

# Albright Rattled Saber Over Albanian Airlift

By Steven Lee Myers  
*New York Times Service*

WASHINGTON — In the harried hours after gunmen fired at Marine Corps helicopters evacuating Americans from Albania last week, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright suggested sending a larger, stronger force from NATO to occupy Albania's main airport and the port at Durres, administration officials said.

After brief consideration, the idea was rejected when military officials, led by Defense Secretary William Cohen, argued that such a force was not necessary for the evacuation and far too risky a way to stabilize the capital, Tirana, which was lurching toward anarchy.

Within days the discussion became largely academic because Albania calmed down; the evacuation resumed after only a brief suspension.

But Mrs. Albright's idea — the most assertive action discussed by President Bill Clinton's foreign policy advisers a week ago — offered an early example of her thinking as the United States faced the first mini-crisis of her tenure.

["We reviewed very carefully the security needs we had as we dealt with the orderly evacuation," Michael McCurry, the White House spokesman, said Friday in Helsinki as Mr. Clinton met with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia, The Associated Press reported.

["There were substantive discussions about how to protect U.S. citizens," he said, with the aim of "making sure we could accomplish the evacuation that was ordered."]

In her four years as the U.S. representative to the United Nations, Mrs. Albright became an advocate for a more muscular approach to foreign policy, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A senior administration official said that Mrs. Albright had raised the idea of a larger force as one for consideration, that she had not insisted on it and that she ultimately agreed with military commanders that the evacuations by helicopter were the best and safest action.

Nonetheless, the discussion showed Mrs. Albright's desire "not to be instinctively unwilling to discuss the possibility of using force," the official said. At the same time, it indicated that any



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**DEADLY GAMES** — Avni Tahiri, from Skuke, Albania, lying in a hospital in Tirana after he was wounded by an explosive. Many children have been injured playing with hand grenades they have found on the streets.

more aggressive use of the military is likely to encounter resistance from the more cautious quarters of the Pentagon.

Mrs. Albright did not suggest that the administration embrace appeals by

some in Europe for an international force to stabilize Albania. The United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have rejected those calls. Although it has not ruled out such a force

in the future, the administration has made it clear that it would do nothing to shore up the teetering government of President Sali Berisha, whose autocratic rule has disillusioned Washington.