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Week Ending Friday, April 2, 1999

The President's Radio Address

March 27, 1999

Good morning. Three days ago I decided the United States should join our NATO allies in military airstrikes to bring peace to Kosovo. In my address to the Nation last Wednesday, I explained why we have taken this step: to save the lives of innocent civilians in Kosovo from a brutal military offensive; to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice before in this century with catastrophic results; to prevent a wider war we would have to confront later, only at far greater risk and cost; to stand with our NATO allies for peace.

Our military operation has been underway for several nights now. In this time, Serb troops have continued attacks on unarmed men, women, and children. That is all the more reason for us to stay the course. We must and we will continue until Serbia's leader, Slobodan Milosevic, accepts peace or we have seriously damaged his capacity to make war.

As always, America's military men and women are performing with courage and skill. Their strength comes from rigorous training, state-of-the-art weaponry, and hard-won experience in this part of the world. This is the same brave and tested force that brought stability to Bosnia after 4 years of vicious war. I am confident they will once again rise to the task.

Some of them are fighter pilots, some are bombers, some are mechanics, technicians, air traffic controllers, and base personnel. Every time I visit our troops around the world, I am struck by their professionalism, their quiet, unassuming determination. They always say, ''This is the job I was trained to do.'' They don't see themselves as heroes, but we surely do.

I've also been deeply impressed by the solidarity of NATO's purpose. All 19 NATO nations are providing support, from Norway to Turkey, from England to Italy, from Germany and France to our neighbors in Canada, including our 3 allies from central Europe, the new NATO members: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic.

And we should remember the courage of the Kosovar people today, still exposed to violence and brutality. Many Americans now have heard the story of a young Kosovar girl trying to stay in touch with a friend in America by E-mail as a Serb attack began in her own village. Just a few days ago she wrote, ''At the moment, just from my balcony, I can see people running with suitcases, and I can hear some gunshots. A village just a few hundred meters from my house is all surrounded. As long as I have electricity, I will continue writing to you. I'm trying to keep myself as calm as possible. My younger brother, who is 9, is sleeping now. I wish I will not have to stop his dreams.''

We asked these people of Kosovo to accept peace, and they did. We promised them we would stick by them if they did the right thing, and they did. We cannot let them down now.

Americans have learned the hard way that our home is not that far from Europe. Through two World Wars and a long cold war we saw that it was a short step from a small brushfire to an inferno, especially in the tinderbox of the Balkans. The time to put out a fire is before it spreads and burns down the neighborhood. By acting now, we're taking a strong step toward a goal that has always been in our national interest: a peaceful, united, democratic Europe. For America there is no greater calling than being a peacemaker. But sometimes you have to fight in order to end the fighting.

Let me end now by repeating how proud all Americans are of the men and women in uniform risking their lives to protect peace in the Balkans. Our prayers are with them. And our prayers are with all the people of the Balkans searching for the strength to put

centuries of divisions to rest and to join Europe and North America in building a better future together.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:44 p.m. on March 26 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 27. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 26 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Rescue of a United States Pilot in Serbia

March 27, 1999

I am pleased with the news that our pilot has been rescued successfully. I am tremendously proud of the skill and bravery of the pilot and of the courageous individuals who participated in the recovery.

As I have said from the outset, this military operation entails real risk. However, the continued brutality and repression of the Serb forces further underscores the necessity for NATO forces to persevere.

Our NATO operations will go forward as planned. I strongly support the decision of Secretary General Solana to move to a new phase of the air campaign, which will include a wider range of targets, including forces in the field.

Statement on the Death of Michael Aris

March 27, 1999

The First Lady and I were saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Michael Aris, a scholar of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Oxford University. We offer our sincere condolences to his wife, Aung San Suu Kyi, his sons, Alexander and Kim, and other family members.

Dr. Aris' perseverance and dedication to his wife and family and to the cause of human rights and democracy in Burma earned him the respect and admiration of citizens around the world. At this difficult time, I want to reaffirm to Michael's family and to all the people of Burma that the United States will keep working for the day when all who have been separated and sent into exile by the denial of human rights in Burma are reunited with their families and when Burma is reunited with the family of freedom.

Remarks on Departure for Camp David, Maryland, and an Exchange With Reporters

March 28, 1999

NATO Airstrikes

The President. Good afternoon. All Americans can be very proud of the skill and bravery of the American servicemen involved in the rescue operation yesterday in Kosovo. Indeed, we can be proud of all of our men and women in uniform who are involved in the NATO mission.

From the outset, I have said to the American people that this military operation entails real risks. But the continued brutality and repression of the Serb forces further underscores the need for NATO to persevere. I strongly support Secretary General Solana's decision yesterday to move to a new phase in our planned air campaign, with a broader range of targets including air defenses, military and security targets, and forces in the field.

In the last 24 hours, I have been in close contact with key NATO allies, including Prime Minister Blair, President Chirac, Chancellor Schroeder, and Prime Minister D'Alema. All of them share our determination to respond strongly to Mr. Milosevic's continuing campaign of inhumane and violence against the Kosovar Albanian people. That is what we intend to do.

Thank you very much.

Q. Has the bombing made things worse, sir?

Q. Sir, is the allied bombing driving the atrocities, sir?

The President. Absolutely not.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to NATO Secretary General Javier Solana; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; President Jacques Chirac of France; Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema of Italy;