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FOR ACTION

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ACTION DATA SUMMARY REPORT

RECORD ID: 9906932

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To: Hill  
McCarthy  
F4I

THE NEW YORK TIMES  
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1999

## NATO Commander Says Armed Serbs Are Slipping Back to Kosovo

By CARLOTTA GALL

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia — Groups of Serbian paramilitaries are infiltrating back into Kosovo from Serbia, apparently bent on causing trouble three months after Serbian forces withdrew from the province, NATO's supreme commander, Gen. Wesley Clark, said Monday.

"I am increasingly concerned by the evidence that we see of organized Serb efforts to cause a little bit of disruption here and there and bring increasing pressure on this fragile community," he said during a visit to Kosovo.

Clark said that one of the three Serbs shot dead by Russian peacekeepers in eastern Kosovo last week was carrying a police identification card. Another was in a military-style uniform, a spokesman for the peacekeepers said. The men were caught ambushing a car and beating two Kosovo Albanians. When they opened fire on the Russian troops, they were shot dead.

The episode was one of a mounting number during the last few weeks involving armed Serbs, particularly in areas near the border with the rest of Serbia.

Mitrovica, in the north, and Gnjilane, in the east, are areas of tension, where Serbs and Albanians clash frequently, and grenade attacks and shootings are still common. Demonstrations by Serbs have spread and appear to be more organized and confrontational, a sign that they might be receiving help from Serbia.

Three Serbs were arrested on Sunday on the bridge that divides the city of Mitrovica, two days after violent confrontations there, Maj. Ole Irgens, a spokesman for the peacekeepers, said at a news conference. The men were armed with a Kalashnikov rifle and hand grenades.

"We have confirmed reports of groups of fighters in military-style uniforms," he said. "We have no specific evidence of paramilitary activity but we certainly will not tolerate such criminal activity."

Irgens also announced that NATO would begin training flights of fighter jets over Kosovo. The exercises will include simulated ground attacks, he said, but will be conducted well away from population centers.

Clark's comments and the peacekeepers' announcement appear intended to remind the Yugoslav leadership in Belgrade that NATO is in charge in Kosovo. Tensions have risen with the approach of next Monday's deadline for disarming the Albanian rebel group, the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Yugoslavia has been pushing the peacekeepers to allow a limited number of Serbian troops and police officers back into Kosovo to guard the borders and holy sites, as stipulated in an agreement signed at the end of the war, one senior peacekeeping official said. But the peacekeepers have responded that their return is out of the question until the Albanian rebels have been disarmed fully.

Clark ruled out their return anytime soon. "There'll be discussion about which Serb personnel will come back in for purposes of, let's say, de-mining, a presence at monuments, maybe a presence at the border, but purely presence," he said in comments reported by Reuters. "This is not a re-entry of Serb forces."

The issue has become political in Belgrade -- a way for the government to show that it is protecting Serbian interests. But Irgens said that any return of Serbian personnel would have to be coordinated with the peacekeepers, and that "the time is not right."

END

9-16-99

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