic or whether NATO would require his removal as part of any settlement.

But she said, "It is very hard to see how Serbia can go into the future with ... the unprecedented situation of having a leader indicted by a war crimes tribunal for the first time in history."

Yugoslav officials in Belgrade and at the United Nations rejected the Milosevic indictment, calling it a U.S.-orchestrated attempt to justify further warfare and undermine diplomatic efforts.

In Moscow, Russia's special envoy on Kosovo, Viktor Chernomyrdin, was going to Belgrade after ending prolonged meetings with Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, who described the latest talks as "the most productive yet."

Chernomyrdin raised new concerns in Washington, however, with a commentary published Thursday in The Washington Post in which he warned that continued NATO bombing could seriously hurt U.S.-Russian relations and lead to a wider war.

"The world has never in this decade been so close as now to the brink of nuclear war," he wrote, adding a threat that Russia would pull out of the negotiating process if NATO bombing doesn't stop soon.

White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said the Russians "can and continue to play a constructive role."

Reno criticizes aides for inaction in China wiretap case

By Michael J. Sniffen
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Janet Reno faulted Justice Department and FBI subordinates Thursday for not coming to her two years ago with their disagreement over whether to wiretap a nuclear weapons scientist suspected of spying for China.

"Where there is something serious, where [FBI] Director [Louis] Freeh disagrees with the findings [of Justice officials], I think that it should be discussed at my level," Reno told her weekly news conference. "I was not briefed on the details."

Reno delivered her most detailed explanation yet of how the Justice Department

handled allegations that a Taiwanese-born scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory may have given nuclear weapons secrets to China.

Reno's comments came after aides pleaded with her to rebut suggestions from Republican Richard Shelby of Alabama, the Senate intelligence committee chairman, and Democratic Sen. Robert Torricelli of New Jersey, usually a staunch defender of the Clinton administration, that she should resign or consider doing so.

National Security Adviser Samuel Berger also defended himself against accusations he wasn't aggressive enough when Energy Department officials briefed him in 1996

about security lapses at a weapons laboratory. Berger did not brief President Clinton on the matter until a year later.

Berger said that when he was told about two cases in 1996, he saw to it that the Energy Department expanded its probe and the FBI launched its own investigation.

"I did take it seriously. I did act. I believe I acted in national interest," Berger said on PBS' "NewsHour With Jim Lehrer."

When investigators returned in 1997 with more detailed information about broader and more systematic problems, Berger said he then briefed Clinton. "We swiftly acted to implement the most sweeping reforms of counterintelligence in the labs in history," he said.

Reno explained that when the FBI first sought in 1997 to wiretap the scientist, Wen Ho Lee, the warrant application was rejected by Justice's Office of Intelligence Policy and Review. Working with Justice officials, the FBI reworked the application twice to add information, but it was still rejected.

Through his attorney, Lee has denied spying. Lee was fired this spring and remains under investigation.

"Based on the facts reported to us in 1997, the department determined that the evidence was insufficient to support a finding of probable cause" to believe Lee engaged in clandestine intelligence-gathering on behalf of a foreign power, Reno said.

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