

## Remarks on Departure From Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, and an Exchange With Reporters

May 8, 1999

### *Bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade*

*The President.* Ladies and gentlemen, as all of you know, last night the NATO airstrikes included a number of command and control targets in Belgrade, targets that involved Mr. Milosevic's ability to do what he has done in Kosovo to run the people out and repress them. Unfortunately, the Chinese Embassy was inadvertently damaged, and people lost their lives, and others have been injured.

It was a tragic mistake, and I want to offer my sincere regret and my condolences to both the leaders and the people of China.

Having said that, let me also remind you that it is clear that we're doing everything we can to avoid innocent civilian casualties. Because the television and other media are in Belgrade, you know every one that's occurred, but I would remind you that well over 10,000 sorties have now been flown, with massive ordinance having been dropped. And that is evidence that we're working very hard to avoid this.

It doesn't remove the sadness from the people in China and from the other innocent civilians that have been hurt, but we are doing our best. And I think it's important to remember why these airstrikes are necessary. Many thousands of Kosovars have been killed. There have been rapes; they have been burned out of their homes; their records have been destroyed; and hundreds of thousands have been turned into refugees.

This can all end tomorrow with an agreement that meets the minimum conditions to restore Kosovo to civilized life; that is, the Serb forces have to leave; a multinational security force with NATO involvement has to come in; the Kosovars have to be able to go home with security and autonomy.

And we're working hard to achieve that goal. We made some progress last week, diplomatically. And meanwhile, I think it's important that NATO stay the course.

Q. There are protests around the world. Russia is calling this barbaric. Could this derail the diplomatic efforts you're making toward a peace deal?

*The President.* Well, it wasn't barbaric. What is barbaric is what Mr. Milosevic has done. It's tragic. It's awful. But it's a tragedy, and it was an accident. What is barbaric is the intentional ethnic cleansing that he has provoked for a decade now, first in Bosnia where a quarter of a million people lost their lives and 2½ million people were made refugees, and now here. That is what is barbaric.

And I believe that Russia recognizes that, which is why they've shown so much leadership on the diplomatic front. And I would encourage them to stay on that course. If they want the bombing to end, then the Kosovars need to come home. We need to reverse the ethnic cleansing. We need to know they'll be secure.

And that's what I would urge everyone to think about here. You know, I'd like to see a few more demonstrations against the helplessness—I mean, the treatment against the helpless Kosovars.

I don't blame people for being upset about it; I'm upset about it. But it is clearly—if you remember that over 10,000 sorties have been flown here, it is obvious that the NATO—the generals and the pilots have worked very hard to avoid this.

I know when I was in Germany, I talked to pilots that literally had risked their own lives to avoid innocent civilian casualties when weapons being fired against them were being fired from heavily populated civilian areas—on roofs and things like that—and they didn't fire back. They risked their own lives to avoid this sort of thing.

So this will happen if you drop this much ordinance over this period of time. I think the campaign is necessary. And what we need to do to end it is to meet the conditions necessary for the Kosovars to go home with safety and autonomy.

Q. Is this a setback for peace?

*The President.* No. What I hope it will do—I'm convinced that NATO should continue its mission. And what I think it should do is to make everybody who's interested in peace redouble their efforts to get Mr. Milosevic to reverse ethnic cleansing here. We need some sense of proportion here. Look at the numbers of people involved: thousands of people killed—

of Kosovars; hundreds of thousands driven out of their homes, their homes burned, their records burned—coming on top of what happened in Bosnia. Let's not forget what the record is here.

And I hate this. And as I said, I send my regrets and my profound condolences to the leaders and the people of China, and to the innocent people in Serbia who have perished. I hate it. But someone sometime has got to stand up against this sort of ethnic cleansing and killing people wholesale and uprooting them and trashing them and destroying their lives by the hundreds of thousands solely because of

their religion and ethnicity. Otherwise, there will be far greater tragedies.

You know, these things are not easy. But someone had to do it sometime. And the answer is for everyone who wants an end to it to put some pressure on the Serbs and get this diplomatic thing even more energized. And let's keep working and put it behind us. No one would be happier than me when it's over. But what we're doing is the right thing to do.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:35 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

## Remarks at the White House Strategy Meeting on Children, Violence, and Responsibility May 10, 1999

### *Bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade*

Before I make my opening remarks, I would like to begin by saying a word about the tragic bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. I have already expressed our apology and our condolences to President Jiang and to the Chinese people. And I have reaffirmed my commitment to strengthen our relationship with China.

But I think it's very important to remember that this was an isolated, tragic event, while the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, which has led to the killing of thousands of people and the relocation of hundreds of thousands, is a deliberate and systematic crime. Until NATO's simple conditions are met, therefore, the military campaign will continue.

But again I want to say to the Chinese people and to the leaders of China, I apologize; I regret this. But I think it is very important to draw a clear distinction between a tragic mistake and a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing. And the United States will continue to make that distinction.

### *White House Strategy Meeting*

Now, let me say as I look around this room today, I want to say on behalf of the Vice President and Mrs. Gore and Hillary and myself, first, we appreciate all of you coming. This is a very diverse and distinguished group of Ameri-

cans. We have leaders of Congress from both parties here; leaders of the faith community; we have activists among parents and students and educators, and people in music and people in the entertainment communities; people who represent the gun manufacturers of our country. This is a truly impressive and diverse array of Americans.

Obviously, we have asked you to come here to see what we can do together to give our children safer childhoods. The four of us, both individually and together, have worked on many of the matters that will be discussed here today for years. We have made particular efforts to give our children safe streets and safe schools.

But I think that we, and the members of the Cabinet and the administration who are here, like all Americans, were profoundly affected by the events in Littleton, Colorado, coming as they did after so many tragic incidents in our schools last year. And we were determined to see what we could do to bring the American people together, to get beyond the divisions that often attend many of the subjects here, which is not to say that we shouldn't have a serious discussion today, and to try to move forward on something really big that can make a difference.

Now, last Friday I announced, therefore, that we would launch a national campaign to prevent