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Croatia, where 2½ million people were driven from their homes and a quarter million were killed before NATO bombing and the resistance of Bosnians and Croatians brought us to the Dayton peace agreement.

Ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was not a response to bombing. It is the 10-year method of Mr. Milosevic's madness. Had we done nothing, the tragedy would have been permanent, accepted, and in effect, condoned by the world community.

Now, Mr. Milosevic had 40,000 troops and nearly 300 tanks in and around Kosovo before he rejected the peace agreement the Kosovars accepted. He could not be prevented, therefore, from driving the Kosovars from their land. But he can be prevented from keeping them out of their land. His 10-year cleansing campaign will end once and for all.

This time the world did not wait, as we did in Bosnia, for 4 more years of fruitless appeals to reason in the face of evil. We have acted quickly to end this horror, and that is exactly what we will do.

Let me be clear about why we have done this and how we intend to meet our goals. As members of the United States Air Force, the members of this class especially are entitled to know.

Our reasons are both moral and strategic. There is a moral imperative because what we're facing in Kosovo is not just ethnic and religious hatred, discrimination and conflict, which are, unfortunately, too abundant in this world. America and NATO's military power cannot be deployed just because people don't like each other or even because they fight each other.

What is going on in Kosovo is something much worse and, thankfully, more rare: an effort by a political leader to systematically destroy or displace an entire people because of their ethnicity and their religious faith; an effort to erase the culture and history and presence of a people from their land. Where we have the ability to do so, we as a nation and our democratic allies must take a stand against this. We do have the ability to do so at NATO's doorstep in Europe.

But there is also a clear strategic imperative. Since I took office, I've worked hard to build for you and your future a Europe that, for the first time in history, is undivided, democratic, and at peace. Because if there is anything we have learned from the bloody 20th century with its two World Wars, it is that peace and stability in Europe is vital to our own security and freedom.

Now, think what the United States has helped to accomplish in the last few years. Many thought the NATO Alliance would wither and die after the cold war. But it is strong and vital, with new partnerships with 25 nations, stretching all the way from the Baltic Sea to central Asia. Three new democracies, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, which spent the last half century struggling for their own freedom in the cold war, are now our NATO Allies defending the freedom of Europeans.

We've helped Russia deal with the difficult challenges it faces on the road to democracy and stability, the road to being a part of and a partner in Europe. We also helped immeasurably to end the war in Bosnia, and now we're keeping the peace there with a coalition that unites every former adversary in all of European history: France and Germany, Germany and Poland, Poland and Russia, Russia and the United States.

We have made clear that NATO membership will remain open to other responsible democracies from central and southeastern Europe. And through our efforts in the Balkans, we have also helped to bridge the gulf between Europe and the Islamic world, the source of so much trouble over the last millennium, and the source of troubling tensions still today.

The killing Mr. Milosevic unleashed in the former Yugoslavia a decade ago is now the last major barrier to a Europe whole, free, and at peace, the last gasp of an aggressive nationalism that has shattered the lives of so many Europeans in this century and drawn so many Americans to fight there in wars. It threatens all the progress made in Europe since the end of the cold war.

Imagine what would have happened had we let the violence in Kosovo escalate without taking a stand. NATO would have been discredited for doing nothing about ethnic conflict and cleansing on its doorstep. The

refugees would have ended up a people without any prospect of going home—overwhelming, perhaps even destabilizing the new, fragile democracies of southeastern Europe with their permanent presence and bitter grievances. Tensions with Russia over the Balkans would not have disappeared; they would have increased. And the fighting might very well have spread to other countries.

Letting Mr. Milosevic succeed would have sent a clear message to other unscrupulous leaders: If you have ethnic or religious problems, just kill the minorities or drive them out. No one will stop you, you won't pay a significant price. In a way, the world will make your job easier by feeding the refugees and finding them permanent homes without pressing for their return.

Slobodan Milosevic would then have become a model of success for 21st century rulers trying to obliterate multiethnic societies, instead of the symbol of the bankrupt policies based on hate that we want to confine to the dustbin of history.

Our strategy for reversing Mr. Milosevic's ethnic cleansing begins with clarity about the goals we are fighting to achieve. The refugees must be able to go home with security and self-government. For that to happen, Serbian forces must leave Kosovo. An international security force with NATO at its core must deploy to protect all the people of Kosovo, including the Serb minority there. Our diplomatic effort supports these goals. They will continue to make clear to Mr. Milosevic exactly what he must do to end the conflict. And our military campaign will continue until it does.

We cannot grow weary of this campaign because Mr. Milosevic didn't capitulate when the first bombs fell. We cannot abandon a just cause because an adversary holds out for more than a few news cycles. I reject that. Our Allies reject that. I know the vast majority of Americans reject that. We must be willing to pay the price of time and effort to reverse the course of ethnic cleansing. The benefits will be far greater and last much longer than the costs.

