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REPORT FROM WASHINGTON
BY CONGRESSWOMAN HELEN DELICH BENTLEY

WEEK OF JUNE 15, 1992

WHY THE WAR IN YUGOSLAVIA IS IMPORTANT TO THE 2ND DISTRICT

What are the odds that the future of Yugoslavia may ultimately effect my constituents in the 2nd District of Maryland? The same as they were twenty five years ago that I could be sent to Vietnam to cover that faraway war for a Baltimore newspaper or, that two years ago, my neighbor's son would go to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait right after bootcamp instead of being stationed in California.

My generation came of age in World War II, served in Korea, were senior advisors during Vietnam and, hopefully, learned through the victories and the defeats that at every step along the road toward major confrontations--good negotiations possibly could have saved lives and nations. From my long labor negotiating experience and my familiarity with Yugoslavia, and many of the factions involved, this is such a time in history.

The role of mediator is not a popular job whether representing the best interests of the people of Maryland during a threatened strike at the Port of Baltimore or representing the long term interests of the United States and the suffering peoples of Yugoslavia, but if there is an opportunity to serve a greater good, if my efforts can save lives, then as an American, I believe I cannot turn away.

The tragedy that is modern-day Yugoslavia has a way of reaching out to ensnare any one who reads the news or watches the shelling of ancient cities, the destruction of farm villages and the deaths--reports estimate that over 15,000 have been killed in the fighting in the last year and a half--tear at the heart. To those of us who know

the country, who have friends and/or relatives still living there, it is a particular horror.

To be asked--as I have--by one's government, to help out at such a critical time in the history of a nation is not only an honor, but a duty. There is so much at stake--not only for the people of Yugoslavia, but possibly for the European Community and ultimately, for the United States.

Reports from the European press and the foreign diplomatic community carry an urgency reminiscent of news out of central Europe prior to both world wars. The factions are the same. The alliances are the same. God save us, the terrible headlines are the same. Even poor Czechoslovakia is breaking apart.

For what scant comfort it is worth, Yugoslavia will not trigger a Third World War, but it could well trigger a 2nd Vietnam. Fueled by foreign arms merchants, a form of low intensity warfare can be waged in Yugoslavia for years. However, there is always the threat of it spreading out from Yugoslavia--not as a brushfire--a world war confrontation--but as a fire in the many ethnic roots of Yugoslavia reaching into every European nation.

The London Daily Telegraph on May 11, 1992, headlined "Conflict could lay foundation for Islamic state in Europe." The commentary points out the strong pan-Islamic views of the Muslim president of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the same time the government of France is having to negotiate school dress codes for the children of the 3 million muslims living inside France.

Because of the large numbers of guest workers taken into the European Community during the economic expansion of the '70s and '80s, many nations in Europe have militant Muslim minorities who are all watching the growing muslim power on the Balkan peninsula.

Hungarians in Voyvidena look longingly toward their "homeland" while Romania reaches out to Moldavia. The Greeks are concerned that Moslim Albania will move on Macedonia isolating the Greek Orthodox minority there.

U.S. press coverage never reports, let alone raises questions about the presence of Croatian troops inside Bosnia-Hercegovenia. When the Yugoslav army moved into Bosnia, there was at least a tissue of legalism in-as-much-as Bosnia-Hercegovenia was a break-away Republic from a legally constituted federation. I have never read an explanation of why Croatian troops are involved in the Bosnian fighting, but then, it seems that no one has asked. The rule of law has broken down not only inside Yugoslavia, but seemingly in the minds of every major nation involved.

There are no excuses for the actions of any of the leaders who have brought this nation to tragedy and I, personally, have been very harsh in my criticism of Milosevic, the President of Serbia. The Washington Post on June 8th carried a story about a young American mother, Shayna Lazarevich, who is seeking the return of her two kidnapped American children from inside Yugoslavia. The article quoted from a letter I had written to Milosevic--on her behalf regarding his treatment of the kidnapping of these American children--"considering this display of callousness--if not outright deception--it is no wonder that Serbia is viewed as a world pariah."

My recent trip to Belgrade was, in part, to intervene on Shayna's behalf. I am hopeful about her plight, because last year I was able to secure the release of a young Albanian-American arrested in Kosevo. Currently, I am seeking the release of a young Croatian-American from New York captured in March but never listed for exchange.

In such matters I have been able to help the U.S. government and these young people and their families. Approve or not, Milosevic has to be dealt with since--in the elections of 1990--he was the duly elected President of the Republic of Serbia and he now controls the predominantly Serbian Yugoslav army. Whatever messages need to be carried representing the best interests of the United States, by birth and background I am uniquely qualified to get through to his government.