

U.S. Verifies Killings in Serb Camps;
State Dept. Spokesman Repeats Condemnation Of 'Horrible' Abuses

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The Bush administration said yesterday it has confirmed reports that Croats and Slavic Muslims are being tortured and killed in Serb "detention camps" in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia, but gave no indication that the United States is willing to go beyond verbal condemnation to halt the atrocities.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher called the kinds of abuses reported in the Serb camps "just horrible" and said the United States has made absolutely clear its condemnation of the "practice of ethnic cleansing" in the struggle between Yugoslav ethnic, religious and national groups.

The only specific measure endorsed by Boucher to stop the atrocities, however, was an appeal that the International Red Cross be permitted to visit the camps, which are being compared to the World War II Nazi concentration camps for Jews. Repeated appeals by the international body have so far met with limited success.

A senior State Department official justified the current U.S. posture by saying that economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation and the start of a negotiating process among the Yugoslav combatants have already been implemented with U.S. support. If stronger measures are needed, the official said, "the only thing left is the question of military action."

Boucher said the United States is continuing to consult with allies about ways to ease the situation in Bosnia, but official sources said no new U.S. initiatives are in sight. Last week the White House sharply criticized Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton for suggesting that the United States seek U.N. Security Council authorization for air strikes against forces attacking the U.N. relief effort in Bosnia.

After months of hesitation and internal debate, President Bush recently authorized the limited use of U.S. force as part of multinational efforts to provide humanitarian relief to war victims in Bosnia. Even this restricted mission has prompted deep misgivings among senior U.S. military officers and Pentagon officials.

As recently as last Saturday, Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney reiterated his opposition to committing U.S. forces in ground action that could lead to deepening involvement. "It's tragic, but the Balkans have been a hotbed of conflict and turmoil and bloodshed and violence for centuries," Cheney said in an interview on Cable News Network.

Reports have filtered out of the Balkans for months about abuses and atrocities in detention camps and other places where civilians were being held prisoner. Among the most extensive accounts, the New York newspaper

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Newsday reported Sunday on the basis of interviews with survivors that more than 1,000 civilians have been executed or starved in two **Serb camps** set up in northern Bosnia.

One survivor said prisoners were executed in groups of 10 to 15 every few days in a former iron-mining complex at Omarska where Croat and Slavic Muslim prisoners were held in metal cages without sanitation, adequate food or exercise. Another survivor said 1,350 prisoners were slaughtered between mid-May and mid-June in an improvised **camp** in the city of Brcko, many of them with their throats cut and their bodies thrown into a nearby river, Newsday reported.

A **State** Department official said recent press reports and similar information received through official channels "provided confirmation of what we've all suspected has been going on" for months.

In Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross said its personnel have visited eight detention centers in Bosnia but have been unable to gain access to many other **camps**. The Swiss government called on combatants in Bosnia to open the detention **camps** to the Red Cross.

"Very serious violations of internationally recognized law and practice on the treatment of civilians in military conflicts are being perpetuated by all parties," Red Cross **spokesman** Pierre Gathier said, according to Reuter.

In a speech to a **U.N.** conference in Geneva last week, Red Cross chief Cornelio Sommaruga placed blame on all the warring parties, and said civilian populations "are being terrorized, minorities intimidated and harassed, civilians interned on a massive scale and hostages taken, while torture, deportations and summary executions are rife."

Boucher said the **United States** has received reports that the Muslim-led Bosnian government and Croat militia forces in the republic, as well as Serbs, also maintain detention centers, "but we do not have similar allegations of mistreatment at those."

The **State** Department also **condemned** the sniper attack Saturday night on a bus carrying 50 orphaned children from Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia, to new homes in Germany. Two of the children were **killed** in the gunfire, and nine others were prevented from leaving because they had **Serb** names.

"It's hard to imagine how anybody can continue the violence, continue to support the violence, when it's reached this **state**," said Boucher.

[Dusko Tomic, secretary general of the Medjasi Children's Embassy, which organized the orphans' evacuation, told Associated Press that **Serb** police seized the nine children in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza. The local **Serb** commander and a doctor from the Ilidza field hospital claimed permission to care for the children until relatives picked them up, he said.]

[The AP reported from Croatia that the bus arrived in the Adriatic port of Split yesterday with the 39 remaining orphans aboard. The children were taken to an orphanage for the night and were to be flown to Germany early today.]

Graphic

PHOTO, NURSES TEND TO ORPHANS REMOVED BY **SERB** FORCES FROM A BUS THAT WAS TO CARRY THEM FROM SARAJEVO TO GERMANY. AFP

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