

I have done everything I could to fashion a Government that could do its part to meet those challenges. It's the smallest Government we've had since President Kennedy was here. It has given more power to States and localities. It works more with community groups and churches and social programs. It does a lot of things that need to be done badly, and I'm sure we can do better.

But in the end, there will be these gaps, and someone must be standing in the gap to reaffirm our basic devotion to freedom and democracy, to peace and prosperity, and to the principle that we must be a community, that out of many we are one, and that we are still about the

business of our Founding Fathers, forming a more perfect Union.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:25 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the J.W. Marriott Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to John E. Major, chairman, Electronic Industries Alliance; Richard A. McGinn, chairman and chief executive officer, Lucent Technologies; Brig. Gen. Hiram (Doc) Jones, USAF, Deputy Chief of Chaplains, who gave the invocation; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Gov. James S. Gilmore III of Virginia; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty

March 31, 1999

I am very pleased that yesterday negotiators from the 30 countries that are party to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) reached an agreement setting the stage for a final adapted treaty. All countries agreed to deeper limits on their conventional forces and stronger measures to ensure compliance. The decision preserves NATO's ability to fulfill its post-cold-war missions, to ensure its new members are full military partners, and to deepen its engagement with Partnership For Peace states. It also takes into account the interests of non-NATO states and helps fulfill the com-

mitment President Yeltsin and I made last September to conclude a final adapted treaty by the OSCE summit this year.

At a time when we are trying to end a pattern of escalating insecurity, brutality, and armed conflict in the Balkans, I am gratified that these 30 countries, comprising the vast majority of European nations, are moving in a different direction. Together, we are building a Europe in which armies prepare to stand beside their neighbors, not against them, and security depends on cooperation, not competition.

Interview With Dan Rather of CBS News

March 31, 1999

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, thank you for doing this.

The President. Glad to do it, Dan.

Mr. Rather. I appreciate you doing it.

NATO Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets

Mr. Rather. As Commander in Chief, you've sent some of our best to fly every day, every night, through the valley of the shadow of death in a place far away. Why? For what?

The President. For several reasons. First and most important, because there are defenseless people there who are being uprooted from their homes by the hundreds of thousands and who are being killed by the thousands; because it is not an isolated incident but, in fact, a repeat of a pattern we have seen from Mr. Milosevic in Bosnia and Croatia. So there is a compelling humanitarian reason.

Secondly, we haven't been asked to do this alone. All of our NATO Allies are doing it with us. They all feel very strongly about it, and we are moving together. Thirdly, we do not want to see the whole region destabilized by the kind of ethnic aggression that Mr. Milosevic has practiced repeatedly over the last 10 years, but he's been limited. This is, in some ways, the most destabilizing area he could be doing it in. And fourthly, we believe we can make a difference.

And so for all those reasons, I believe we should be doing this.

Mr. Rather. Why now, and why this place? The Russians, in a somewhat similar situation in Chechnya, had maybe 100,000 casualties. We've had Rwanda, Sudan—you didn't go into those places. As a matter of fact, the Serbians argue the Croats did the same thing with the Serbians in part of Croatia. So why this place? Why right now?

The President. Well, first of all, if you go back to Yugoslavia, we never supported any kind of ethnic cleansing by anybody. And the circumstances under which we went into Bosnia and ended the Bosnian war were designed to guarantee safety and security for all the ethnic groups, not just the Muslims but also the Croats and the Serbs. And the peace agreement that the Kosovar Albanians agreed to would have brought in an international peacekeeping force under NATO that would have guaranteed security to the Serbs as well as to the Albanians.

So the United States and NATO believe that there should be no ethnic cleansing and no people killed or uprooted because of their ethnic background.

Secondly, we're doing it now because now it's obvious that Mr. Milosevic has no interest in an honorable peace that guarantees security and autonomy for the Kosovar Albanians, and instead he is practicing aggression. We might have had to do it last fall, but we were able to head it off. Remember, he created a quarter of a million refugees last year. And NATO threatened to take action, and we worked out an agreement, which was observed for a while, which headed this off.

When we agreed to take action was when he rejected the peace agreement and he had already amassed 40,000 soldiers on the border and in Kosovo, with about 300 tanks. So that's why we're doing it now.

And you asked about other places. In the Rwanda case, let's remember what happened. In Rwanda, without many modern military weapons, somewhere between 500,000 and 800,000—we may never know—people were killed in the space of only 100 days. I think the rest of the world was caught flat-footed and did not have the mechanisms to deal with it. We did do some good and, I think, limited some killing there. But I wish we'd been able to do more there. And I would hope that that sort of thing will not ever happen again in Africa. And that's one of the reasons we worked hard to build up a cooperative relationship with African militaries through the Africa Crisis Response Initiative.

