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The President's Radio Address

April 3, 1999

As we gather in our homes during this sacred week to observe Easter and Passover, let us take a moment to think about the plight of the people in Kosovo, who have been forced from their homes by a campaign of violence and destruction, and who look to us for help and hope.

The tragedy in Kosovo has been mounting for over a year now. Over the last 2 weeks, Serbian forces have intensified their attacks against innocent civilians there, leaving no doubt about the cold, clear goal of their leader, Slobodan Milosevic, to keep Kosovo's land while ridding it of its people.

Nearly one out of every three people in Kosovo has been made homeless since the start of this conflict. Even before the recent surge, well over a quarter of a million people had been displaced. Every hour of every day more arrive at Kosovo's borders, tired, hungry, shaken by what they have been through.

Among them are elderly people, who have lived their whole lives in peace with their neighbors, only to be told now to leave everything behind in minutes or to be killed on the spot. Among them are small children who walked for miles over mountains, sometimes after watching their fathers and uncles and brothers taken from them and shot before their eyes.

Some have been shelled by artillery on their long trek to safety. Many have had their identity papers and family records stolen and destroyed, their history in Kosovo erased, their very existence denied.

Our Nation cannot do everything. We can't end all suffering. We can't stop all violence. But there are times when looking away simply is not an option. Right now, in the middle of Europe, at the doorstep of NATO, an entire people are being made to abandon their homeland or die, not because of anything they've done but simply because of who they are.

If there's one lesson we've learned in this century, it's that that kind of poison will spread if not stopped. If there's one pledge that binds the past and future generations, it is that we cannot allow people to be destroyed because of their ethnic or racial or religious groups when we do have the power to do something about it.

Our military mission in Kosovo is a difficult and dangerous one, but it's necessary and right, and we must stand with all our NATO allies to see it through. Our goal is to exact a very high price for Mr. Milosevic's policy of repression and to seriously diminish his military capacity to maintain that policy.

We also must open our hearts and our arms to the innocent victims of this conflict. This week I authorized the expenditure of $50 million in emergency funds to support the relief effort and directed our military to do its part to get critical supplies to people in need. We'll work with the United Nations and with the many courageous volunteers working on the ground with nongovernmental organizations from all around the world.

You can help, too. I urge you to call your local Red Cross or church-based charity and ask them how you can get involved. Together, we'll provide food, water, and medicine, blankets, clothing, and shelter to Kosovar refugees. We'll remind the victims of this conflict that for all they have lost, they have not been abandoned or forgotten.

European countries are helping as well. Kosovo's neighbors, Macedonia and Albania, are taking the refugees in, despite the huge burden this places on these poor, struggling nations; so are Greece, Bosnia, and Bulgaria, showing there's more mercy than madness in the Balkans, more compassion than cruelty in this troubled region of the world.

All of us want to provide for the refugees; all of us want to make it possible for them

to return home. Let us do our part for all the innocent people whose lives have been shattered by this conflict. And let us give our thanks to our men and women in uniform who are risking their lives today for our ideals, our interests, and their lives.

Let us keep in our prayers the three brave American servicemen now being held without justification in Belgrade that they may return to us soon. Let us do what we can, and what we must, for peace to prevail. And let us stay the course until it does.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:05 p.m. on April 2 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 3. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); and the three U.S. Army infantrymen in custody in Serbia: Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Decision To Send Certain United States Forces to Macedonia and Albania

April 3, 1999

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Since I reported to the Congress on March 25, 1999, under section 8115 of the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 1999 (Public Law 105–262), there have been dramatic and very serious developments in Kosovo and the region, particularly Macedonia and Albania. Belgrade's sustained and accelerating repression and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo has created a humanitarian crisis of staggering dimensions. Estimates are that more than 800,000 Kosovars have been displaced from their homes and villages, with large concentrations in Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro, and with the numbers rising dramatically every day. Throughout Kosovo, Serb forces have burned villages. Homes throughout the region have been looted and are smoldering. In Pristina, Kosovars are being forced into rail cars and shipped to the Macedonian border.

As the refugee flow out of Kosovo has surged, the limited ability of Albania and Macedonia to deal with the situation has been overwhelmed. The international organizations engaged in refugee assistance do not currently have in the region the ability and resources to deal with a refugee crisis of this magnitude. Unless adequate care can be provided for these refugees, a humanitarian disaster of immense proportions will result. In addition to the human suffering involved, such a disaster carries with it the very real possibility of destabilizing the governments and societies of Albania and Macedonia. This disaster could have the effect of spreading violence in the region that NATO is determined to prevent.

In the light of these disturbing events, I have directed that additional U.S. forces be deployed to Albania and Macedonia in order to support disaster relief by, among other activities, delivering food and essentials, constructing shelter, providing coordination and assisting in onward movement, and when necessary, providing protection for relief supplies and refugees. In regard to the elements of section 815(a)(1)–(8), I am providing the following information.

1 & 2. *National Security Interests.* I hereby certify that the deployment of additional forces to Albania and Macedonia as described above is necessary in the national security interests of the United States. These actions will provide additional forces to aid in the relief efforts supporting Kosovar refugees. They also will contribute to the overall effort to stabilize this region that has historically been a tinderbox, thereby helping to preserve peace and security in the region.

3. *Numbers.* The number of U.S. personnel who will be deployed for these purposes cannot be definitively provided at this time, since planning for the deployment is ongoing. I would anticipate, at a minimum, a deployment of 1,000 personnel. It can be anticipated that headquarters elements, air crews, airlift control elements, selected transport and rotary wing aircraft, security personnel, civil affairs and psychological operations personnel, medical and engineer forces, and logistics support forces may become involved in the operation. These forces