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There are so many people to thank: first, Secretary General Solana and General Clark, who were steadfast and effective, our NATO Allies—I have spoken already with Prime Minister Blair and have calls out to many others. I hope to speak at least to President Chirac, Chancellor Schroeder, Prime Minister D'Alema, Prime Minister Chretien, Mr. Kok, Mr. Aznar, and many others. They were all—all 19 held together so well.

I want to thank President Ahtisaari and Mr. Chernomyrdin for their diplomatic mission, which played a critical role in this. I want to thank President Yeltsin for his strong instructions to his team to resolve these matters so that we can go forward.

I want to thank our allies in Congress in both Houses and both parties for believing in America's mission in Kosovo. I want to thank our team very much, those who are not here: the Vice President, who played a large role in putting together the Chernomyrdin-Ahtisaari team; Secretary Albright, whose passionate commitment to this cause is well-known; and Deputy Secretary Talbott, who was pivotal in the diplomatic efforts. I want to thank Secretary Cohen and General Shelton, who persevered with great confidence and calmness amidst criticisms and the early rough-going to achieve the victory that they have achieved.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to Mr. Berger, who has barely slept for the last 3 months and who has done a superb job. He and Mr. Podesta and Mr. Steinberg, our entire national security team has done a very, very good job.

And finally, let me say I am enormously proud of our men and women in uniform, and those of our Allies, who have performed with tremendous skill and courage, striking at Serbia's military machine and aiding the refugees. I am profoundly grateful for what they have done. I am very grateful that the loss of life was limited to the tragedies in the two training incidents and that we only lost two planes in the combat operation.

And I am grateful to the American citizens, who felt enormous compassion for the suffering of the people in Kosovo and understood the importance of standing up to the war crimes involved in ethnic cleansing and killing, and the kind of ethnic and religious bigotry and violence we have seen against innocent civilians.

Now we are waiting for the United Nations to pass a resolution that the G–8 nations have embraced. We expect the Security Council to adopt it shortly.

We must be mindful that even though we now have a chance to replace violence with peace, ethnic and religious hatred with a democratic future, a bloody century in Europe with a Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace, there is still quite a lot to be done:

First, we have to make sure that the Serbs keep their commitments. That means the forces must rapidly and peacefully leave Kosovo under the agreed timetable, 11 days from yesterday. NATO's air campaign is suspended. It is not formally terminated, and Secretary General Solana retains the authority to resume strikes if Serbia violates its commitments.

Second, we face challenges and risks in bringing home the refugees and restoring stability. With determination and cooperation, an International Security Force of roughly 50,000 troops, including 7,000 Americans, can give the people of Kosovo the confidence to return, to lay down their arms, to heal their wounds, to live in peace. But there are operational difficulties with this, as well, which you will see over the next few days as we come to grips with them.

Finally, we face the broader challenge of preventing future crises by promoting democracy and prosperity in this region which has been so troubled. With our Allies and partners, we must intensify these efforts. In the past 4 months, we have seen some of the worst inhumanity in our lifetime, but we've also seen the bravery of our troops, the resolve of our democracy, the decency of our people, and the courage and determination of the people of Kosovo. We now have a moment of hope, thanks to all those qualities. And we have to finish the job and build the peace.

Thank you.

KFOR Timetable

Q. Mr. President, sir, is there anything you can tell the American people as to how long

the NATO peacekeepers will have to be in Kosovo, including the American forces?

The President. I don't think we should put a timetable on it. We will define our objectives and proceed to implement them.

Serbian Leadership

Q. Can you see the NATO peacekeeping force leaving Kosovo with Mr. Milosevic still in power?

The President. Well, I would put it in a different way. What I would like to see is all the nations of southeastern Europe built up. I'd like to see them coming closer together, and then I'd like to see them becoming more integrated with the economic and security structure of Europe, so that we will see them growing and prospering the way Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic did after the fall of communism, for example. And I don't see how Serbia can participate in that unless they have a leadership that is committed to a multiethnic, multireligious democracy and to genuine democracy and human rights.

Success of Airstrikes

Q. Do you feel vindicated against the criticism that the air war would not work, sir?

The President. Well, I think—again, I would say, I think that our people in uniform performed superbly, and they performed risking their lives. We regret the fact that there were any civilian casualties, but our pilots risked their lives to minimize those casualties. And there were far fewer here, for example, than there were in the Gulf war—far, far fewer.

And I think it's a tribute to Secretary Cohen and to General Shelton and the others who believed that, given these facts—given these facts—and given the capacity of our forces, that this strategy could work. We never took other options off the table; we had planned and thought about them. But I think that our people in uniform, starting with our Secretary of Defense, are the ones that have been vindicated by this. And I'm grateful for what they have achieved.

But in terms of America, the United States should feel vindicated when the people go home and when they're safe and when we can say that we, as a nation, have played a role in reversing ethnic cleansing. Because if we do that, after what we have done in Bosnia and the work we have been doing in Africa to set up a crisis response team to try to prevent a Rwanda from ever occurring again, then we will be able to see the world go into the 21st century with a more humane future, not able to stop all conflict, not able to stop all ethnic conflict, but at last able to prevent this sort of thing.

Serbian Willingness To Reach Agreement

Q. Why do you think he gave in now, Mr. President?

Q. Apart from the air campaign, was it also the indictment as a war criminal; was he getting pressure from his own people, from his military?

The President. They paid quite a high price for this; they were hurt very badly.

Reconstruction of the Balkans

Q. Mr. President, sir, it's going to cost a lot of money to reconstruct Kosovo and also the neighboring countries are going to need a lot of aid. How much is the United States willing to put up, and will this be a European endeavor with help from the United States?

The President. Well, as I said, I would expect that most of the money would come from Europe because most of the costs of this campaign, the air campaign, have been borne by the United States. I don't quarrel with that. We had the capacity, and we did what we should have done.

But I don't want us to get into a haggling situation, either. We should do this because it's the right thing to do. And it will be—let me say this, it will be far less expensive—far, far less expensive—for us to make a decent contribution to the long-term development of these people than it will be to wait around for something like this to happen again and run the risks, all the risks we had to deal with this time that it might spread and all of that.