So I believe there are lots of reasons. But if you look at Kosovo, we have a history there in Europe. We know what happens if you have ethnic slaughter there. We know how it can spread. And the main thing is, there is this horrible humanitarian crisis. And because of NATO, because of our allied agreement and because we have the capacity, we believe we can do something about it there. And I think we have to try.

Mr. Rather. You still believe you can do something about it there? The last few days have indicated—well, seem from at least several points of view, Milosevic is winning, and we're losing.

The President. Well, we knew that that would happen in the first few days. He had planned this a long time. Keep in mind, before the first NATO plane got in the air, he already had the 40,000 troops there. Think how we would feel if this were going on and we were doing nothing. There's no question that in—we've run this air campaign for less than a week. We've been hampered by bad weather. We had to be cautious on the early nights to try to at least protect our planes as much as we possibly can against the air defenses, which are quite good.

So it takes a while to get up and going. And against that, he had 40,000 troops and 300 tanks. It shouldn't surprise anybody that he's able to do a lot of what he intended to, even though we've had some success in hitting his military targets in the last couple of days.

But I would urge the American people and, indeed, the people of all the NATO nations to have a little resolve here, to stay with your leaders, to give us a chance to really see this thing through. We cannot view this as something

that will be instantaneously successful. This is something that will require some time.

Keep in mind, when we took NATO air action in Bosnia, when we tried to alleviate the siege of Sarajevo, which was a very important precursor to the ultimate peace that was signed there, the air campaign went on for 20 days—with pauses—I think there were 12 days, at least, of bombing. So that's quite a bit more than has been done now—2,300 sorties there.

So the American people and the people of the NATO nations should not be surprised that what has happened on the ground has happened. It was always obvious it was going to happen if there were no opposition to Milosevic. And this thing hasn't had enough time to work. So I would ask for the American people to be patient and to be resolved and be firm and to give our plan a chance to take hold here.

Call for Easter Suspension of Airstrikes

Mr. Rather. Let me follow up some, Mr. President. First of all, the Pope has asked for an Easter suspension of the bombing. Are you prepared to do that?

The President. I don't see how we can do that, with what is going on on the ground there now. Mr. Milosevic is running those people to the Albanian border, to the other borders by the thousands a day; he's killing people. No one would like more than I to properly observe Easter, which for Christians is the most important holiday of all—even more important than Christmas, really, because of what it symbolizes to the living. But we can't observe Easter and honor the resurrection of Christ by allowing him another free day to kill more innocent civilians.

Mr. Rather. And to those people who say, Mr. President, that this is the most important week in the whole Judeo-Christian calendar in many ways because you have Passover, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter—that it is “obscene” to be carrying on this kind of war during this period—you say what?

The President. That we are acting in defense of the defenseless. We are not carrying on an aggressive war. We are acting at a time when he is going through the country killing people—according to the reports, including moderate politicians—tried to destroy records of what their land holdings are, tried to eradicate any historical record of their claim to their own land, and has given no indication whatever that he's prepared to stop his aggression.

I mean, the cease-fire he offered to Prime Minister Primakov was ludicrous. He didn't offer to withdraw his troops to where they were before this invasion began. He didn't do that. He basically said, “Well, now, I'll just keep my gang and sit around here, and if everybody wants to stop shooting, that's fine with me.”

Since he's taken all the media out of Kosovo, we would have no way of knowing even whether he was honoring that or not. He could keep right on doing what he's been doing, and there would be no coverage of it.

So this week is a very important week to me personally and to American Christians, to American Jews. Next week will be Easter week for Orthodox observers, Christians not only in—the Serbs, in that part of the world, and among the many, many Orthodox we have in the United States. I hate the idea of having to continue this campaign during this period. But I hate more the idea that we would walk away from this campaign while he continues to clean out house after house after house and village after village after village and kill a lot of innocent people. I think that that would not serve to honor the occasion.

President's Feelings About Kosovo Situation

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, as you always try to do, we're talking in measured tones. As President of the United States, you have to be careful of what you say. But I'm told by those who are close to you that you have a lot of pent-up feelings about what's happening in the Balkans, what we're doing there. Can you share some of that with us?

