

May 4 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

heritage that Mexican Americans have brought to our society. As we stand at the threshold of the 21st century, let us vow to work together to forge a future of peace and prosperity for our hemisphere and the world.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to all for a memorable celebration.

BILL CLINTON

Remarks to the Community at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany *May 5, 1999*

Thank you very much. Secretary Cohen, thank you for your remarks and your remarkable leadership. We're glad that you and Janet are here with us today and there for the men and women of America's military services every day.

Secretary Albright, thank you for being able to redeem the lessons of your life story by standing up for the freedom of the people in the Balkans.

To the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton—I was looking at General Shelton standing up here—you know, he's about a head taller than I am. And I thought to myself, he not only is good; he looks good. He looks like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But what I want you to know is, however good he looks, he's better than that in the job that he does.

I thank General Clark for his leadership; Ambassador Kornblum; National Security Adviser Sandy Berger; our USAID Director, Brian Atwood, who is doing so much for the humanitarian relief. Brigadier General Scott Van Cleef, thank you. Chief Master Sergeant Daniel Keane, thank you for making all of us feel so welcome here today.

I'd like to thank the distinguished German public officials and citizens who are here. And I'd like to thank the Spangdahlem oompah band and the gospel choir. Thank you. I thank all the men and women of Team Eifel and all your family members who are here. I am delighted to see so many children here today. And I hope this will be a day they will long remember.

The 52d Air Expeditionary Wing is crucial to our mission in Europe. There are so many to thank: the Stingers and Hawks, the Panthers, your guests here, the crews of the Flying Knights, all the hundreds of base operations and support personnel here, working day after day

and now night after night. We ask so much of you, and you never let us down.

Ever since the end of the cold war, this base has been busy with the challenges of a new era, training new allies, planning new missions, helping people in need like the earthquake victims in Turkey whom the 52d Civil Engineer Squadron assisted last summer. A few years ago, you helped to end the cruel war in Bosnia. And I'm sorry you have to do it all over again, but I'm proud of the job you're doing today in Kosovo.

Earlier this year, some of you in the 22d Fighter Squadron flew support for Operation Northern Watch. Since this conflict in Kosovo began, we have been depending on you more than ever. It's meant more hardship and more hard work for you. Many of your loved ones are right now flying out of Italy, and of course, these F-117 stealth fighters and their crew are here from Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. And they're a long way from their families.

Night after night, crews fly out to Serbia, punching through enemy defenses; putting ordinance on target; returning home to debrief, rest, and then do it all over again. That takes courage and skill and a lot of support that we must never take for granted: refueling in midair; evading anti-aircraft fire; pinpointing targets; seeking, often at great personal risk, to avoid civilian casualties; coordinating with crews from other nations; rescuing a downed pilot, as one of your squadrons did just a few days ago; and for the base personnel and the loved ones, always the anxious waiting for the aircraft to return.

One thing I have tried to make sure the American people understand in the years that I have been President is that your jobs have inherent dangers, even when not directly engaged in conflict. As many of you now know,

just yesterday we lost two brave Americans in a helicopter training accident in Albania. And today we grieve with their families and pray for them.

I came here more than anything else to say, on behalf of your fellow Americans, we thank you for your service and your sacrifice. Though you're far from our shores, you are close to our hearts every day.

I also would like to thank the people of Germany, who are our allies in this cause and who do so very much to make all of you feel at home here in this wonderful country.

I just came from an operations briefing and a tour of the aircraft you fly from this base. I want to talk just a little bit about why you're flying. And I want all of you, particularly, who have children here, who think about the world they will live in the 21st century, to think about why you're flying.

Our mission in Kosovo has nothing to do with trying to acquire territory or dominate others. It is about something far more important, creating the kind of world where an innocent people are not singled out for repression, for expulsion, for destruction just because of their religious and ethnic heritage.

You look around today at the people we have in uniform here. We have people from all different racial and ethnic backgrounds. We have people from all different religious heritages. And I think America's military is stronger because we try to get everybody's talents and put everybody's talents to the best possible use—not weaker. And I can tell you for sure that our country is stronger when we reach across all the lines that divide us and celebrate our differences but say that what unites us is more important.

All the differences that exist among people in the world, especially differences of religion, make life more interesting and more enlightening when they are limited by an understanding of our common humanity. But when people throw away that understanding of our common humanity and make differences the only thing that matter and make them so important they justify literally dehumanizing other people so that their lives, their children, their property, their history, their culture, even their faith in God do not matter, that makes life unbearable, and it makes civilization impossible.

And that is what we are fighting against in Kosovo, the same thing we fought to stop in

Bosnia. And if we want Europe to be undivided and democratic and at peace for the first time in history, and if we don't want your successors to have to come to this continent and fight another bitter war, then we must stand in Kosovo for the elemental principle of the common humanity of every breathing, living person in this continent.

