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SECURITY ASSISTANCE
POTUS QUESTIONS

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SUBJECT: POTUS FWDS 15 APR NYT ARTICLE RE TEETERING BALKANS

ACTION: NFAR PER SCHULTE

DUE DATE: 11 MAY 99 STATUS: C

STAFF OFFICER: SCHULTE

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SP FOR WORKING VISIT BY BOSNIA JOINT PRESIDENCY						
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Document Description:

TO: BERGER DOCUMENT DATE: 4/21/99
FROM: PRESIDENT
SUBJECT: TOTUS FINDS 15 APR NYT ARTICLE
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The Teetering Balkans

Bombings by NATO May Be Destabilizing
A Region Where Peace Has Cost So Much

By BLAINE HARDEN

SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina, April 14 — NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia is destabilizing neighboring regions in which the United States and Europe have stationed tens of thousands of troops, spent billions of dollars and invested years of work in trying to secure peace, build democracy and improve moribund economies.

Since the bombing started on March 24, the 32,000 NATO-led troops who keep Bosnia's shaky peace have faced numerous attacks from Serbs and are on high alert in the worst tension since the end of war in 1995. The Government put in place by the West is frozen and inactive. In Montenegro, a President who has won backing from Washington and other foreign capitals is devoting all his energies to averting a coup backed by the army of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

Macedonia, already coping with hundreds of thousands of Kosovo refugees, is worried about tens of thousands more arriving, and Croatia's tourist-dependent economy faces a bleak summer of empty hotels and beaches.

For involved foreigners and locals, the real fear is that prolonged NATO bombing of the Serbs will reopen all the wounds still festering from the Balkan wars of this past decade.

"The security situation is stable, but the longer the bombing goes on the more difficult it will be to control the situation," said Lieut. Gen. Mike Wilcocks, a British officer who is the deputy commander of the Stabilization Force in Bosnia, the NATO-led peacekeepers known here by the acronym SFOR. "We are watching the situation like a hawk."

In Bosnia and Montenegro, the best face that diplomats or military officials have put on the Serbian fury stoked by three weeks of bombing is that they should be able to contain it until Mr. Milosevic is defeated. At that point, they suggest, prospects for democratic development in the region will soar.

"If getting rid of Milosevic fails, then everything else fails," said Carlos Westendorp, the top international official charged with keeping peace in Bosnia. "That is the condition we need for full development of the region, respect of borders and democracy."

He and other Western officials concur, however, that the longer the bombing campaign continues, the more difficult it will be for peacekeeping forces in Bosnia to hold back Serbian radicals and for the elected government in Montenegro to escape a coup that could spark a civil war.

The bombing has halted efforts to rebuild infrastructure or return Bosnians who fled the war to their old homes. Hundreds of Westerners have evacuated what is called Republika Srpska, as the Bosnian Serbs' 49 percent of Bosnia is known. Mr. Westendorp has ordered the elected Serb assembly not to hold any sessions until the Kosovo war is

over. "What I am doing is freezing the situation," Mr. Westendorp, the high representative enforcing the 1995 Dayton peace accords, said here today. "The hard-liners are constantly harassing the moderates. It would do a lot of harm to have the assembly meet."

Next door, fears of a coup in Montenegro, a Yugoslav republic where the American Government is making significant diplomatic and financial investments, have paralyzed the economy while backing elected leaders into a corner. They are struggling to stop the Yugoslav Army from taking over the news media, conscripting senior officials in the republic and fomenting street violence.

The bombing also scuttled a bid to improve relations between Montenegro and its neighbor, Croatia.

According to a Western diplomat, Montenegro had been planning before the bombing to apologize to Croatia for Montenegrin forces that in 1991 and 1992 shelled the historic coastal city of Dubrovnik, the jewel

of Croatia's Adriatic coastline and once a major tourist draw.

While Croatia has supported the bombing of its old foe Serbia, the assaults appear to have shattered prospects for the country's tourist industry this year. Most summer hotel bookings up and down the Adriatic coast have been canceled, hotel owners said.

In the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, too, there is widespread concern that the flood of refugees from Kosovo could destabilize a government that has been receptive to Western influence.

The West has the most control where it has the most military muscle. That is in Bosnia, where peacekeepers from 37 countries, including 6,200 American troops, are heavily armed and have more than three years' experience dealing with the terrain and managing the anger of local Serbs.

After the bombing began on March 24, General Wilcocks said he ordered a ban on the training and movement of local armies across Bosnia. SFOR troops have been ordered to wear body armor in the field at all times and not to travel in groups of less than three.

In the week after the bombings began, there was a sharp increase in Serbian attacks on SFOR troops, including several incidents when hand grenades were thrown at soldiers from moving cars. General Wilcocks said no troops have been injured in the attacks.

The general said in an interview that forces in Bosnia "have nothing to do with NATO." But the credibility of that distinction, if it ever held much weight among Bosnian Serbs, took a severe blow on April 3, when SFOR troops, acting on orders from Washington, blew up a stretch of railroad that connects Belgrade with Montenegro.

The tracks were destroyed in a stretch of the railroad that cuts across a tip of Bosnia. Western diplo-

rats here said SFOR troops were ordered to take immediate action because of information that a trainload of armed Serbian paramilitary forces was headed to Montenegro to make trouble for the pro-Western government there.

The destruction of the tracks, during which SFOR troops killed a local watchman who fired at them, gave Serbian nationalists in Bosnia a reason to argue that their country was being occupied by the same forces that are bombing Serbia.

The NATO bombing, moreover, exacerbated an already severe political crisis in Republika Srpska.

Earlier in March, Mr. Westendorp in effect fired the elected President of the Serbian republic, Nikola Poplasen, a radical Serbian nationalist who had refused for months to work with the government's moderate prime minister.

On that same day, an arbitrator in Vienna denied the Serbs exclusive control of a city, Brcko, that connects two parts of their territory. Many Serbs regard the city as an essential link for the survival of their government inside Bosnia, a loosely federated country they share with the Muslim-Croat Federation that covers 51 percent of Bosnian territory.

The bombing, then, was perceived as part of a triple whammy by the West against Serbs and has sharply raised the risks of violence, said Bryan Hopkinson, director of the Sarajevo-based Bosnia project of the International Crisis Group, a think tank financed by European governments and Western foundations.

"At worst, the capacity might soon exist to mount an armed secessionist movement, at least for that part of Republika Srpska east of Brcko, perhaps using paramilitaries so that the political instigators would not be directly implicated," Mr. Hopkinson, a former British Ambassador to Bosnia, wrote in a report last week. "The public, in its present baffled and enraged state, would probably not be hostile."

Mr. Hopkinson said in an interview that any move by the Bosnian Serbs to secede would be easily handled by peacekeepers.

"They might lose a few men, but if SFOR is determined to resist an insurrection, they could," Mr. Hopkinson said.

In neighboring Montenegro, however, Western diplomats are not at all certain that the elected government could resist an army coup. The army has tanks and artillery, while the republic's police, although well trained and believed to be highly motivated, do not.

The President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, has told American diplomats that he was confident that he could avoid bloodshed in Montenegro while challenging Mr. Milosevic's authority, but only if the West refrained from bombing.

Since the bombs started to fall, Mr. Djukanovic has said in interviews that his police would prevail in a fight against the army, but he and other officials have conceded that such a fight could ignite a civil war among his heavily armed population.

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The New York Times

THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 1999