The President. Well, I guess I do have a lot of pent-up feelings, and I think the President is supposed to keep a lot of those feelings pent up. But let me say, I think throughout human history one of the things that has most bedeviled human beings is their inability to get along with people that are different than they are, and their vulnerability to be led by demagogues who play on their fears of people who are different than they are.

You and I grew up in a part of the country where that was a staple of political life during our childhood. That's why this race issue has always been so important to me in America. And here we are at the end of the cold war; we're on the verge of the 21st century; our stock market went over 10,000 this week; we see the Internet and all this technology with

all this promise for all these people, not just the United States but all over the world; and what is the dominant problem of our time? From the Middle East to Northern Ireland to Bosnia to central Africa, people still wanting to kill each other because of their racial and religious, their ethnic, their cultural differences.

This is crazy. And it is embodied in the policies of Mr. Milosevic. He became the leader of the Serbs by playing on their sense of grievance, which may have had some justification—their sense of ethnic grievance—and made them believe that the only way they could fulfill their appropriate human destiny was to create a Serbs-only state, even if it meant they had to go in and go to war with the Bosnian Muslims and they had to go to war with the Croatian Catholics, they had to go to war with Kosovar Albanian Muslims and clean them all out.

And to be doing it in a place where World War I began, which has been the source of so much heartache, where so much instability can occur in other neighboring countries, in the last year of the 20th century, I think is a tragedy.

And I had hoped—he's a clever man, you know, Mr. Milosevic, not to be underestimated. He's tough; he's smart; he's clever. I told all of our people that. The worst thing you can ever do in life is underestimate your adversary. But underneath all that, for reasons that I cannot fathom, there is a heart that has turned too much to stone, that believes that it's really okay that they killed all those people in Bosnia and they made a quarter of a million refugees there—or millions, probably 2 million by the time it was over, dislocated from their home, and a quarter million people died; and it's really okay what they're doing in Kosovo, that somehow non-Serbs, on land that they want, are less than human.

And I guess I've seen too much of that all my life. And I have all these dreams for what the modern world can mean. When I'm long gone from here, I hope that there will be a level of prosperity and opportunity never before known in human history, not just for Americans but for others. And it's all being threatened all over the world by these ancient hatreds.

We're working, trying to bring an end to the Northern Ireland peace process now. We're trying to keep the Middle East peace process going. All of this stuff, it's all rooted in whether people believe that their primary identity is as

a member of the human race, that they share with others who are different from them; or if they believe their primary identity is as a result of their superiority over people who may share the same village, the same neighborhood, and the same high-rise apartment but they don't belong to the same ethnic group or racial group or religious group, so if they have to be killed, it's just fine.

I mean, I think that is the basis of Milosevic's power. And that is the threat to our children's world. That's what I believe.

NATO Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, there are reports that as we speak, and through this evening, that there will be air attacks in Belgrade itself, that you've gotten NATO to authorize it. Is that correct? Is that accurate?

The President. It is accurate that we are attacking targets that we believe will achieve our stated objective, which is either to raise the price of aggression to an unacceptably high level, so that we can get back to talking peace and security, or to substantially undermine the capacity of the Serbian Government to wage war.

Mr. Rather. Does that include attacks now in Belgrade? In the vernacular of the military, have you authorized them to go downtown?

The President. I have authorized them to attack targets that I believe are appropriate to achieve our objectives. We have worked very hard to minimize the risks of collateral damage. I think a lot of the Serbian people are—like I said, the Serbs, like other people, are good people. They're hearing one side of the story. They've got a state-run media. They don't have anybody that can talk about Mr. Milosevic the way you get to talk about me from time to time. And that's too bad. And some of those targets are in difficult places. But I do not believe that we can rule out any set of targets that are reasonably related to our stated objective.

Mr. Rather. If I report tonight that we are attacking targets inside Belgrade, will that be inaccurate?

The President. I don't think that you can report tonight that I have confirmed any specific set of targets, because I think that's a mistake until we have actually carried out our mission, and I would not do that. You can report that I have said that I have not ruled out any targets

that I believe are reasonably related to our objective of raising the price of his aggression in trying to undermine the capacity to wage war.

Mr. Rather. You know I'm not going to go down a list of targets. When you say that you don't rule out any targets that could help you accomplish the mission, would that—declining to rule out targets—include the Defense Ministry, the Interior Ministry?

The President. I don't think I should discuss the specific targets, because I don't want to compromise our efforts to achieve them. And I don't want to run the risk that unscrupulous people would actually try to stage civilian casualties there that would otherwise not occur. But you can say that I didn't rule out any targets anywhere within Serbia or Kosovo that would be reasonably related to our objectives. You can say that.