The Alliance in which we are privileged to serve, NATO, is comprised of 19 democracies with 780 million people, tied together by a respect for human rights and the richness of all people, tied together in a conviction that we will build a Europe that is for the first time in history undivided, peaceful, and free. Kosovo is an affront to everything we stand for.

Two months ago there were 1.8 million ethnic Albanians living there; now nearly 1½ million have been forced from their homes, their villages burned, their men often separated from their families and killed, some of them bundled and set on fire, the records of their family history and property destroyed.

The number of people dislodged there in 2 months is equivalent to the entire population of the State of Nebraska—kicked out of house and home without warning at gunpoint. It is—and those of you who were involved in Bosnia will remember this very well—it is the culmination of a deliberate, calculated, 10-year campaign by Mr. Milosevic to exploit the religious and ethnic differences in the former Yugoslavia, to preserve and enhance his dictatorial power.

His so-called ethnic cleansing has included concentration camps, murder, rape, the destruction of priceless religious, cultural, and historical sites, books, and records. This is wrong. It is evil. NATO, after the cold war, said that we would stand for the freedom and unity of Europe. This is occurring in the heart of Europe on NATO's doorstep. We must repudiate it. We must reverse it. And we intend to do that.

Now, when Mr. Milosevic started this campaign against unarmed people in Kosovo, with 40,000 troops and nearly 300 tanks, he may have thought our Alliance was too divided, our people too impatient, our democracies too weak to stand against single-minded despotism. Every day, you prove him wrong.

NATO is now more united. Our objectives are clear and firm; Secretary Cohen said them. I want to say them one more time. This is not complicated. The Kosovars must be able to go home, safe and with self-government. The

Serbian troops must be withdrawn, and instead there must be an international force with NATO at its core, but hopefully with many other nations participating, to keep the peace and protect all the people of Kosovo, Albanians and Serbs alike.

We have no quarrel with the Serb people. I say that again. We do not want to be guilty of the sin we are standing and speaking against. We have no quarrel with the Serb people. America has many great Serbian-Americans. They were our allies in war. Our quarrel is with ethnic cleansing and systematic killing and uprooting and the bigotry and death brought on by religious hatred. That is what we stand against and what we seek to reverse.

But for that to happen and for those people to go home and have self-government, there has to be an international security force with NATO at its core that will protect everybody there. We will continue to pursue this campaign in which we are now engaged. We will intensify it in an unrelenting way until these objectives are met.

You know, the gentle hills of this region, the Eifel region and the Mosel Valley, are peaceful today, thanks in no small measure to 50 years of alliance and commitment, of which you are the most recent manifestation. But we mustn't forget that here, where we now are, there was a landscape of violence for thousands of years, from the time Trier served as a Roman capital just south of here. For two millennia, Europeans fought each other in the contested terrain around this base—two millennia.

Now, when you drive across these beautiful hills and you see these beautiful fields, war is unthinkable here and in most of Europe because of what your forebears did. And you can now look forward to a day not long from now when, in the Balkans and throughout southeastern Europe, human rights are respected and the men and women of Spang are honored for doing your part to turn the dream of peace and human rights into an everyday reality.

This base was built in the aftermath of the Second World War, at the dawn of the cold war. Because of Allied vigilance, the war we then feared would occur never happened. Now, planes are actually flying into combat from this base for the very first time to protect the future your forebears worked so hard to build.

I know this is hard. I know too many of these pilots are flying long hours with too little rest. I know the stress and anxiety must be unbearable. But when you wonder what it is like, next time you're in a meeting of American service personnel, look around at your differences, at your racial differences, the differences of background, the men and women together, the differences of religious faith, and thank God you live in a society that honors that, because we are united by things that are more important. And look at these little children here and think how terrible it would be for them to live in a world where a person could gain, increase, and keep political power by teaching young people like them to kill other young people because of their religious faith or their ethnic background. That has no place in Europe or any other civilized society.

And you have a chance to prove the dreams of the people that fought World War II and that held together during the long cold war—to prove those dreams can be realized in Europe in your lifetime. And if you do, the people who wear the uniform of the United States military 10 or 20 or 30 years from now will not be called upon to spill their blood in another war because of some dictator's mad schemes to dehumanize a whole people. That is what you're fighting for, and that is what you will be grateful that you did for your children and the children of this continent.

Thank you so much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:36 p.m. in Hangar One. In his remarks, he referred to Janet Langhart Cohen, wife of Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen; General Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; John C. Kornblum, U.S. Ambassador to Germany; Brig. Gen. Scott Van Cleef, USAF, Commander, 52d Air Expeditionary Wing; Chief Master Sergeant Daniel M. Keane, USAF, 52d Fighter Wing; Apache helicopter pilots CW3 David A. Gibbs, USA, and CW2 Kevin L. Reichert, USA; and President Slobodan Milosevic, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The President also referred to the Team Eifel Amateur Radio Society.