

to save lives. Just last November, over 70 percent of the voters in Florida, not generally thought of as a liberal State, voted to close the gun show loophole.

I ask the Senate to reconsider its decision. There is simply no excuse for letting criminals get arms at gun shows they can't get at gun stores.

Today the Senate will have another chance to debate commonsense measures that most gunmakers and sportsmen and ordinary citizens would welcome. The American people are watching this debate. They care very much about the result.

As we all saw Monday, the gun manufacturing industry is ready to make progress. The country is ready to make progress. The Congress should be ready to make progress. We can't expect parents, young people, and the media to take responsibility if we in Government aren't willing to do our part.

Thank you very much.

Kosovo Funding Legislation

Q. Mr. President, the Kosovo money bill—is it getting so loaded down that you may have to veto it?

The President. Well, I believe that we're actually making progress. I got a report from Mr. Podesta this morning, and I think there is some effort to trim down the bill some and to get it in position where I can sign it, and I hope it will be done quickly. We need the funds now, and we need the demonstration of support for the Kosovar refugees and for Macedonia and Albania now. It needs to be done as quickly as possible. And I'm, frankly, pretty encouraged this morning.

Q. Do you think the American people understand the war, Mr. President? Support for the war seems to be declining, according to national polls.

The President. I think they do understand it. I think they understand that it is overwhelmingly a humanitarian problem. I think they understand that there's a great difference between ethnic cleansing and mass slaughter and ethnic conflicts, which are so prevalent in other parts of the world. I think they understand that this is not something the United States is doing alone but with the strong involvement and leadership of our European allies. And I believe they understand that we have an interest in seeing peace and freedom in Europe.

I think they are probably frustrated that it's not already over, but I said in the beginning we have to be prepared to pay the price of time. And the most important thing is that our children will understand it years from now if we stand against ethnic cleansing and we can turn the world against it, and they will not forgive us years from now if we do not.

Thank you.

Q. Central American aid, Mr. President?

Q. Are there offsets that you would accept?

Q. Will Yeltsin be impeached? What happens if Yeltsin goes?

Q. Central American aid—

The President. That is there, and I hope we get it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for Fort McNair, MD. A portion of the exchange could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States at Fort McNair, Maryland

May 13, 1999

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Commander Pouliot. I am grateful to you and to Veterans of Foreign Wars for your support of America's efforts in Kosovo.

General Chilcoat, Secretary Albright, Secretary Cohen, Secretary West, National Security Adviser Berger, Deputy Secretary Goyer, Gen-

eral Shelton and the Joint Chiefs, and to the members of the military and members of the VFW who are here. I'd also like to thank Congressman Engel and Congressman Quinn for coming to be with us today.

I am especially honored to be here with our veterans who have struggled for freedom in

World War II and in the half century since. Your service inspires us today, as we work with our Allies to reverse the systematic campaign of terror and to bring peace and freedom to Kosovo. To honor your sacrifices and fulfill the vision of a peaceful Europe for which so many of the VFW members risked your lives, NATO's mission, as the Commander said, must succeed.

My meetings last week in Europe with Kosovar refugees, with Allied leaders, with Americans in uniform, strengthened my conviction that we will succeed. With just 7 months left in the 20th century, Kosovo is a crucial test: Can we strengthen a global community grounded in cooperation and tolerance, rooted in common humanity? Or will repression and brutality, rooted in ethnic, racial, and religious hatreds, dominate the agenda for the new century and the new millennium?

The World War II veterans here fought in Europe and in the Pacific to prevent the world from being dominated by tyrants who used racial and religious hatred to strengthen their grip and to justify mass killing.

President Roosevelt said in his final Inaugural Address: "We have learned that we cannot live alone. We cannot live alone at peace. We have learned that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away. We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community."

The sacrifices of American and Allied troops helped to end a nightmare, rescue freedom, and lay the groundwork for the modern world that has benefited all of us. In the long cold war years, our troops stood for freedom and against communism until the Berlin Wall fell and the Iron Curtain collapsed.

