

Remarks at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization 50th Anniversary
Summit Dinner
April 23, 1999

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the White House and, again let me say, welcome to Washington and to the NATO Summit.

Some of you know that I am quite a fan of music. And I found a little-known bit of history related to the founding of NATO 50 years ago. When the original North Atlantic Treaty was signed, the United States Marine Band, which was in the auditorium playing for us today, was in the auditorium then, playing a group of songs from George Gershwin's famous opera, "Porgy and Bess." The two songs they played were "I Got Plenty of Nothing" and "It Ain't Necessarily So." Well, I think after 50 years we can still appreciate Gershwin, but the songs were poorly timed, because NATO has had plenty of substance, and its word has been necessarily so.

In 1949 when we entered NATO, it signaled a radical departure in America's history because we had been warned from the time of our first President, George Washington, against entangling alliances with other nations. But we learned the hard way after World War I that the warning was no longer valid in the 20th century.

In the last 50 years, all of us have become more and more involved with events beyond our borders because we have seen increasingly how they affect the lives of people within our borders and how the values we espouse at home must be defended abroad. That is in large measure what we are trying to do in Kosovo, to protect the innocent families, the children, and to stand for the values that we have stood for as an organization for 50 years now.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to our founders, to the generation of people after the

Second World War who constructed a world of freedom that stood against tyranny and eventually helped to end the cold war. We can best pay that debt by standing up for those values today, including meeting our responsibilities to the children and the future of southeastern Europe in the terrible suffering of Kosovo.

Mr. Secretary General, I want to say a special word of thanks to you for your steadfast leadership, for your continuing reminder to all of us that we must both do our duty and stay together as we do it. Tomorrow we will focus on Kosovo again, but we will also look to the larger issues of the 21st century. Again, I compliment you on your leadership, and I thank all of our colleagues for their input.

We will look back on this summit, I think, and say, "Well, it wasn't one of those traditional meetings, where we got to have a lot of fun and a lot of laughs, because we were so gravely concerned with the suffering of the people in the Balkans. But it was a profoundly important one because it reminded us of why we got started, what we have to do tomorrow, and what it is that gives our Alliance meaning in this present day."

I'd like to ask all of you to join me in a toast to Secretary General and Mrs. Solana, and to NATO and its future. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary General Javier Solana of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and his wife, Concepcion. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary General Solana.

Remarks at the Opening Session of the North Atlantic Council Summit
April 24, 1999

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary General.

Yesterday we recalled NATO's history, embraced our new members, deepened our unity

and our determination to stand against ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and to build a broader transatlantic community that respects human