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Week Ending Friday, June 25, 1999

**Statement on the G-7 Agreement
To Help Poor Nations**

June 18, 1999

The G-7 agreement we reached today is an historic step to help the world's poorest nations achieve sustained growth and independence while targeting new resources for poverty reduction, education, and combating AIDS. It represents a sound, humane effort to promote widely shared prosperity in the new millennium.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

**Remarks on the Agreement on
Russian Participation in KFOR and
an Exchange With Reporters
in Cologne, Germany**

June 18, 1999

The President. Let me say, first of all, how pleased I am and appreciative I am for the efforts made by Secretary Cohen and Defense Minister Sergeyev to reach the agreement under which the Russian forces will join KFOR in Kosovo.

I have been briefed on the terms of the agreement. They provide for unity of command. They provide for a significant range of responsibilities for the Russians, which I think are entirely appropriate and will enhance the mission's effectiveness. And I am fully supportive of this agreement and very pleased by it.

This has been a good day. We are achieving our objectives now. We know that we have 35,000 Serb forces out, 19,000 KFOR forces in. Now we have the agreement with the Russians, and the Kosovars are going home. So I feel very good and very grateful for this.

And again, I know that Secretary Cohen and Mr. Sergeyev have worked very hard, and I'd also like to thank Secretary Albright

and Foreign Minister Ivanov, because I know they've been also in Helsinki working away. So I'm very pleased.

Q. What will the Russian troops be doing, and why is it significant that they would not control a sector of their own?

The President. Well, for one—the main reason is they are actually needed in more than one sector.

Q. Why?

The President. Because even though the Serb population of Kosovo is concentrated primarily in one north central sector and then a northeastern sector, they're actually—the religious and cultural sites are spread throughout the country and there are pockets of Serbs throughout the country, and we think it's quite important that every effort be made to secure both the physical sites and the personal security of the Serb minority, as well as the Kosovar-Albanian majority. And we think it will give confidence to them if the Russians are in more than one sector.

Q. Will the Russians answer to the NATO commanders?

The President. They have worked out their agreements on unity of command, and Secretary Cohen and Mr. Sergeyev are discussing it now—I think the briefing is going on now, so there's no point in my trying to answer their questions for them. They'd do a better job than I would, and if made a mistake just have to clean it up.

Q. Is this better than Bosnia, sir?

**House of Representatives Action on
Gun Control Legislation**

Q. The House vote to kill the gun legislation—was that inevitable to kill the legislation because of changes the House wanted to make on gun control and the background checks?

The President. Did they do that today?

Q. I think they're about to.

The President. They're going to kill it all?

Q. They have killed it all.

Q. They have.

The President. Well, then maybe that means we'll go back to square one and pass a good bill.

Q. What happened? A month ago it was so different, wasn't it?

The President. They made a—the decision made by the leadership not to act before Memorial Day gave people—gave the NRA time to mobilize and lobby and put pressure on the House, and gave people's attention time to wander from the heartbreak of Littleton and the determination to do something about it.

But I think people still feel very strongly that there's more we can do to protect our children, and my attention hasn't wandered. I've been working on this for years, and I've seen a lot of ups and downs, so I'm more than happy to keep at it. And I would just urge all the advocates of sensible legislation to keep their spirits up and keep working and keep fighting. And I'll be there with them, and we'll get some things done.

Russian Participation in KFOR

Q. Is this more than Bosnia for the Russians, Mr. President? Is this an enhanced role than what they had in Bosnia?

The President. Yes, I would say so, because—but it's different. You see, in Bosnia, we shared a sector in Bosnia, and we worked very well together. I think all of our people will tell you they were very well pleased. And then the French had a sector and the British had a sector, and there were lots of other countries involved, just as there will be here. There will be nearly 30 countries involved.

But the—we didn't have the same dynamic here. We've got just two ethnic groups, and the Serbs are a small minority, but they're a substantial number of people and they're spread out. You know, of course, I hope that conditions will be such that those ordinary civilians who didn't commit any crimes who left will feel that they can come back, too.

So I think having the Russians there and then playing the administrative role at the airport gives them a broader range of responsibilities, because as I said, I think it's perfectly consistent with the mission. I think it will help us to send the message, to model the message, to both groups that we really

do want all law-abiding people to be able to live in peace in Kosovo, and we intend to honor our commitments to that end.

So I feel quite good about this, and I've reviewed the, as I said, the terms of command and control and the basic elements. I think it will work. My test about all this has always been, will it work; will it bring the Kosovars home; will it enable them to live in safety with self-government; will it enable us to protect everyone's religious and cultural and other appropriate sites? I think the answers to all those questions, if this agreement is faithfully implemented—and I believe it will be—the answers to those questions are, yes.