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, I want to read to you what some fairly high-ranking military people have said privately. You would understand, they didn't want their names attached to it. "Dan, we're not employing the full power of our Air Force." Another one: "We ran over 200 bombing missions the first day when we moved against Saddam Hussein." There hasn't been a single day in which you've run as many as 50 bombing missions, with the possible exception of today. Why aren't we going all-out? You've described a situation that you feel passionately about, you think is wrong. Everybody knows if you had a street fight with a bully, you want to hit him the hardest right at first.

The President. You have reported—and you mentioned this to me in the beginning that we have stepped up our attacks and that I have pushed for that. I think it's quite important to emphasize—again, let me say, again—we have done this through and with NATO. It is an organization that operates by consensus. One of the things that has struck me is that in the last 48 hours, because of the actions taken by Mr. Milosevic, the will, the steel, the determination, and the outright anger of our allies has been intensifying exponentially, so that we have now, I think, stronger support than we have ever had for taking the most aggressive action we can.

So I will say to you, I've tried to do everything I can, consistent with maintaining allied unity and with achieving our objectives. I understand the frustration of some of our people in the Pentagon. But I think that the Secretary of

Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs would tell you that I have worked very hard with them to give them the maximum possible leeway, showing sensitivity only to targets that would have marginal benefit but cause a lot of collateral damage. I don't want a lot of innocent Serbian civilians to die because they have a man running their country that's doing something atrocious. But some of them are at risk because of that and must be, because we have targets that we need to go after.

Now, we're getting—we've got good allied unity. I think it's worth something to preserve that. And I think that that's what I would ask our military people to understand, too. I know that our top commanders do, because they understand what we're trying to do with NATO. And goodness knows, General Clark, the American general who's the commander of our NATO forces, we have someone who understands Mr. Milosevic very well, who was there during the Bosnian talks, and who is all-out committed to the most aggressive possible response.

So we're doing—we're getting steadily more and more support for being more and more aggressive, and I think that will only grow.

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, I want to pose this next question with all respect, but also directly. Everybody acknowledges you have a brilliant mind; you're an excellent speaker, but sometimes people—people who support you and like you say, well, he parses words too closely—"what is, is" argument, all of that. I want to discuss ground troops. In the context of speaking as directly as you possible can, when you say you have no intention to commit ground troops to accomplishing the mission in Kosovo, does that mean we are not going to have ground troops in there—no way, no how, no time?

The President. It means just what it says. I'll come back to the point, but you say people say I parse words too close. That's what they said about President Roosevelt, too. He made a pretty good President. And when people say you parse words too closely, it usually means they want to ask you a question and get you to give an answer which is inconsistent with the objective you're trying to pursue for the American people, and so you don't do what they want you to do. So normally they criticize you not for what you're doing but for what they wish you would do.

Mr. Rather. Fair enough.

The President. I have used those words carefully. I am very careful in the words I use not to mislead one way or the other. And the reason is, I think I have embraced a strategy here that I believe has a reasonable, good chance, a reasonably good chance of succeeding, maybe even a better chance than that, as long as we have more and more steel and will and determination and unity from all of our NATO Allies. And I want to pursue that strategy. And I believe that all these discussions about, well, other strategies and should we do this, that, or the other thing do not help the ultimate success of the strategy we are pursuing. That is why I have used the words I have used; why I have said the words I have said.

Now, on the merits of it, the thing that bothers me about introducing ground troops into a hostile situation—into Kosovo and into the Balkans—is the prospect of never being able to get them out. If you have a peace agreement, even if it's difficult and even if you have to stay a little longer than you thought you would, like in Bosnia, at least there is an exit strategy, and it's a manageable situation. If you go in in a hostile environment in which you do not believe in ethnic cleansing and you do not wish to see any innocent civilians killed, you could be put in a position of, for example, creating a Kosovar enclave that would keep you there forever. And I don't believe that is an appropriate thing to be discussing at this time.

I do think we've got quite a good chance of succeeding with our strategy if we could keep everybody focused on it. And I simply think that it's wrong for us to be obsessing about other things and not working—people are frustrated because we live in an age where everybody wants things to operate like a 30-second ad. This air campaign is not a 30-second ad. It's only been going on a few days, and it's been undermined to some extent by bad weather. But we are blessed with enormously skilled pilots, a good plan, good technology, and good resolve by our allies. And I'd like to see us keep working on this and not to have our attention diverted by other things.

