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Instead, his forces have intensified their attacks, burning down Kosovar Albanian villages and murdering civilians. As I speak, more Serb forces are moving into Kosovo, and more people are fleeing their homes—60,000 in just the last 5 weeks, a quarter of a million altogether. Many have headed toward neighboring countries.

Kosovo's crisis now is full-blown, and if we do not act, clearly, it will get even worse. Only firmness now can prevent greater catastrophe later.

Our strikes have three objectives: First, to demonstrate the seriousness of NATO's opposition to aggression and its support for peace; second, to deter President Milosevic from continuing and escalating his attacks on helpless civilians by imposing a price for those attacks; and third, if necessary, to damage Serbia's capacity to wage war against Kosovo in the future by seriously diminishing its military capabilities.

As I have repeatedly said to the American people, this action is not risk-free. It carries risks. And I ask for the prayers of all Americans for our men and women in uniform in the area. However, I have concluded that the dangers of acting now are clearly outweighed by the risks of failing to act, the risks that many more innocent people will die or be driven from their homes by the tens of thousands, the risks that the conflict will involve and destabilize neighboring nations. It will clearly be much more costly and dangerous to stop later than this effort to prevent it from going further now.

At the end of the 20th century, after two World Wars and a cold war, we and our allies have a chance to leave our children a Europe that is free, peaceful, and stable. But we must—we must—act now to do that, because if the Balkans once again become a place of brutal killing and massive refugee flights, it will be impossible to achieve.

With our allies, we used diplomacy and force to end the war in Bosnia. Now trouble next door in Kosovo puts the region's people at risk again. Our NATO allies unanimously support this action. The United States must stand with them and stand against ethnic violence and atrocity.

Our alliance is united. And I am particularly grateful for the support we have received from Members of Congress from both parties. As we go forward, I will remain in close contact with Congress—I have spoken with all the leaders today—and in contact with our friends and allies around the world. And I will have more to say about all of this tonight.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* Oilspill in Prince William Sound, Alaska

March 24, 1999

Ten years after the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground in Prince William Sound, the lingering effects of the worst oilspill in U.S. history are a compelling reminder that we must be ever vigilant in the protection of America's natural treasures.

The spill caused grievous damage to an extraordinary web of nature and to the communities and livelihoods it sustains. A decade later, the healing is well under way, and tough new rules ensure that our entire coast is better protected against the threat of oilspills. With the State of Alaska, we have converted the large penalty paid by Exxon into lasting protection for salmon streams, fragile coastline, and old-growth forest around Prince William Sound.

Still, more time must pass before the communities and wildlife of Prince William Sound can fully recover. And some of the damage may never be undone. This awful disaster was a wake-up call. And we must work to ensure that its true legacy is a renewed commitment to protect our environment for generations yet to come.

Statement on the Murder of Vice President Luis Maria Argana of Paraguay

March 24, 1999

I want to express the profound sadness of the United States for the death earlier yesterday of the Vice President of Paraguay, Luis Maria Argana, and offer our condolences to the people of Paraguay and especially to the family of Vice President Argana. Vice President Argana was shot and killed yesterday by unknown assailants while on his way to the office. We strongly condemn this brutal murder, which occurred against the backdrop of continued political turmoil in Paraguay. I join the President of Paraguay, Cubas Grau, in urging all Paraguayans to put aside politics and draw together in the interest of all Paraguayans to support the democratic process.

Statement on Legislation To Strengthen Medicare

March 24, 1999

Today, the Senate Democrats introduced important amendments to address the major defect of the Republican budget: its complete failure to address Medicare. The majority's budget fails to set aside even one penny of the surplus to strengthen Medicare and does not extend its solvency by a single day. Yet, Medicare faces the same demographic challenges as Social Security and is projected to become insolvent even sooner. Instead of putting Medicare first, the Republican budget puts top priority on a tax cut that explodes in cost just at the time that baby boomers retire.

I applaud Senate Democratic efforts to fix the Republican budget by putting a higher priority on strengthening Medicare and by making sure that any lock-box includes Medicare. I urge Congress not to miss this historic opportunity to strengthen Medicare.

Proclamation 7175—Greek Independence Day: A National Day of Celebration of Greek and American Democracy, 1999

March 24, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

America has deep roots in Greece, and today we celebrate the friendship, values, and aspirations our two countries have shared for more than 2 centuries. Greek thought and the passion for truth and justice deeply influenced many of our Nation's earliest and greatest leaders. The documents our founders wrote to establish our democracy and the political and legal institutions they created to preserve our independence and protect our rights reveal that influence.

Later, recognizing this profound debt to Greek thought and culture and inspired by the struggle of modern Greece in the War of Greek Independence, many Americans left home to join in that distant fight for freedom between 1821 and 1832. In this century, the relationship between the Greek and American peoples deepened as we fought together in two world wars. The U.S. desire to help preserve freedom in Greece after the devastation of World War II moved President Truman to stand firm against isolationism and for postwar engagement abroad. Our nations stood together in Korea and in the Gulf War, and we continue to work shoulder-to-shoulder today in our efforts to find a lasting solution in the Balkans and to promote democracy around the world.

The bonds of family have further reinforced our ties of friendship and shared ideals. All across our Nation, Americans of Greek descent have brought their energy, grace, and determination to every field of endeavor, and they have added immeasurably to the richness and diversity of our national life. The sons and daughters of Greece have flourished in America, and with their help, America too has flourished.