

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.

I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to the Members of Congress who are here: your representatives, Congressmen Scott and Sisisky; Senator Levin, our ranking member of the Armed Services Committee; and a special thanks to my longtime friend Senator Chuck Robb, who is one of the most courageous Members of the United States Congress, and Virginia is very fortunate to be represented by him.

Let me say to all of you, I came here today primarily to thank two groups of people, our men and women in uniform and their families, for the service and sacrifice that makes America strong.

I just met a few moments ago with several members of families, spouses and children of members of four different services who are deployed away from here now. They're all over here to my right. And whatever it is you would like to say to me today, I think there's a very good chance they said it. They did a very good job for you, and I'm very proud of them.

I heard about the financial sacrifices, and I heard about the human sacrifices. I don't think that anyone could say it better than this lady over here with this beautiful baby in the red hat, with the "I miss you, Daddy" sign. I thank you. And this sign, "I love my TR sailor. Support our troops."

I wanted to come here today because I want America to know that the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform are fully mirrored by their families back home, by the opportunities that are missed to be with wives and husbands and children on birthdays and holidays, and just being there for the kids when they're needed at night and in the morning as they go off to school. They are fully felt in terms of the financial sacrifices of the family members left at home to pay the bills and see to the health care and other needs of the children.

And America should know that and should be very, very grateful to all of you. We are grateful, and we think all Americans will be grateful as they know what you do.

Let me also say I had a chance to speak, just before I came out here, with the 510th Fighter Squadron at Aviano Air Base in Italy, part of our Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, to thank them and to hear of their immense pride and determination in their mission.

I know that many, many people here have friends or family members who are working hard

in our mission in Kosovo. I know this port is home to 100 ships, not only the powerful battle groups now at sea led by the *Enterprise* and the *Theodore Roosevelt* but also ships in the Adriatic, guided missile destroyers like the *Gonzalez*, fast-attack submarines like the *Norfolk*. [Applause] Yes, you can clap for your ships; that's okay. [Applause]

I can't name every ship or every unit, but I know that all of you are proud of all of them. Again, let me say, too, a special word of thanks to the family members of those who are deployed in the Kosovo operation now.

And let me say to all of you, we spend a lot of time—perhaps more time than you would think—in the White House, and at the Pentagon, talking about our obligations to the families of our service members. We know that we are asking more and more of you as we have downsized the military and diversified and increased the number of our operations around the world. We know that the more we ask of you, the greater our responsibilities to you.

We know that we owe you the support, the training, the equipment you need to get the job done. We know we owe you fair pay, decent housing, and other support. Our new defense budget contains not only a substantial pay raise but increased funding to keep our readiness razor sharp. It is our solemn obligation to those of you who accept the dangers and hardships of our common security.

Since the cold war ended, we have asked more and more of our Armed Forces, from the Persian Gulf to Korea to Central America to Africa—today, to stand with our allies in NATO against the unspeakable brutality in Kosovo.

Now, this is not an easy challenge with a simple answer. If it were, it would have been resolved a long time ago. The mission I have asked our Armed Forces to carry out with our NATO Allies is a dangerous one, as I have repeatedly said. Danger is something the brave men and women of our country's Armed Forces understand because you live with it every day, even in routine training exercises.

Now, we all know that yesterday three Army infantrymen were seized as they were carrying out a peaceful mission in Macedonia, protecting that country from the violence in neighboring Kosovo. There was absolutely no basis for them to be taken. There is no basis for them to be held. There is certainly no basis for them to

be tried. All Americans are concerned about their welfare.

President Milosevic should make no mistake: The United States takes care of its own. And President Milosevic should make no mistake: We will hold him and his government responsible for their safety and for their well-being.

But I ask you also to resolve that we will continue to carry out our mission with determination and resolve.

Over the past few weeks, I have been talking with the American people about why we're involved with our NATO Allies in Kosovo and the risks of our mission and why they're justified. It's especially important that I speak to you and, through you, to all men and women in uniform about these matters.

The roots of this conflict lie in the policies of Mr. Milosevic, the dictator of Serbia. For more than 10 years now, he has been using ethnic and religious hatred as a path to personal power and a justification for the ethnic cleansing and murder of innocent civilians. That is what he did first in Bosnia and Croatia, where the United States, with our allies, did so much to end the war. And that is what he is doing in Kosovo today. That is what he will continue to do to his own people and his neighbors unless we and our allies stand in the way.