Q. Do you trust the Russians?

The President. Well, we—all I can tell you is, every time I've had an understanding with Boris Yeltsin, he's kept it. And we did work with them on a consistent, long-term basis for years now in Bosnia, and it's worked out. So I believe now that the agreement is worked out, I think it will be honored. I expect it will be honored.

Q. Despite last week—

The President. Yes, absolutely.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:08 p.m. in front of the Cologne Cathedral. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Defense Igor Sergeyev and Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov of Russia. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's Radio Address

June 19, 1999

Good morning. Tomorrow will mark the 2-month anniversary of the terrible school shooting in Littleton, Colorado. This tragedy shocked our Nation and galvanized our determination to protect our children from violence.

Together with the entertainment industry, we're finding new ways to reduce our children's exposure to graphic and gratuitous violence in movies, TV, and video games. Together with parents, teachers, and community leaders, we're talking about how we can increase our involvement in our children's lives and reach out to troubled young people

before they act in violence; how together we can form a grassroots campaign against violence directed at young children. Together as a nation, we're searching our hearts and minds for the best way to prevent anything like this from happening again.

Now, one of the most urgent lessons of Littleton—and the plea of so many parents who've lost their own children to gun violence—is that to keep our children safe, we simply must do more to keep guns away from young people and out of the hands of criminals.

Time and again, the gun lobby has used every weapon in its arsenal to defeat any effort to strengthen our gun laws, no matter how sensible. This week it, sadly, happened again.

I sent to Congress a very sensible, moderate proposal to apply Brady background checks to gun shows. These are the same simple background checks that have now stopped 400,000 illegal gun sales without stopping a single legitimate purchaser from buying a gun over the last 5 years. Thanks to a tie-breaking vote by Vice President Gore, the Senate did the right thing and passed this measure. But the sound of the gavel hadn't died in the Senate Chamber before the gun lobby set its sights on the bill before the House of Representatives.

This week the House of Representatives gutted our bill in the dark of night—literally, after midnight—because the gun lobby didn't want commonsense gun legislation to see the light of day.

That is unacceptable. We can't allow the gun lobby to rewrite our laws and undermine our values. So today, again, I say to Congress: You've still got an opportunity, and you've still got an obligation to do the right thing and pass real legislation that will strengthen our gun laws, not weaken them. Pass a law that applies to all gun shows, not one that lets criminals turn flea markets and parking lots into gun bazaars. Pass a law that gives law enforcement enough time to run real background checks, not one that lets more criminals slip through the cracks. Pass a law that closes the deadly gun show loophole once and for all.

Try this—before you send me that final bill, ask yourselves questions that are on

every American's mind: Will this bill make it easier or harder for criminals to get guns? Will more lives be lost or more lives be saved? Is this about politics or putting our children's safety first?

I say to the gun lobby again: I wish you would help us. Nobody is going to be hurt by this legislation. But we've overcome your scare tactics and strong-arm pressure before. We did it with the Brady law; we did it with the assault weapons ban. We've got the lowest crime rate in 25 years; the American people are safer and honest hunters and sportsmen haven't been hurt a bit. The American people understand that commonsense gun laws don't infringe our rights; they protect our lives. It's that simple.

This isn't a partisan issue anywhere else in America; it shouldn't be a partisan issue in Washington. Let us learn from the lessons of Littleton. Let us remember the children of Littleton and, indeed, honor the memory of all the children who lost their lives to gun violence in our country. Let's build a stronger and safer America for our kids in the 21st century.

Thank for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:43 p.m. on June 18 in the Senator Room at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cologne, Germany, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. e.d.t. on June 19. The transcript was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Interview With Wolf Blitzer of Cable News Network's "Late Edition" in Cologne

June 20, 1999

President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, thank you so much for joining us on this very special "Late Edition" from here in Cologne.

There have been reports that President Yeltsin has been ill, erratic that his behavior has been shaky. You just met with him a little while ago; what's your impression?

The President. Well, his behavior was neither erratic nor shaky today. He was strong, clear, forceful, and looking to the future. We actually had quite a good meeting. We got a lot done. We set out an agenda to continue to work on reducing the nuclear threat, to

continue to work on reducing the likelihood of any cooperation of Russian entities with Iran's missile technology development, with working to help Russia comply with the IMF and get its economy going strongly again. And obviously, we talked about our commitment to fully implement the agreements we made over Kosovo.

So, today all I can tell you is I had good personal experience. He was clear, concise, and direct and strong.

Stability of Russia/Role in Kosovo

Mr. Blitzer. But a lot of people were concerned when the Russians sent those 150 or 200 soldiers into Pristina so secretly. With the Russians still having thousands of nuclear warheads, should Americans be concerned about the security, the safety of that nuclear arsenal, if there's a problem between civilian and military control of the Russian military?

