

I have a responsibility as President to deal with problems such as this before they do permanent harm to our national interests. America has a responsibility to stand with our allies when they are trying to save innocent lives and preserve peace, freedom, and stability in Europe. That is what we are doing in Kosovo.

If we've learned anything from the century drawing to a close, it is that if America is going to be prosperous and secure, we need a Europe that is prosperous, secure, undivided, and free. We need a Europe that is coming together, not falling apart, a Europe that shares our values and shares the burdens of leadership. That is the foundation on which the security of our children will depend.

That is why I have supported the political and economic unification of Europe. That is why we brought Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into NATO, and redefined its missions, and reached out to Russia and Ukraine for new partnerships.

Now, what are the challenges to that vision of a peaceful, secure, united, stable Europe? The challenge of strengthening a partnership with a democratic Russia that, despite our disagreements, is a constructive partner in the work of building peace; the challenge of resolving the

tension between Greece and Turkey and building bridges with the Islamic world; and finally, the challenge of ending instability in the Balkans so that these bitter ethnic problems in Europe are resolved by the force of argument, not the force of arms, so that future generations of Americans do not have to cross the Atlantic to fight another terrible war.

It is this challenge that we and our allies are facing in Kosovo. That is why we have acted now: because we care about saving innocent lives; because we have an interest in avoiding an even crueler and costlier war; and because our children need and deserve a peaceful, stable, free Europe.

Our thoughts and prayers tonight must be with the men and women of our Armed Forces who are undertaking this mission for the sake of our values and our children's future.

May God bless them, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:01 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and U.S. Special Envoy Richard C. Holbrooke.

## Remarks on Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets and an Exchange With Reporters

*March 25, 1999*

*The President.* I'm about to receive a briefing from the national security team, as you can see. I'm very grateful that our crews returned home safely after their work last night. And I'm very grateful that the United States Congress has expressed its support for them.

I want to say again that our purpose here is to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe or a wider war. Our objective is to make it clear that Serbia must either choose peace or we will limit its ability to make war. And we're going to get a briefing and lay further plans today.

*Q.* Mr. President, yesterday you listed in the briefing room three objectives of the airstrikes, but among them was not a demand that Milosevic return to the negotiating table if he signed a peace agreement. Yet, others in the

administration are saying this morning that is a precondition for ending the strike. What are the facts?

*The President.* Well, he has to choose peace, or we have to try to limit his ability to make war. That's what we're trying to do. And I think that's been very clear. If you look at what happened at the Rambouillet talks, the arrangement was basically supported by all of Europe, the United States, the Kosovars. The Russians agreed that it was a fair agreement. They did not agree to the military involvement of NATO, but they agreed that it was a fair agreement. Only Mr. Milosevic and the Serbs declined to deal with the evident responsibility they have to choose the path of peace instead of the path of aggression and war.

So I think that it is clear—I don't know how to make it any clearer—that we either have to have a choice for peace by Serbia, not just stopping the killing for an hour or two but a choice for peace, or we will do our best to limit their ability to make war on those people.

*Q.* What is the exit strategy?

*The President.* The exit strategy is what it always is in a military operation. It's when the mission is completed.

*Q.* Do you believe the Kosovars can be safe without the intervention of ground troops from NATO? Can your goals be achieved just through airstrikes?

*The President.* I do. I believe we can create a situation in which we have limited their ability to make war and thereby increase the prospects that they can protect themselves better. I do believe that.

*Q.* What about Russians threatening to arm Belgrade?

*The President.* Well, you know, they have quite a lot of arms on their own; they made a lot of arms in the former Yugoslavia. I told the American people they had a very impressive air defense system, and they had lots of other arms and weapons. I have no intention of supporting any lifting of the arms embargo on Serbia. I think that would be a terrible mistake. We would be far better off if they didn't have

as many arms as they do; then they would be out there making peace and accommodating these ethnic differences and figuring out ways they can live together.

*Q.* Are you concerned that the American people aren't more strongly behind you on this?

*The President.* No. I believe that many Americans really had not thought a lot about this until the last 2 days. I hope that a lot of them heard my presentation last night. I did my very best to explain what we were doing and why, and I believe that a majority of them will support what we're trying to do here. I also believe very strongly that it is my responsibility to make this judgment based on what I think is in the long-term interests of the American people.

*Q.* [*Inaudible*—achieve peace or you will limit his ability to make war, but need he come back to the conference table?

*The President.* I think he knows what needs to be done.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:10 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House, prior to a meeting with the national security team. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## Videotaped Address to the Serbian People March 25, 1999

As you know, the United States and its NATO Allies have begun a military campaign to reduce President Milosevic's ability to make war on the people of Kosovo. I want to speak candidly to all Serbian people, to explain our reasons for this action and how there could be a quick resolution of the crisis.

First, I cannot emphasize too strongly that the United States and our European allies have no quarrel with the Serbian people. We respect your proud history and culture. We joined together on many occasions, including our victory over nazism in World War II. Our own history has been honored by the contributions of Serb families who came to America to start a new life.

But our common future has been put in jeopardy by a war that threatens the peace of Europe and the lives of thousands of innocent people in Kosovo. After exhausting every other option, all 19 members of NATO—from France to Poland, from Italy to Greece, from across Europe to Canada and the United States in North America—all of us agree that only swift action can save peace in the Balkans.

Let us turn from Serbia's history to the facts of the last 10 years. There has been too much propaganda and too little plain truth. President Milosevic has spoken often of Serbia's standing in the world, but by his every action he has diminished your country's standing, exposed you to violence and instability and isolated you from