For months, we tried and tried and tried every conceivable peaceful alternative. We did everything we could through diplomacy to solve this problem. With diplomacy backed by the threat of NATO force, we forged a cease-fire last October that rescued from cold and hunger hundreds of thousands of people in Kosovo whom he had driven from their homes.

In February, with our allies and with Russia, we proposed a peace agreement that would have given the people of Kosovo the autonomy they were guaranteed under their constitution before Mr. Milosevic came to power and ended the fighting for good.

Now, the Kosovar leaders, they signed that agreement, even though it didn't give them the independence they said they wanted and that they had been fighting for. But Mr. Milosevic refused. In fact, while pretending to negotiate for peace, he massed 40,000 troops and hundreds of tanks in and around Kosovo, planning a new campaign of destruction and defiance. He started carrying out that campaign the moment the peace talks ended.

Now the troops and police of the Serbian dictator are rampaging through tiny Kosovo, separating men from their families, executing many of them in cold blood, burning homes—sometimes, we now hear, with people inside—forcing survivors to leave everything behind, confiscating their identity papers, destroying their records so their history and their property is erased forever.

Yesterday Mr. Milosevic actually said this problem can only be solved by negotiations. But yesterday, as he said that, his forces continued to hunt down the very Kosovar leaders with whom he was supposed to be negotiating.

All together now, more than half a million Kosovars have been pushed from their homes since the conflict began. They are arriving at the borders of the country, shaken by what they have seen and been through. But they also say—as a delegation of Albanian-Americans, many of whom have relatives in Kosovo, told me personally in the White House yesterday—that NATO's military action has at least given them some hope that they have not been completely abandoned in their suffering.

Had we not acted, the Serbian offensive would have been carried out with impunity. We are determined that it will carry a very high price, indeed.

We also act to prevent a wider war. If you saw my address to the country the other night and the maps that I showed, you know that Kosovo is a very small place. But it sits right at the dividing line of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East; the dividing line between Islam and Christianity; close to our Turkish and Greek allies to the south; our new allies, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, to the north; surrounded by small and struggling democracies that easily could be overwhelmed by the flood of refugees Mr. Milosevic is creating.

Already, Macedonia is so threatened. Already, Serbian forces have made forays into Albania, which borders Kosovo. If we were to do nothing, eventually our allies and then the United States would be drawn into a larger conflict, at far greater risks to our people and far greater costs.

Now, we can't respond to every tragedy in every corner of the world. But just because we can't do everything for everyone doesn't mean that for the sake of consistency we should do nothing for no one.

Remember now, these atrocities are happening at the doorstep of NATO, which has preserved the security of Europe for 50 years because of the alliance between the United States and our allies. They are happening in violation of specific commitments Mr. Milosevic gave to us, to our NATO Allies, to other European countries, and to Russia. They are happening to people who embrace peace and promise to lay down their own arms. They put their trust in us, and we can't let them down.

Our objective is to restore the Kosovars to their homes with security and self-government. Our bombing campaign is designed to exact an unacceptably high price for Mr. Milosevic's present policy of repression and ethnic cleansing and to seriously diminish his military capacity to maintain that policy.

We've been doing this for 7 days now—just 7 days. Our pilots have performed bravely and well in the face of dangerous conditions and often abysmal weather. But we must be determined and patient. Remember, the Serbs had 40,000 troops in and around Kosovo and nearly 300 tanks when they began this, before the first NATO plane got in the air. They had a sophisticated air-defense system. They also have a problem which has been festering for a decade, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Milosevic to make people hate each other in the former Yugoslavia because they are Muslims instead of Orthodox Christians or Catholics; because they're Albanians instead of Serbians or Croatians, or Bosnian Muslims, or Macedonians, or you have—whatever. It is appalling.

For decades, those people lived in peace with one another. For 10 years and more, now, a dictator has sought to make himself powerful by convincing the largest group, the Serbs, that the only way they can amount to anything is to uproot, disrupt, destroy, and kill other people who don't have the same means of destruction—no matter what the consequences are to everybody around them, no matter how many innocent children and their parents die, no matter how much it disrupts other countries.

Why? Because they want power, and they want to base it on the kind of ethnic and religious hatred that is bedeviling the whole world today. You can see it in the Middle East, in Northern Ireland. You can see it in the tribal wars in Africa. You can see that it is one of the dominant problems the whole world faces. And this is right in the underbelly of Europe.