Now, the nations of central Europe are free democracies. We've welcomed new members to NATO and formed security partnerships with many other countries all across Europe's east, including Russia and Ukraine. Both the European Union and NATO have pledged to continue to embrace new members.

Some have questioned the need for continuing our security partnership with Europe at the end of the cold war. But in this age of growing international interdependence, America needs a strong and peaceful Europe more than ever as our partner for freedom and for economic progress and our partner against terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and instability.

The promise of a Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace, is at long last within reach. But we all know it is threatened by the ethnic and religious turmoil in southeastern Europe, where most leaders are freely elected and committed to cooperation, both within and among their neighbors.

Unfortunately, for more than 10 years now, President Milosevic has pursued a different course for Serbia, and for much of the rest of the former Yugoslavia. Since the late 1980's, he has acquired, retained, and sought to expand his power by inciting religious and ethnic hatred in the cause of Greater Serbia, by demonizing and dehumanizing people, especially the Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims, whose history, culture, and very presence in the former Republic of Yugoslavia impedes that vision of a Greater Serbia. He unleashed wars in Bosnia and Croatia, creating 2 million refugees and leaving a quarter of a million people dead. A decade ago, he stripped Kosovo of its constitutional self-government and began harassing and oppressing its people. He has also rejected brave calls among his own Serb people for greater liberty. Today, he uses repression and censorship at home to stifle dissent and to conceal what he is doing in Kosovo.

Though his ethnic cleansing is not the same as the ethnic extermination of the Holocaust, the two are related, both vicious, premeditated, systematic oppression fueled by religious and ethnic hatred. This campaign to drive the Kosovars from their land and to, indeed, erase their very identity is an affront to humanity and an attack not only on a people but on the dignity of all people. Even now, Mr. Milosevic is being investigated by the International War Crimes Tribunal for alleged war crimes, including mass killing and ethnic cleansing.

Until recently, 1.7 million ethnic Albanians, about the population of our State of Nebraska, lived in Kosovo among a total population of 2 million, the other being Serbs.

The Kosovar Albanians are farmers and factory workers, lawyers and doctors, mothers, fathers, school children. They have worked to build better lives under increasingly difficult circumstances. Today, most of them are in camps in Albania, Macedonia, and elsewhere, nearly 900,000 refugees, some searching desperately for lost family members. Or they are trapped within Kosovo itself, perhaps 600,000 more of them, lacking shelter, short of food, afraid to go home.

Or they are buried in mass graves dug by their executioners.

I know we see these pictures of the refugees on television every night, and most people would like another story. But we must not get refugee fatigue. We must not forget the real victims of this tragedy. We must give them aid and hope. And we in the United States must make sure—must make sure—their stories are told.

A Kosovar farmer told how Serb tanks drove into his village. Police lined up all the men, about 100 of them, by a stream and opened fire. The farmer was hit by a bullet in the shoulder. The weight of falling bodies all round him pulled him into the stream. The only way he could stay alive was to pretend to be dead. From a camp in Albania, he said, "My daughter tells me, 'Father, sleep. Why don't you sleep?' But I can't. All those dead bodies on top of mine."

Another refugee told of trying to return to his village in Kosovo's capital, Pristina. "On my way," he said, "I met one of my relatives. He told me not to go back because there were snipers on the balconies. Minutes after I left, the man was killed. I found him. Back in Pristina no one could go out because of the Serb policemen in the streets. It was terrible to see our children; they were so hungry. Finally, I tried to go shopping. Four armed men jumped out and said, 'We're going to kill you if you don't get out of here.' My daughters were crying day and night. We were hearing stories about rape. They begged me, 'Please get us out of there.' So we joined thousands of people going through the streets at night toward the train station. In the train wagons, police were tearing up passports, taking money, taking jewelry."

