

to create genuine self-government to eradicate corruption and violence and give your children the joys of a normal life?

I beg you who are parents to teach your children that life is more than the terrible things that are done. It is how you react to them. Do not let the children's spirits be broken. Do not let their hearts harden. The future we fought to save for you is the future we see here today, smiling, cheering, happy children. Give them the tomorrow they deserve. The American people have been honored to stand with you, and we will stand with you every step of the way.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Sports Pavilion. In his remarks, he referred to students Ramadan Ilazi and Luljeta Haliti; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The President also referred to the KLA, the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Remarks to American Troops at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo

November 23, 1999

The President. Thank you. Hello.

Audience members. Hello!

The President. From the reception you gave my daughter, I thought he was going to say I was Chelsea's father, too. [Laughter] Thank you.

I want to thank all of you for making us feel so welcome. I want to introduce the people who came with me: our Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright; our NATO Commander, General Wes Clark; my Chief of Staff, John Podesta; National Security Adviser Sandy Berger; and four Members of the United States Congress, Representative Jack Kingston from Georgia, Representative Peter Deutsch from Florida, Representative Carolyn Maloney from New York City, and Representative Eliot Engel from New York City; and Chelsea.

Let me say that we are honored to be with you. We thank you for your service. We're looking forward to eating a big, early Thanksgiving dinner with the men and women of Task Force Falcon.

I want to salute some of the troops for what they have done at Camp Bondsteel and Camp Monteith. And also I want to thank those from other nations in our multinational Brigade East. I want to visit you now, at this season of Thanksgiving, not only because you're doing a hard job a long way from home but because here we've got a lot to be thankful for.

Thanks to you, we have reversed ethnic cleansing. We have a successful military mission which was brilliantly executed, with no combat casualties. And now, we have a chance, not a guarantee but a chance, to work with these folks to build a lasting peace in the Balkans. Now that Operation Allied Force is over, there is a new struggle underway, and Camp Bondsteel is on the frontlines. Operation Joint Guardian will protect and deepen the peace we are working so hard to make permanent.

You certainly haven't wasted any time. The story of Bondsteel reads like something out of the settling of the Old West. Not long ago, this was a hayfield. Soon after NATO came into Kosovo, it became a beehive of activity. Between the Army Engineers and the Navy Seabees—

[At this point, audience members interrupted the President with cheers and laughter.]

The President. Yeah. Well, anyway, somewhere—[laughter]—somewhere between the Army Engineers and the Navy Seabees, you move over a half a million cubic yards of earth. You brought enough gravel to lay a two-lane road all across the State of Missouri. In less than 5 months, you built 160 sea huts, a chapel, a gym, a hospital, mess halls, a PX, a barber shop, and an aviation area.

I want to salute a few of the responsible units—don't be shy: the Headhunters of the Engineer Brigade 1st Infantry Division; the Blue Devils of the 3504 Parachute—I just want to note for the press that the Blue Devils of the 3504 Parachute Infantry Regiment are also known as "devils in baggy pants"; the Steel Tigers of the 177 Armor Battalion; the Bone Crushers of the 2d Platoon Bravo Company; the Blue Spaders of the 126 Infantry Regiment; the Hellcats of the 299th Forward Support Battalion; the Eagles of Task

Force 21 Aviation Regiment; the Spartans of the 793d Military Police Battalion; the Dagger Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division; the Navy Seabees of Battalion 3.

[Unit members cheered as they were mentioned.]

The President. You did pretty well.

Let me say to all of you, I know that a lot of your assignments are still dangerous. I appreciate the hard work you have done to protect all the people of Kosovo, including the Serbs. I appreciate your pursuit of local thugs, like the mad mortar-man. I appreciate your constant mediation between people who have a long way to go toward reconciliation.

I'm told that children routinely say, "We love you, United States." Well, they love the United States because they love you, because we gave them their freedom back; we gave them a chance to go home; we're giving the children a chance to have a different life than their parents have lived.

But let me just say this—I say this every time I speak to a group of American service men and women overseas—the biggest problem in the world today, with all the modern technology, all your fancy computers, everybody getting on the Internet, all the new discoveries in science, the biggest problem in the world today is the oldest problem of human society. People tend to be afraid of people who don't look like them and don't worship God the way they do and come from a different place. And when you're afraid of somebody, it's just a short step to disliking them. If you dislike them, it's a short step to hating them. If you hate them, it's a short step to dehumanizing them. And once you do that, you don't feel bad about killing them. Now that's what this whole deal is about.