Hillary Clinton's Possible Senate Candidacy

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, there's so many questions and so little time. You know I'm going to be in trouble if I don't ask you some questions on some other subjects, but I'd like to do that and then come back to Kosovo because

I know you agree that this war situation—air war at the moment for us—there's nothing more important than that. But let me shift gears for just a moment.

Could you describe for me what you believe to be the responsibilities of a husband of a United States Senator?

The President. [Laughter] I don't know, but I'm willing to fulfill them. I would do whatever. I would fill in at dinners, make speeches when she had to vote. I'd be the main casework officer of the New York office. I'd do whatever I was asked to do.

Let me say seriously, I have no earthly idea what my wife will do. I can tell you that before some New York officials came to her, it had never crossed her mind. And I still think it's a highly unusual thing. And I can imagine that many voters in New York would wonder whether—even though she and I intended to move to New York after we left the White House, although I would also spend a lot of time at home in Arkansas—they would wonder, well, does this make sense for someone to be a United States Senator. And that would be a burden she would have to carry in the campaign and to explain that—why she was doing it, that she was asked to do it, and demonstrate her commitment to the State and its issues.

I think if she could win an election like that, she would be magnificent. But whatever the duties are—for 22 years now or more, we've done what I wanted to do in terms of my political career. So the deal I made was, she gets the next 22 years. And if I'm still around after that, we can argue about the third phase. And so I would be happy to be the spouse of a Senator.

Mr. Rather. And you expect to do that together as man and wife?

The President. Oh, absolutely. I would—like I said, I don't know what the duties are, but I'm sure I could fulfill them.

First Family

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, you know Americans like to know that the First Family is okay, that they're doing all right. Given the year-plus, what you and our First Family have been through, tell us what you can about how the three of you are doing.

The President. Well, I think, given what we've been through, we're doing reasonably well. We're not a large family. We do love each other very much, and we work hard to support one

another. And I think that this trip to north Africa has been a good thing not only for our country—because I think Hillary has done a great job on it—I think it must have been good for Hillary and Chelsea, too, to have that time together, to do some exciting things, to be in a different environment. And I think they've really enjoyed it. I think we're doing quite well considering what we've been through. And God willing, we'll keep after it.

Lessons of the Past Year

Mr. Rather. How about yourself, Mr. President? We're here in a room with pictures of Lincoln, Washington, Continental Congress. And you're thinking about sending our sons and daughters into war; I know that. But I also know you tend to stay up late at night; you always have done that. When you look back over this year-plus, what's the moral of it? Does it have a moral?

The President. Oh, yes, I think there is more than one lesson here. I think, first of all, the moral is—there's a personal moral, which is that every person must bear the consequences of his or her conduct, and when you make a mistake, you pay for it, no matter who you are. And it's true whether or not it's made public, or whether or not what's made public is exactly accurate reflection of what in fact happened—that's not the important thing. The important thing is that there are consequences in people's personal lives, no matter who they are.

The second lesson is that the Constitution works. The Founding Fathers were smart people. They understood that partisan passions which very often get carried away in the temptation to seize on events of the moment would be too great, and that's why they wrote the Constitution the way they did. And they were awfully smart.

The third thing that I think we learned this year is that the American people almost always get it right if you give them enough time to think through things and really work on it.

And the fourth thing I think we learned is that people expect their elected officials to work for them and not be forced to be focused on themselves or their adversaries in Washington, and that they will reward those who they believe get up every day and show up for work and work for them and their future and their children, and they will take account of those they believe do not.

Those are, I think, the lessons of the last year.

Option of Resignation

Mr. Rather. You said the American people, if given enough time—did you ever consider resigning?

The President. Never.

Mr. Rather. Never for a second?

The President. Never. Not a second. Never. Never.

Mr. Rather. Never entered your mind?

The President. Never entered my mind.

Mr. Rather. Did the First Lady ever come to you and say, "Listen, I think we ought to at least consider it?"

The President. No. She felt at least as strongly as I did that it shouldn't be done.

Mr. Rather. That tells me she might have felt even stronger.

The President. At least as strongly as I did. But it never crossed my mind. I wouldn't do that to the Constitution. I wouldn't do that to the Presidency. I wouldn't do that to the history in this country. I would never have legitimized what I believe is horribly wrong with what has occurred here over the last 4 or 5 years. So it never crossed my mind. And I always had faith. I just—I prayed about it. I tried to work on maintaining my inner spiritual strength, and I tried to come to grips with the work I had to do personally with my family and myself and the work I owed the American people. And I just decided that of all the options available, that wasn't one. And it never entered my mind.