Another refugee reported, "The Serbs surrounded us. They killed four children because their families did not have money to give to the police. They killed them with knives, not guns."

Another recalled, "The police came early in the morning. They executed almost 100 people. They killed them all, women and children. They set a fire and threw the bodies in."

A pregnant woman watched Serb forces shoot her brother in the stomach. She said, "My father asked for someone to help this boy, but the answer he got was a beating. The Serbs told my brother to put his hands up, and then they

shot him 10 times. I saw this. I saw my brother die."

Serb forces, their faces often concealed by masks, as they were before in Bosnia, have rounded up Kosovar women and repeatedly raped them. They have said to children, "Go into the woods and die of hunger."

Last week in Germany I met with a couple of dozen of these refugees, and I asked them all, in turn, to speak about their experience. A young man—I'd say 15 or 16 years old—stood up and struggled to talk. Finally, he just sat down and said, "Kosovo, I cannot talk about Kosovo."

Nine of every ten Kosovar Albanians now has been driven from their homes, thousands murdered, at least 100,000 missing, many young men led away in front of their families; over 500 cities, towns, and villages torched. All this has been carried out, you must understand, according to a plan carefully designed months earlier in Belgrade. Serb officials pre-positioned forces, tanks, and fuel and mapped out the sequence of attack: What were the soldiers going to do; what were the paramilitary people going to do; what were the police going to do.

Town after town has seen the same brutal procedures: Serb forces taking valuables and identity papers, seizing or executing civilians, destroying property records, bulldozing and burning homes, mocking the fleeing.

We and our Allies, with Russia, have worked hard for a just peace. Just last fall, Mr. Milosevic agreed under pressure to halt the previous assault on Kosovo, and hundreds of thousands of Kosovars were able to return home. But soon, he broke his commitment and renewed violence.

In February and March, again we pressed for peace, and the Kosovar Albanian leaders accepted a comprehensive plan, including the disarming of their insurgent forces, though it did not give them all they wanted. But instead of joining the peace, Mr. Milosevic, having already massed some 40,000 troops in and around Kosovo, unleashed his forces to intensify their atrocities and complete his brutal scheme.

Now, from the outset of this conflict, we and our Allies have been very clear about what Belgrade must do to end it. The central imperative is this: The Kosovars must be able to return home and live in safety. For this to happen, the Serb forces must leave; partial withdrawals can only mean continued civil war with the

Kosovar insurgents. There must also be an international security force with NATO at its core. Without that force, after all they've been through, the Kosovars simply won't go home. Their requirements are neither arbitrary nor overreaching. These things we have said are simply what is necessary to make peace work.

There are those who say Europe and its North American allies have no business intervening in the ethnic conflicts of the Balkans. They are the inevitable result, these conflicts, according to some, of centuries-old animosities which were unleashed by the end of the cold war restraints in Yugoslavia and elsewhere. I, myself, have been guilty of saying that on an occasion or two, and I regret it now more than I can say. For I have spent a great deal of time in these last 6 years reading the real history of the Balkans. And the truth is that a lot of what passes for common wisdom in this area is a gross oversimplification and misreading of history.

The truth is that for centuries these people have lived together in the Balkans and southeastern Europe with greater or lesser degree of tension but often without anything approaching the intolerable conditions and conflicts that exist today. And we do no favors to ourselves or to the rest of the world when we justify looking away from this kind of slaughter by oversimplifying and conveniently, in our own way, demonizing the whole Balkans by saying that these people are simply incapable of civilized behavior with one another.

Second, there is—people say, “Okay, maybe it's not inevitable, but look, there are a lot of ethnic problems in the world. Russia has dealt with Chechnya, and you've got Abkhazia and Ossetia on the borders of Russia. And you've got all these ethnic problems everywhere, and religious problems. That's what the Middle East is about. You've got Northern Ireland. You've got the horrible, horrible genocide in Rwanda. You've got the war now between Eritrea and Ethiopia.” They say, “Oh, we've got all these problems, and, therefore, why do you care about this?”