We have to decide whether we are going to take a stand with our NATO Allies and whether we are prepared to pay the price of time to make him pay the price of aggression and murder. Are we, in the last year of the 20th century, going to look the other way as entire peoples in Europe are forced to abandon their homelands or die? Are we going to impose a price on that kind of conduct and seek to end it?

Mr. Milosevic often justifies his behavior by talking about the history of the Serbs going back to the 14th century. Well, I value the history of this country, and I value what happened here in the 18th century. But I don't want to take America back to the 18th century. And he acts like he wants to take Serbia back to the 14th century, to 14th century values, 14th century ways of looking at other human beings.

We are on the edge of a new century and a new millennium, where the people in poor countries all over the world, because of technology and the Internet and the spreading of information, will have unprecedented opportunities to share prosperity and to give their kids an education and have a decent future, if only they will live in peace with the basic human regard for other people. That is absolutely antithetical to everything that Mr. Milosevic has done.

So I ask you—you say, what has this got to do with America? Remember, we fought two World Wars in Europe. Remember that the unity, the freedom, the prosperity, the peace of Europe is important to the future of the children in this room today. That is, in the end, what this is about.

We're not doing this on our own. We could not have undertaken it on our own. This is something we're doing with our NATO Allies. They're up there in the air, too. If there's a peace agreement, they've agreed to provide 85 percent of the troops on the ground to help to monitor the peace agreement and protect all the ethnic groups, including the Serbs.

This is something we are doing to try to avoid in the 21st century the kind of widespread war, large American casualties, and heartbreak that we saw too much of in the century we are about to leave.

So this is not just about a small piece of the Balkans. But let me ask you something. When we are moved by the plight of three servicemen, when we stay up half the night hoping that our rescue teams find that fine pilot

who went down when his plane was hit, when we see a sign that says, "I love my TR sailor" or "I miss my Daddy," we remember that all political and military decisions ultimately have a human component that is highly individualized.

Think how you would feel if you were part of the half million people who lived peaceably in a place, just wanted to be let alone to practice your religion and educate your children and do your work, if people came to your house and your village and said, "Pack up your belongings and go. We're going to burn your property records; we're going to burn your identity records. And if your husband or your son is of military service age, we might take them out behind the barn and shoot them dead"—just because you have a different religion, just because you have a different ethnic background. Is that really what we want the 21st century to be about for our children?

Now, that is what is at stake here. We cannot do everything in the world, but we must do what we can. We can never forget the Holocaust, the genocide, the carnage of the 20th century. We don't want the new century to bring us the same nightmares in a different guise.

We also want to say again how proud the United States is that each of NATO's 19 members is supporting the mission in Kosovo in some way—France and Germany, Turkey and Greece, Poland and Hungary, the Czech Republic, Britain, Canada, all the others. And this is also important.

Let me finally say—I'd like to read you something. Near the end of the Second World War, President Roosevelt prepared a speech to give at a holiday honoring Virginia's famous son Thomas Jefferson. He never got to give the speech. But it still speaks to us, his last words. And to those of you who wear the uniform of our Nation and to those of you who are

part of the families of our Uniformed Service members. I ask you to heed these words.

After the long war was almost drawing to a close, these were Franklin Roosevelt's last words that he never got to deliver: "We as Americans do not choose to deny our responsibilities. Nor do we intend to abandon our determination that within the lives of our children and our children's children, there will not be a third world war. We seek peace, enduring peace. More than an end to war, we want an end to the beginnings of all wars."

That is what we are trying to achieve in Kosovo. That is what many of you in this room, perhaps, and your colleagues, did achieve in Bosnia. We want to end a war that has begun in Europe and prevent a larger war. And we want to alleviate the burdens and the killing of defenseless people. Let us heed President Roosevelt's last words.

Let me say again, for those of you who serve and for those of you who serve as family members and who sacrifice as wives and husbands and children: I thank you for your service and your sacrifice, and America thanks you.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:17 p.m. in Hangar SP2. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Harold W. Gehman, Jr., USN, Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic; Adm. J. Paul Reason, USN, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet; Lt. Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Europe; Lt. Gen. Thomas Keck, USAF, Vice Commander, Air Combat Command; Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf of Virginia Beach; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); and Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA, infantrymen in custody in Serbia.

Statement on the 2000 Census

April 1, 1999

Exactly one year from today, America will commence the first census of the 21st century. The responsibility to conduct the census is near-

ly as old as our Nation. Beginning in 1790, and every 10 years since, America has counted