Public's Response to President's Conduct

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, I get a lot of letters—not as many as you do, but I get a lot of letters from parents who say, some of them say, "Listen, I like President Clinton, I like what he's doing for the country." Some of them even say they'd "vote for him again, but I don't know what to tell the children on the worst aspects of what happened last year." Let's try to give these parents some help. What can they tell the children? What do they tell—

The President. Well, it's interesting, you know. I get a lot of letters from parents and from children—interesting letters from children—and sometimes pretty young children—11-, 12-, 13-year-old kids writing me, some of them, on this very point, and offended that they're being used in that way, because what they say is, "What

I learned from this is what my parents always told me: that nobody is so big or so important that they're not subject to the same rules of human conduct; and that when they do things they shouldn't, they have to bear the consequences. But if they bear the consequences, say they're sorry and go on, they should be able to go on with their lives, because they also know that every person makes mistakes. No one is so big or so important that they are perfect."

And so that's what I would say to our children. That's what I think the lessons of all those Bible stories are, of the great figures of the Bible who did things they shouldn't have done. The reason those stories are in the Bible is to say, everyone sins, but everyone is held accountable, and everyone has a chance to go on—and that all three of those points need to be made. And if you say that to our children, I think that's what needs to be said.

Kids are pretty smart, and they—this is a good lesson, not a bad lesson for them. I'm sorry that I had to be the example, and it's painful. But the lessons, the right lessons properly learned, will be good for them and good for our country.

Impeachment

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, I hear this clock ticking, and it isn't the "60 Minutes" clock. And I do want to get back to the war situation, but in this category—last question, if you'll indulge me—you agree that whatever you do, however this situation in Kosovo turns out, whatever else you do, in the first paragraph of your obituary is going to be a reference to what you consider among the worst things that has ever happened to you: the only President in the 20th century to be impeached; one of only two Presidents to be impeached. Give me some sense of how you feel about that, within yourself.

The President. Well, first of all, I'm not at all sure that's right, that it will be the first paragraph of the obituary. And secondly, if it is, if the history writers are honest, they'll tell it for just exactly what it was. And I am honored that something that was indefensible was pursued and that I had the opportunity to defend the Constitution. That doesn't have anything to do with the fact that I did something I shouldn't have done, of which I am ashamed of, and which I apologize for. But it had nothing to

do with the impeachment process. And I think that's what the American people, two-thirds of them, knew all along. And I determined that I would defend the Constitution and the work of my administration. And those that did not agree with what I had done and were furious that it had worked and that the country was doing well, and attempted to use what should have been a constitutional and legal process for political ends, did not prevail. And that's the way I saw it.

I have no lingering animosity. I don't wake up every day mad at those people—

Mr. Rather. You've got to be bitter about some of it.

The President. I'm not. I have—I'm not. I learned—look, I'm not. And I'm not saying that for any reason other than that I have—part of the learning process that I went through in the last 6 years, but certainly in the last—and in the last several years when I was dealing with this, when I saw—all these other charges, they were always false; they never amounted to anything. And half the people that were propagating them knew they were false. I realized that, particularly in the last year, if I wanted people to give me forgiveness, I had to extend forgiveness. If I wanted to be free to be the best President and the best husband and father and the best person I could be, I had to free myself of bitterness.

And I have worked very hard at it. And I have had very powerful examples. I look at a man like Nelson Mandela, who suffered enormously. Yes, he was part of a political movement that was threatening to the people who were in, but he didn't deserve to go to jail for 27 years. And in the 27 years he was there, he purged himself of his hatred and also of whatever might have been wrong with himself, and his hatred for other people. Now, if a person like that can rid himself of bitterness, what I went through was peanuts compared to that. It was nothing.

And I think it's an—and any moment I spend full of anger and bitterness is a moment I am robbing from my wife or from my daughter or from my country or from my friends. So it's almost a selfish decision. But I do not regard this impeachment vote as some great badge of shame; I do not. Because it was—I do not believe it was warranted, and I don't think it was right.

And I believe, frankly, if you look back at President Andrew Johnson, who unfortunately, because of the circumstances under which he came to office, didn't have the opportunity to achieve very much while he was President, I think most people believe that he was unjustly impeached and that the fact that he stood up to it and refused to give in and came within much closer than I did—he came within only a vote of actually being removed—reflects well on him and the history of the country, not poorly.