And you see this problem in our inability to solve the peace in the Middle East, although we're getting there. But it's been a long time coming. We may be about to have a final breakthrough in the Irish civil war—been 30 years coming. Almost 800,000 people were killed in 100 days in Rwanda by people of 2 different tribes, one hacking the others to death with machetes; they hardly had any guns at all.

And if you strip it all away, the number one problem in this old world today is the

problem of Bosnia, the problem of Kosovo: It's racial and ethnic and religious hatred and dehumanization.

All you've got to do is look around the room today, and you see that our military is a stunning rebuke to that. This is the American idea in flesh and blood, all of you. You come from all different backgrounds, all different races, all different religious faiths, all different walks of life. And you're here working together as a team. You can appreciate your differences. You can even make fun of them. You can even make jokes about them because you know that your common humanity and your shared values are even more important than your differences.

Now, the most important thing you can do, besides keeping these people alive and having security, is to teach that to the children and to their parents by the power of your example and your own testimony. Because I am telling you, what they're going through here today is an example, but by no means the only example, of the worst problem the world faces on the eve of the new millennium. And it violates everything we in America stand for. And the power of our weapons could win the military battle in Kosovo, but the peace can only be won by the human heart.

And every day they see you, every day these little old kids see you working together—even if they don't speak our language, even if they never met any African-Americans or Hispanics before, even if they don't know any Asians before—they can see; they have eyes; they'll get it. You just show up, and you be yourself, and you do what you're supposed to do, and you treat them right. The power of your example will show them that they do not have to be trapped in the pattern which led to the slaughter of a quarter of a million people in Bosnia, 2½ million refugees there, almost a million refugees here, though we acted quicker, and because we acted quicker, they all came home.

But now that they came home, they've got to learn how to win the peace. And I say that to the other nations who are here represented. I want people to see Americans working with you. I want these children to know that the world is a better place when

people are proud of their own race and ethnicity and religion, but respectful of others; when they are secure enough in who they are that they don't have to put anybody else down, hurt anybody else, torch anybody else's church or mosque just to feel that they matter. This is the most important issue in the whole world today.

And just by getting up every day, going to work, keeping the kind of morale that you manifested today with your cheers and your pride, you are a rebuke to the biggest problem in the world, and the power of your example can do more than anything else to help us to win the peace.

Thank you, God bless you, and Happy Thanksgiving.

[At this point, a gift was presented to the President.]

The President. You all know I have an important job, because I'm your Commander in Chief, right? [Cheers] Well, tomorrow, because I'm also the President and I have broad executive authority—I get home at 10 o'clock tonight, we're all dog-tired, but I've got to get up and go to work tomorrow because I have to do something that every President has been doing since the 1920's: I have to pardon the Thanksgiving turkey. And they bring me a big turkey, and we let one go so we can eat all the others. [Laughter] And they put this turkey in a petting zoo for children to see in the Washington area. Anyway, it's always a great deal. I'm just saying, when I go into the office tomorrow to pardon the turkey, I'm going to take the falcon and put it on my desk so all of America can see, when my desk is on television, what you're doing.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:13 p.m. in the base theater/festival tent. In his remarks, he referred to Brig. Gen. Craig Peterson, USA, Commander, Task Force Falcon, who introduced the President; and Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

Remarks to American Troops Following Thanksgiving Dinner at Camp Bondsteel

November 23, 1999

Thank you. Well, the people at my table said that the speech I gave to the other troops was piped in here, which means it either was or it wasn't. And if it was, you heard it, and if it wasn't, you get relieved of hearing it. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you how very grateful I am for your service here and for the power of your example here. As I said to the other troops, NATO won the military victory, but now the people of Kosovo have to win the peace, and you have to help them win it, not only by doing your jobs but by setting a good example.

This was a war caused by a man's determination to drive a whole people out of a country because of their ethnic and religious background. It's the opposite of everything we believe in, everything we live by, and everything the United States military stands for.

And you just look around this room today. We just celebrated Thanksgiving, with, I bet you, conservatively, 25 different ethnic groups represented among the American military forces here in this room—maybe 50, maybe it's more. We are interested and proud in and proud of our background, and we should be, but we know that our common humanity and our shared values are more important. That's the message that the children need to get here in Kosovo. And the more you work with people and the more you let children see you working together, having a good time, being proud of what you're doing, doing your job, living the American creed, you will also be fulfilling your mission by doing that.

Kids are not brought up hating each other because they're different; they have to be taught to do that. They've taught generations of people on this land, good people in both communities, to do that. And now they've got to stop, and you've got to help them. And