The President. Well, so far, I can only tell you what our experience is, now in its 6½ years. We've worked very well with the Russian military to implement the system that was set up, actually, before I became President, although we've tried to strengthen it—to strengthen the Russian security over nuclear weapons, to strengthen security over other materials—President Yeltsin and I agreed last year to destroy 50 tons of plutonium arising out of nuclear operations. We have great confidence in that, and it's working quite well. I have no reason to believe that it won't continue to do so.

Mr. Blitzer. But will you concede, though, that the dash for the airport in Pristina and the grabbing hold of that piece of territory helped them get a better deal for their peacekeepers in Kosovo than would have been the case if they had not done so?

The President. I'm not sure that's right, for the following reason: I felt it was important myself—and I told all of our people this, and several of our NATO Allies—that Russia have a different role in Kosovo, because of the importance of making clear our common commitment to protect civilians, both the Kosovar Albanians who are coming home and the Serbs who remain. Therefore, I thought it was important for Russia to have its forces in more than one of these sectors. And of course, as you know now, they'll be working

with us and with the Germans and the French.

So they may believe that; the Russians may believe that. But in my own mind, I had already determined that if our Allies would go along, they should be in more than one sector.

Mr. Blitzer. But not necessarily in control of the airport, which originally was going to be the strategic headquarters for the peacekeepers.

The President. Yes, but now the division of labor they have worked out at the airport is quite acceptable to us and guarantees that the mission can go forward. So I think that's the most important thing.

We have to—every decision we made, including the agreements made with the Russians, had one thing uppermost in their minds: Will the mission succeed? That is, today it's a very happy day. The Serbian forces will go out on schedule, the last of them. We have about 20,000 of our NATO peacekeepers in there; 62,000 of the Kosovars have already come home, some of them before we wanted them to, because of the demining operations. So I feel very good about where we're going with this now, and I'm leaving here with real confidence that we are going to succeed in achieving all of our objectives.

Kosovo Liberation Army

Mr. Blitzer. But you have to be concerned about the potential for the KLA, the Kosovo Liberation Army—the revenge, the hatred, the fact that they're not going to be satisfied with autonomy. They're going to want full independence from Serbia. The potential for danger to those U.S. troops is very, very real.

The President. There is a potential for danger for all troops, from both disgruntled Kosovar Albanians or disgruntled or frightened Serbs in Kosovo. But I am encouraged that the leaders of the KLA have now signed on to the commitment to demilitarize. They've agreed to put away their uniforms; to give up their big weapons, their non-pistol weapons; to do everything we have asked them to do.

Might there be individuals or small groups who are full of anger and seek revenge? Of

course. And we'll have to be very vigilant, just as we've had to be vigilant in Bosnia.

I also think we're going to have to work hard to take initiative, to try to take some of that venom out of the atmosphere. When Elie Wiesel, our Nobel laureate who survived the Holocaust, came back from the tour I asked him to take of the camps, he talked about how troubled he was by the children, the families, how much we needed to work on that, and how hard we'd have to work to get people, religious leaders and others, in there to try to get people to turn away from revenge.

But this is a problem everywhere where such things occur. And you'd look at these hideous accounts that are just now coming out, even worse than we imagined, about the mass killings and the graves and the unusual, almost unimaginable cruelty. So it will take them some time to get through that, and we're going to work with them.

Mr. Blitzer. You know, some in the U.S. military, though, are concerned that just as—when the U.S., when President Reagan sent troops into Lebanon, there were high expectations. When you sent troops into Somalia, there were high expectations. Things could go sour quickly. Is that realistic, or are you taking certain steps that will prevent another Lebanon or Somalia?

The President. Well, I think we learned a lot about that. And when we went to Bosnia, where all the same things were present—remember, we'd had a quarter of a million people killed; we'd had 2.5 million refugees; we had all those horrible internment camps—all the hideous, awful stories we're hearing now out of Kosovo we had in Bosnia for a longer period of time.

So we did a lot of extra work on security. And we were quite careful about how we defined our mission and how we carried it out, based on lessons learned both in Lebanon and in Somalia.

And so we'll try to carry those lessons through. I can't tell the American people there will not be any violent incident, that no American will ever be harmed or killed. But I can say that we have learned the lessons of the last several years, and I think what we are doing is profoundly important.

Aftermath of Situation in the Balkans

Mr. Blitzer. In your Oval Office address, you declared victory. Some of your critics, though, say that as long as President Slobodan Milosevic is in power, there is no victory.