And so I just don't have bad feelings about that. But neither do I have feelings of anger and bitterness against those who did what they did, whether they believed it or whether it was political, or whatever. I just think that it's past us, and we need to put it behind us, and we need to go on. We owe that to the American people, to let it go. And all of us owe it to our families and our personal lives. All the great players here, they need to let it go and go on with the business of the country.

Serbia's Strategy in Kosovo

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, you have been very generous with your time, and I appreciate it. I want to get back to the war. Let me sketch out for you a scenario which a number of diplomats and some military people have said this could happen: Milosevic will have defeated the Kosovo Liberation Army, self-described as such, and he will have rid Kosovo—driven out most of, if not all of, the Albanians. He's very near having accomplished that. So over the next few days, having accomplished that on the ground, while our air campaign tries to build this momentum you've talked about, he then says, "Okay, I'm ready to talk." Doesn't that leave us defeated? Or does it?

The President. It does if we accept that result—if we accept that result. Because I think we've got to say, "But the Kosovars have all got to be able to come home, and they have to be secure, and they have to be given the autonomy of self-government"—

Mr. Rather. Excuse me—you're talking about in some enclave, some protected enclave?

The President. No, I'm talking about they're entitled to come back to Kosovo, to go back to their villages where they were, and to enjoy self-government and security. But keep in mind, Dan, let me say again, there is no scenario

under which this last week could not have occurred, if he was willing to do it.

Mr. Rather. You don't think the air campaign gave him the opening to do this?

The President. No, no, that I'm sure of. I just met with a bunch of Kosovar Albanians here—excuse me, a bunch of Albanian-Americans here—I'm sorry—in the White House. One man told me he had 24 cousins in Pristina. Every one of them said to me, "Don't let people tell you that this NATO air campaign caused Milosevic to do that. Everybody knows that's a bunch of bull."

Mr. Rather. You're absolutely convinced—

The President. Absolutely.

Mr. Rather. —that it didn't touch it off.

The President. No. He had 40,000 soldiers on the border and inside Kosovo.

Mr. Rather. And hundreds of tanks?

The President. Almost 300—before any of this happened. Last October he had already created a quarter of a million refugees before the NATO threat got him to stop. This is a part of his strategy. He started his ethnic cleansing politics with a big speech against the Kosovars in Kosovo 12 years ago, and then he got diverted into his wars in Bosnia and Croatia. So I believe this is a plan he had all along.

Now, suppose—you could take any scenario. If we had said, "Well, if you do this, ground troops are on the way"—suppose that had been said—it would take much longer to mobilize that than it did the air campaign. He had the armor; he had the men; he had the air cover; he had the weapons; he had all this stuff he could do.

And the UCK, the Kosovar Liberation Army, all those people, all they could ever do was to fight what was, in effect, a guerrilla war, which they could still do. They may be run out of the country; they could come back. They may be run up into the hills; they can come down—with support they got from their kinfolks and relatives outside of the region.

So I think it's very important to note that there—that under any set of circumstances, his military could have done what they have done these last 5 days.

Mr. Rather. And you think they would have done—

The President. Absolutely. I am totally convinced of that. So is everyone else that I know who's been dealing with this for any length of time. Would they have waited another week to

do it? Maybe. But I'm convinced that that's exactly what they wanted to do. They didn't show up in those numbers with those tanks for their health. That's what they were going to do.

So I think the real issue is—I think that that was a decision certainly made when he realized—he did not want the framework of the peace agreement, which was, let them have self-government within the autonomous framework that governed Yugoslavia for all those years, and let's have an international force in there to keep them safe. Even though the international force—I want to say again, because there may be a lot of Serbian-Americans listening to this interview—the international force, we made it clear that we would not go in there, and neither would our NATO Allies, unless they were also free to protect the Serbian minority in Kosovo, because so much blood has been shed and so many people that have been dislocated that they, too, are vulnerable to people taking it out on them because they're Serbs. So we said we would not go in there unless we also protected the Serbs.

But, yes, I'm completely convinced. Prime Minister Blair believes that. Chancellor Schroeder believes that.

Mr. Rather. And you believe it.

The President. With every fiber of my being, I am convinced. Look at what this guy did in—let's go back to Bosnia: 2 million refugees, a quarter of a million people dead. There is no question that this is his strategy. And he was very angry that finally what had been a passive resistance from the Kosovars, a peaceful resistance for 10 years, began to manifest itself then in violent exchanges in return for—in reaction to what the Serbians had done.