I say to them, there is a huge difference between people who can't resolve their problems peacefully and fight about it and people who resort to systematic ethnic cleansing and slaughter of people because of their religious or ethnic background. There is a difference. There is a difference.

And that is the difference that NATO—that our Allies have tried to recognize and act on. I believe that is what we saw in Bosnia and Kosovo. I think the only thing we have seen that really rivals that, rooted in ethnic or religious destruction, in this decade is what happened in Rwanda. And I regret very much that the world community was not organized and able to act quickly there as well.

Bringing the Kosovars home is a moral issue, but it is a very practical, strategic issue. In a world where the future will be threatened by the growth of terrorist groups, the easy spread of weapons of mass destruction, the use of technology including the Internet, for people to learn how to make bombs and wreck countries, this is also a significant security issue. Particularly because of Kosovo's location, it is just as much a security issue for us as ending the war in Bosnia was.

Though we are working hard with the international community to sustain them, a million or more permanent Kosovar refugees could destabilize Albania, Macedonia, the wider region, become a fertile ground for radicalism and vengeance that would consume southeastern Europe. And if Europe were overwhelmed with that, you know we would have to then come in and help them. Far better for us all to work together, to be firm, to be resolute, to be determined to resolve this now.

If the European community and its American and Canadian allies were to turn away from and, therefore, reward ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, all we would do is to create for ourselves an environment where this sort of practice was sanctioned by other people who found it convenient to build their own political power, and therefore, we would be creating a world of trouble for Europe and for the United States in the years ahead.

I'd just like to make one more point about this, in terms of the history of the Balkans. As long as people have existed, there have been problems among people who were different from one another, and there probably always will be. But you do not have systematic slaughter and an effort to eradicate the religion, the culture, the heritage, the very record of presence of the people in any area unless some politician thinks it is in his interest to foment that sort of hatred. That's how these things happen. People with organized political and military power decide it is in their interest, that they

get something out of convincing the people they control or they influence to go kill other people and uproot them and dehumanize them.

I don't believe that the Serb people in their souls are any better—I mean, any worse than we are. Do you? Do you believe when a little baby is born into a certain ethnic or racial group, that somehow they have some poison in there that has to, at some point when they grow up, turn into some vast flame of destruction? Congressman Engel has got more Albanians than any Congressman in the country in his district. Congressman Quinn's been involved in the peace process in Ireland. You think there's something about the Catholic and Protestant Irish kids that sort of genetically predisposes them to—you know better than that, because we're about to make peace there, I hope—getting closer.

Political leaders do this kind of thing. Think the Germans would have perpetrated the Holocaust on their own without Hitler? Was there something in the history of the German race that made them do this? No.

We've got to get straight about this. This is something political leaders do. And if people make decisions to do these kinds of things, other people can make decisions to stop them. And if the resources are properly arrayed, it can be done. And that is exactly what we intend to do.

Now, last week, despite our differences over the NATO action in Kosovo, Russia joined us, through the G-8 foreign ministers, in affirming our basic condition for ending the conflict, in affirming that the mass expulsion of the Kosovars cannot stand. We and Russia agreed that the international force ideally should be endorsed by the United Nations, as it was in Bosnia. And we do want Russian forces, along with those of other nations, to participate, because a Russian presence will help to reassure the Serbs who live in Kosovo, and they will need some protection, too, after all that has occurred.

NATO and Russian forces have served well side-by-side in Bosnia, with forces from many other countries. And with all the difficulties, the tensions, the dark memories that still exist in Bosnia, the Serbs, the Muslims, and the Croats are still at peace and still working together. Nobody claims that we can make everyone love each other overnight. That is not required. But

what is required are basic norms of civilized conduct.

Until Serbia accepts these conditions, we will continue to grind down its war machine. Today our Allied air campaign is striking at strategic targets in Serbia and directly at Serb forces in Kosovo, making it harder for them to obtain supplies, protect themselves, and attack the ethnic Albanians who are still there. NATO actions will not stop until the conditions I have described for peace are met.