The President. Well, that's two different things. Let me first say that when I spoke to the American people, I said we had three objectives: to reverse the ethnic cleansing and bring the Kosovar Albanians home—we're doing that; 62,000 are already back—to do it in a way that would keep our Alliance together—we're stronger than we ever were; and that I would seek a partnership with Russia as we had in Bosnia—we have now formalized that partnership, so that even though our relationships with Russia were quite strained during this period of the conflict, I think that we're actually in a position to have a stronger relationship with Russia in the future than we had before the conflict started. And so I feel good about that. So that is victory.

Now, do I think the Serbian people would be better off without Mr. Milosevic? You bet I do. He has been indicted by the War Crimes Tribunal, and every day now we see the vivid pictures which graphically demonstrate that it was even worse than we imagined. There is no statute of limitations on that. The Serbian—the leader of the Serbian church has now called for him to step aside. And I certainly hope that will happen, and we have time to focus on that. But first, we've got to do the mission. We've got to bring the folks home in safety and self-government.

Mr. Blitzer. Well, what the critics also say is that the U.S. and the NATO Allies have done nothing to go after other leading indicted war criminals—Serbs Ratko Mladic, Radovan Karadzic, Arkan. Why should President Milosevic be any more concerned than they are? They're all still free men.

The President. Well, in our sector in Bosnia, we have arrested people who were indicted, and so have the British, and we have worked with them. And I think that would be a big mistake for Mr. Milosevic now. We may not have an extradition agreement with Serbia. But he—as long as he remains at large, there is no statute of limitations. And if I were in his position, I wouldn't take too

much comfort from that. But the best thing that can happen for the Serbian people is if he were no longer President.

Mr. Blitzer. And you think that's realistic, that that could happen anytime soon?

The President. Well, I think that I shouldn't comment on that right now. But I think that there's—with the church leaders calling for him to step down, with the people in the opposition in Serbia calling for him to do so, and with the commitment we have made as allies to support humanitarian aid to the Serbs but no reconstruction aid as long as he's there, I think that's a pretty clear message.

Undermining Milosevic's Regime

Mr. Blitzer. You know about the reports that you've signed an intelligence finding to actively seek to undermine his regime?

The President. I don't comment on those things. I can't—

Expectations of Operation Allied Force

Mr. Blitzer. I knew you wouldn't, but I figured I would ask anyhow.

Let's move on to talk about—under the category of “now the truth can be told.” When you gave the order to launch the airstrikes, did you ever believe in your wildest imagination it would take 78 days, and all the devastation that it did take, to finally declare a victory?

The President. I'll tell you what I thought. I thought that there was maybe a 50 percent chance it would be over in a week, because once he knew we would do it, I thought he would remember Bosnia, and I thought he would understand what we could do. But I knew that if he decided to take the punishment of the air campaign, it could go on quite a long while, because he would be trying all along to divide the Allies or to bring pressure from the outside to try to find some way to bring it to a close.

And so I told everybody when we started, I said, “Look, if we start this and it doesn't work out in 2 or 3 days, we've got to be prepared to go on.”

I knew that we had, because of the facts of this case, the capacity—with the sophisticated weaponry and the skill of our pilots—I knew we had the capacity to essentially take

down the military apparatus and the economic apparatus supporting it. But I knew it could take quite a long time. I didn't have any specific deadline, but I knew it could take quite a long time.

“Clinton Doctrine”

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, some of your aides are now talking about a Clinton doctrine in foreign policy in the aftermath of this war against Yugoslavia. Is there, in your mind, a Clinton doctrine?

The President. Well, I think there's an important principle here that I hope will be now upheld in the future and not just by the United States, not just by NATO, but also by the leading countries of the world, through the United Nations. And that is that while there may well be a great deal of ethnic and religious conflict in the world—some of it might break out into wars—that whether within or beyond the borders of a country, if the world community has the power to stop it, we ought to stop genocide and ethnic cleansing. People ought—innocent civilians ought not to be subject to slaughter because of their religious or ethnic or racial or tribal heritage.

That is what we did, but took too long in doing, in Bosnia. That is what we did and are doing in Kosovo. That is, frankly, what we failed to do in Rwanda, where so many died so quickly, and what I hope very much we'll be able to do in Africa if it ever happens there again.

Gun Control Legislation

Mr. Blitzer. All right. Let's move on to some domestic issues. Guns—a big subject this past week. Do you really believe it's realistic, it's appropriate to register all guns in the United States? And if that were done, would that stop the violence?

The President. Well, you asked two questions. Realistic? In this Congress, perhaps not. Appropriate? Sure. We register cars. And if we did register them, it would be easier to track sales and easier to do comprehensive background checks.

But that's not what I asked the Congress to do. All I asked the Congress to do was to close the loophole for sales at gun shows and flea markets, so we could do the same