I think he wanted to clean them out. I think he wanted to ethically cleanse the country as much as he could. I think he wanted to drastically alter the population balance. I think he wanted to eradicate all the records of the Albanians and the property they own. I think he wanted to erase the history and start all over again. That's what I think.

Mr. Rather. Is genocide too strong a word, Mr. President?

The President. Well, as you know, I try to be hesitant in using it. There is no question that a few thousand people have been murdered because they were Kosovar Albanians. There's no question about that.

Mr. Rather. But you hesitate to use the word genocide.

The President. But I think because—it's only a question of whether enough people have been killed yet. There's no question that what he was doing constitutes ethnic cleansing and that he was killing and uprooting people because of their ethnic heritage. There is no question about that. And I think that not only he, but others who are in decisionmaking positions, have to be held accountable for what they've done. And of course, this whole war crimes tribunal that's been set up to review what happened in the Balkans will have to review those facts. But the main thing I want to do is, whatever the label belongs on it, is to stop it if we can.

Legal Status of Kosovo

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, I'm getting the wrap-up sign, and I must ask you—help me as a reporter. You seemed to hint within the last 24 hours, at least hint—and the newspaper stories say, "President hints at a change in position"—an independent Kosovo, as opposed to a semi-autonomous Kosovo. Has there been a change in your thinking? Are you changing the policy? Is there likely to be one? Help me explain that to folks.

The President. What I said, I'll say it again, because I think it's pretty clear. The United States has supported the historic legal status of Kosovo as an autonomous province of Serbia. We think it would be difficult for the Kosovars, politically, economically, to sustain independence because of their small size and because of the stage of their economic development.

But what I said, and I'll say again, is that Mr. Milosevic is in danger of forfeiting the claim of the Serbs to have government over those people in their own land. That's the problem. It's his conduct. It's not that we've had a change of heart about what would be best, if you will, or that we would honor the rule of international law, which still has lodged Kosovo as an independent province of Serbia. It's whether—and we tried to tell Mr. Milosevic all along that this peace process was the best chance he had to keep the Kosovars as a part of Serbia, because there would be a 3-year period during which they could demonstrate, the Serbs, good faith in letting them govern themselves. We could protect the Serbian minority as well as the Albanian majority in Kosovo. And they could see that economically it would be better, as well

as politically. He's just about blown all that off. That's the—

Mr. Rather. You think he now has that at deep risk?

The President. It's very much at risk, not because of a change of heart by us but because of a change of behavior by him.

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, thank you.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:21 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House for later

broadcast, and the transcript was embargoed for release until 9 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov of Russia; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; President Nelson Mandela of South Africa; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Telephone Remarks From Norfolk, Virginia, to United States Troops at Aviano Air Base in Italy

April 1, 1999

The President. Colonel Nichols, I know you're about to leave on a mission. I just called to tell you we're proud of you, and we appreciate you and all your Buzzards there at the 510th and all the other people who are carrying out this difficult mission.

And you may know that I'm down in Virginia, and I just met with some service families to tell them how much I appreciate their sacrifice. And I know many of you have families back home pulling for you, as well.

So I just want to tell you that and tell you how proud we are. I'm here with Secretary Cohen and General Shelton and a number of other people from Washington, and we're all there for you.

Lt. Col. David Nichols. Thank you, Mr. President, sir. You have the 81st and the 23d Fighter

Squadrons here also. It's a great team. And we are truly honored to have the privilege to hear your voice this afternoon.

The President. Well, thank you. I know that I'm taking you almost up to your departure time, and I don't want to keep you late for your mission. But you just know we're all proud of you, and what you're doing is very important for our country and for the future of the world. And we thank you very much.

Goodbye.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:46 p.m. from the dining room of the Pennsylvania House at Norfolk Naval Station, to Lieutenant Colonel Nichols, USAF, Commanding Officer, 510th Fighter Squadron. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the Military Community at Norfolk Naval Station

April 1, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. I'm just curious, can you all hear me out there?

Audience member. No!

The President. No? The echo is pretty bad, isn't it? Well, if I speak louder, is it better or worse? No difference. I'll do the best I can.

First, I'd like to thank Secretary Cohen and General Shelton for their truly outstanding serv-

ice in our administration at a difficult time. I'd like to thank Admiral Gehman, Admiral Reason, General Pace, General Keck, and the other leaders of all the forces represented here.

I thank Secretary Danzig, National Security Adviser Berger, and others who came with me from the White House. Mayor Oberndorf, thank you for welcoming me to Virginia Beach.