Last week I had a chance to meet with our troops in Europe, those who are flying the missions, and those who are organizing and leading our humanitarian assistance effort. I can tell you that you and all Americans can be very, very proud of them. They are standing up for what is right. They are performing with great skill and courage and sense of purpose. And in their attempts to avoid civilian casualties, they are sometimes risking their own lives. The wing commander at Spangdahlem Air Force Base in Germany told me, and I quote, "Sir, our team wants to stay with this mission until it's finished."

I am very grateful to these men and women. They are worthy successors to those of you in this audience who are veterans today.

Of course, we regret any casualties that are accidental, including those at the Chinese Embassy. But let me be clear again: These are accidents. They are inadvertent tragedies of conflict. We have worked very hard to avoid them. I'm telling you, I talked to pilots who told me that they had been fired at with mobile weapons from people in the middle of highly populated villages, and they turned away rather than answer fire because they did not want to risk killing innocent civilians. That is not our policy.

But those of you who wear the uniform of our country and the many other countries represented here in this room today and those of you who are veterans know that it is simply not possible to avoid casualties of noncombatants in this sort of encounter. We are working hard. And I think it is truly remarkable—I would ask the world to note that we have now flown over 19,000 sorties, thousands and thousands of bombs have been dropped, and there have been very few incidents of this kind. I know that you know how many there have been because Mr. Milosevic makes sure that the media has access to them.

I grieve for the loss of the innocent Chinese and for their families. I grieve for the loss of the innocent Serbian civilians and their families. I grieve for the loss of the innocent Kosovars who were put into a military vehicle—that our people thought was a military vehicle, and they’ve often been used as shields.

But I ask you to remember the stories I told you earlier. There are thousands of people that have been killed systematically by the Serb forces. There are 100,000 people who are still missing. We must remember who the real victims are here and why this started.

It is no accident that Mr. Milosevic has not allowed the international media to see the slaughter and destruction in Kosovo. There is no picture reflecting the story that one refugee told of 15 men being tied together and set on fire while they were alive. No, there are no pictures of that. But we have enough of those stories to know that there is a systematic effort that has animated our actions, and we must not forget it.

Now, Serbia faces a choice. Mr. Milosevic and his allies have dragged their people down a path of racial and religious hatred. This has resulted, again and again, in bloodshed, in loss of life, in loss of territory, and denial of the Serbs’ own freedom and, now, in an unwinnable conflict against the united international community. But there is another path available, one where people of different backgrounds and religions work together, within and across national borders, where people stop redrawing borders and start drawing blueprints for a prosperous, multiethnic future.

This is the path the other nations of southeastern Europe have adopted. Day after day, they work to improve lives, to build a future in which the forces that pull people together are stronger than those that tear them apart. Albania and Bulgaria, as well as our NATO Ally Greece, have overcome historical differences to recognize the independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and others have deepened freedoms, promoted tolerance, pursued difficult economic reforms. Slovenia has advanced democracy at home and prosperity, stood for regional integration, increased security cooperation with a center to defuse landmines left from the conflict in Bosnia.

These nations are reaffirming that discord is not inevitable, that there is not some Balkan

disease that has been there for centuries, always waiting to break out. They are drawing on a rich past where peoples of the region did, in fact, live together in peace.

Now, we and our Allies have been helping to build that future, but we have to accelerate our efforts. We will work with the European Union, the World Bank, the IMF, and others to ease the immediate economic strains, to relieve debt burden, to speed reconstruction, to advance economic reforms and regional trade. We will promote political freedom and tolerance of minorities.

At our NATO Summit last month we agreed to deepen our security engagement in the region, to adopt an ambitious program to help aspiring nations improve their candidacies to join the NATO Alliance. They have risked and sacrificed to support the military and humanitarian efforts. They deserve our support.