And day by day, night by night, our air campaign is succeeding. The pilots are doing a magnificent job. Mr. Milosevic is systematically losing his armed forces. NATO airstrikes are destroying ever-increasing numbers of tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery. We have eliminated 80 percent of Serbia's modern fighters, most of its ability to produce ammunition, all its capacity to refine fuel, much of the rest of its military economy.

Mr. Milosevic, in turn, has not eliminated the insurgent Kosovar Liberation Army. Their ranks are growing, and the longer he holds out, the more vulnerable he leaves his forces to the KLA's growing attacks.

Meanwhile, there are growing signs of disaffection in Serbia: soldiers abandoning their posts, civilians protesting, young men avoiding conscription, prominent citizens calling on Milosevic to accept NATO's conditions. There is a clear choice before the Serbian leader. He can cut his losses now and accept the basic requirements of a just peace, or he can continue to force military failure and economic ruin on his people. In the end, the outcome will be the same.

This week, we are deploying an additional 68 F–16's and F–15's to join the mission. We now have planes flying at all hours from every direction, from bases in Italy, Germany, Hungary, Turkey, the United States, and from carriers at sea. If we have the patience and determination to match the courage and skill of our men and women in uniform, we will achieve our goals.

A second reason we have pursued this strategy is that it enables us to pursue our goal in a way that preserves the unity of NATO's 19 democracies. We must maintain the solidarity between the United States, Canada, and Europe that has been vital to our past and is vital to our future security. And I am confident we will.

A third important reason is to meet our goals in a way that strengthens, not weakens, our fundamental interest in a long-term positive relationship with Russia. Russia is now working with us on a solution that meets our requirements. We hope Russian troops will participate in the force that keeps the peace in Kosovo, just as they have done so well in our joint efforts in Bosnia.

A fourth element is to prepare now for the difficult task of returning refugees to Kosovo and implementing the peace there. Yesterday NATO approved the outlines of KFOR, the force that will deploy to Kosovo

once the conditions are met. Approximately 50,000 troops will take part in this effort. Our European Allies will provide the vast bulk of them, but America will also contribute, and we should.

Today I am announcing my decision to provide about 7,000 of these troops for Kosovo, about 15 percent of the total force. The leading elements and headquarters are already in Albania and Macedonia, ready to deploy to Kosovo within a few hours to oversee the safe return of the refugees. The additional NATO forces required are beginning to move to the region.

Finally, this strategy will enable us to put in place a plan for lasting peace and stability in the Balkans, when Mr. Milosevic is stopped and the ethnic cleansing is reversed. For that to happen, the European Union and the United States must be farsighted. We must do for southeastern Europe what we did for Western Europe after World War II, for central Europe, for Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and others after the cold war. We must give them a positive path to a prosperous, shared future, a unifying magnet more powerful than the pull of hatred and destruction which threatens to tear them apart.

It is simply not true, as some have alleged, that the Balkan region has always been and always will be torn apart by ethnic and religious strife and violence, that they are somehow genetically predisposed to that. It isn't true. History does not support that conclusion. And today, the efforts of Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia to resolve their minority problems peacefully show that if leaders are responsible and if people have a positive future to work for, then they can live together and resolve their differences.

Europe and the United States can and should support efforts to increase economic growth, trade, and investment, to strengthen democratic governments and institutions, to help the nations of the region join the European Union and NATO. We should also include Serbia in this effort if, but only if, it practices democracy, respects human rights, and has leaders who uphold the basic standards of human conduct.

So I say again, why are we in Kosovo? Because we have a moral responsibility to oppose crimes against humanity and mass ethnic and religious killing and cleansing where we can. Because we have a security responsibility to prevent a wider war in Europe, which we know from our two World Wars would eventually draw America in at far greater cost in lives, time, and treasure.

Why are we pursuing this particular strategy of massive bombing and diplomacy? Because it gives us the best chance of achieving all our objectives in Kosovo: First, the return of Kosovars with security and self-government, withdrawal of Serb forces and the deployment of the international security force with NATO at its core. Second, to maintain Allied unity. Third, to continue cooperation with Russia. Fourth, to maximize our capacity after the conflict is over to build a progressive, democratic, multiethnic Balkans region that will contribute to our economic growth as a world society and our security progress, not be a constant drain on our economy and a constant threat to our security.

Why have we refused to close other doors and other options? Because we are determined to prevail. We are in Kosovo for the same reason you are here. Some things are worth fighting for: A future with the great alliance between the United States and Europe standing strong; a future not dominated by massive killing of innocent civilians because of the ethnic or racial heritage they were born with, or the way they worship God; a future in which leaders cannot keep, gain or increase their power by teaching their young people to hate or kill others simply because of their faith or heritage; a future in which young Americans who set out from this academy to serve our country will not have to fight in yet another major European conflict.

That is the future we want you to have. That is the future we want your children to inherit. I thank you for your willingness to contribute to that future. I thank you for your dedication to your country.

Good luck to you all, and Godspeed.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:28 a.m. in Falcon Stadium at the United States Air Force Academy. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Tad J. Oelstrom, USAF, Superintendent, United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), and his wife, Sandra; Gen. Michael E. Ryan, USAF, Air Force