Last Saturday was the anniversary of one of the greatest days in American history and in the history of freedom, V-E Day. Though America celebrated that day in 1945, we did not pack up and go home. We stayed to provide economic aid, to help to bolster democracy, to keep the peace and because our strength and resolve was important as Europe rebuilt, learned to live together, faced new challenges together.

The resources we devoted to the Marshall plan, to NATO, to other efforts, I think we would all agree have been an enormous bargain for our long-term prosperity and security here in the United States, just as the resources we are devoting here at this institution to reaching out to people from other nations, to their officers, to their military, in a spirit of cooperation are an enormous bargain for the future security of the people of the United States.

Now, that’s what I want to say in my last point here. War is expensive; peace is cheaper. Prosperity is downright profitable. We have to invest in the rebuilding of this region. Southeastern Europe, after the cold war, was free but poor. As long as they are poor, they will offer a less compelling counterweight to the kind of ethnic exclusivity and oppression that Mr. Milosevic preaches.

If you believe the Marshall plan worked and you believe war is to be avoided whenever possible and you understand how expensive it is and how profitable prosperity is, how much we have gotten out of what we have done, then we have to work with our European Allies to

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rebuild southeastern Europe and to give them an economic future that will pull them together.

The European Union is prepared to take the lead role in southeastern Europe's development. Russia, Ukraine, other nations of Europe's east are building democracy; they want to be a part of this.

We are trying to do this in other places in the world. What a great ally Japan has been for peace and prosperity and will be again as they work to overcome their economic difficulty. Despite our present problems, I still believe we must remain committed to building a long-term strategic partnership with China.

We must work together with people where we can, as we prepare, always, to protect and defend our security if we must. But a better world and a better Europe are clearly in America's interests.

Serbia and the rest of the Balkans should be part of it. So I want to say this one more time; Our quarrel is not with the Serbian people. The United States has been deeply enriched by Serbian-Americans. Millions of Americans are now cheering for some Serbian-Americans as we watch the basketball playoffs every night on television. People of Serbian heritage are an important part of our society. We can never forget that the Serbs fought bravely with the Allies against Fascist aggression in World War II, that they suffered much; that Serbs, too, have been uprooted from their homes and have suffered greatly in the conflicts of the past decade that Mr. Milosevic provoked.

But the cycle of violence has to end. The children of the Balkans, all of them, deserve the chance to grow up without fear. Serbs simply must free themselves of the notion that their

neighbors must be their enemies. The real enemy is a poisonous hatred unleashed by a cynical leader, based on a distorted view of what constitutes real national greatness.

The United States has become greater as we have shed racism, as we have shed a sense of superiority, as we have become more committed to working together across the lines that divide us, as we have found other ways to define meaning and purpose in life. And so has every other country that has embarked on that course.

We stand ready, therefore, to embrace Serbia as a part of a new Europe if the people of Serbia are willing to invest and embrace that kind of future; if they are ready to build a Serbia, and a Yugoslavia, that is democratic and respects the rights and dignity of all people; if they are ready to join a world where people reach across the divide to find their common humanity and their prosperity.

This is the right vision and the right course. It is not only the morally right thing for America; it is the right thing for our security interests over the long run. It is the vision for which the veterans in this room struggled so valiantly, for which so many others have given their lives.

With your example to guide us, and with our Allies beside us, it is a vision that will prevail. And it is very, very much worth standing for.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in Eisenhower Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas A. Pouliot, commander in chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Brig. Gen. Scott Van Cleef, USAF, commander, 52d Air Expeditionary Wing; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Death of Meg Greenfield

May 13, 1999

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Meg Greenfield. In her work for the Washington Post and Newsweek, Meg perfected the art of the newspaper column. Her essays were invariably tightly reasoned, forcefully stated, and deeply felt. She called on those of us who work in Government to pursue far-

sighted public policy and bipartisan solutions. Her voice of eloquence and reason will be sorely missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family in their time of mourning.