

The airstrikes have been suspended. Aggression against an innocent people has been contained and is being turned back.

When I ordered our Armed Forces into combat, we had three clear goals: to enable the Kosovar people, the victims of some of the most vicious atrocities in Europe since the Second World War, to return to their homes with safety and self-government; to require Serbian forces responsible for those atrocities to leave Kosovo; and to deploy an international security force, with NATO at its core, to protect all the people of that troubled land, Serbs and Albanians, alike. Those goals will be achieved. A necessary conflict has been brought to a just and honorable conclusion.

The result will be security and dignity for the people of Kosovo, achieved by an alliance that stood together in purpose and resolve, assisted by the diplomatic efforts of Russia. This victory brings a new hope that when a people are singled out for destruction because of their heritage and religious faith and we can do something about it, the world will not look the other way.

I want to express my profound gratitude to the men and women of our Armed Forces and those of our Allies. Day after day, night after night, they flew, risking their lives to attack their targets and to avoid civilian casualties when they were fired upon from populated areas. I ask every American to join me in saying to them, thank you, you've made us very proud.

I'm also grateful to the American people for standing against the awful ethnic cleansing, for sending generous assistance to the refugees, and for opening your hearts and your homes to the innocent victims who came here.

I want to speak with you for a few moments tonight about why we fought, what we achieved, and what we have to do now to advance the peace, and together with the people of the Balkans, forge a future of freedom, progress, and harmony.

We should remember that the violence we responded to in Kosovo was the culmination of a 10-year campaign by Slobodan Milosevic, the leader of Serbia, to exploit ethnic and religious differences in order to impose his will on the lands of the former Yugo-

slavia. That's what he tried to do in Croatia and in Bosnia, and now in Kosovo. The world saw the terrifying consequences: 500 villages burned; men of all ages separated from their loved ones to be shot and buried in mass graves; women raped; children made to watch their parents die; a whole people forced to abandon, in hours, communities their families had spent generations building.

For these atrocities, Mr. Milosevic and his top aides have been indicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity. I will never forget the Kosovar refugees I recently met. Some of them could barely talk about what they had been through. All they had left was hope that the world would not turn its back.

When our diplomatic efforts to avert this horror were rebuffed and the violence mounted, we and our Allies chose to act. Mr. Milosevic continued to do terrible things to the people of Kosovo, but we were determined to turn him back. Our firmness finally has brought an end to a vicious campaign of ethnic cleansing, and we acted early enough to reverse it, to enable the Kosovars to go home.

When they do, they will be safe. They will be able to reopen their schools, speak their language, practice their religion, choose their leaders, and shape their destiny. There'll be no more days of foraging for food in the cold of mountains and forests, no more nights of hiding in cellars, wondering if the next day will bring death or deliverance. They will know that Mr. Milosevic's army and paramilitary forces will be gone, his 10-year campaign of repression finished.

NATO has achieved this success as a united alliance, ably led by Secretary General Solana and General Clark. Nineteen democracies came together and stayed together through the stiffest military challenge in NATO's 50-year history.

We also preserved our critically important partnership with Russia, thanks to President Yeltsin, who opposed our military effort but supported diplomacy to end the conflict on terms that met our conditions. I'm grateful to Russian envoy Chernomyrdin and Finnish President Ahtisaari for their work, and to Vice President Gore for the key role he played in putting their partnership together.

Now, I hope Russian troops will join us in the force that will keep the peace in Kosovo, just as they have in Bosnia.

Finally, we have averted the wider war this conflict might well have sparked. The countries of southeastern Europe backed the NATO campaign, helped the refugees, and showed the world there is more compassion than cruelty in this troubled region. This victory makes it all the more likely that they will choose a future of democracy, fair treatment of minorities, and peace.

Now we're entering a new phase, building that peace, and there are formidable challenges. First, we must be sure the Serbian authorities meet their commitments. We are prepared to resume our military campaign should they fail to do so. Next, we must get the Kosovar refugees home safely; mine fields will have to be cleared; homes destroyed by Serb forces will have to be rebuilt; homeless people in need of food and medicine will have to get them; the fate of the missing will have to be determined; the Kosovar Liberation Army will have to demilitarize, as it has agreed to do. And we in the peacekeeping force will have to ensure that Kosovo is a safe place to live for all its citizens, ethnic Serbs as well as ethnic Albanians.

For these things to happen, security must be established. To that end, some 50,000 troops from almost 30 countries will deploy to Kosovo. Our European Allies will provide the vast majority of them; America will contribute about 7,000. We are grateful that during NATO's air campaign we did not lose a single serviceman in combat. But this next phase also will be dangerous. Bitter memories will still be fresh, and there may well be casualties. So we have made sure that the force going into Kosovo will have NATO command and control and rules of engagement set by NATO. It will have the means and the mandate to protect itself while doing its job.

In the meantime, the United Nations will organize a civilian administration while preparing the Kosovars to govern and police themselves. As local institutions take hold, NATO will be able to turn over increasing responsibility to them and draw down its forces.

A third challenge will be to put in place a plan for lasting peace and stability in Kosovo and through all the Balkans. For that to happen, the European Union and the United States must plan for tomorrow, not just today. We must help to give the democracies of southeastern Europe a path to a prosperous, shared future, a unifying magnet more powerful than the pull of hatred and destruction that has threatened to tear them apart. Our European partners must provide most of the resources for this effort, but it is in America's interest to do our part, as well. A final challenge will be to encourage Serbia to join its neighbors in this historic journey to a peaceful, democratic, united Europe.

I want to say a few words to the Serbian people tonight. I know that you, too, have suffered in Mr. Milosevic's wars. You should know that your leaders could have kept Kosovo as a part of your country without driving a single Kosovar family from its home, without killing a single adult or child, without inviting a single NATO bomb to fall on your country. You endured 79 days of bombing, not to keep Kosovo a province of Serbia, but simply because Mr. Milosevic was determined to eliminate Kosovar Albanians from Kosovo, dead or alive.

As long as he remains in power, as long as your nation is ruled by an indicted war criminal, we will provide no support for the reconstruction of Serbia. But we are ready to provide humanitarian aid now and to help to build a better future for Serbia, too, when its Government represents tolerance and freedom, not repression and terror.

My fellow Americans, all these challenges are substantial, but they are far preferable to the challenges of war and continued instability in Europe. We have sent a message of determination and hope to all the world. Think of all the millions of innocent people who died in this bloody century because democracies reacted too late to evil and aggression. Because of our resolve, the 20th century is ending not with helpless indignation but with a hopeful affirmation of human dignity and human rights for the 21st century.

In a world too divided by fear among people of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups, we have given confidence to the friends of freedom and pause to those who

would exploit human difference for inhuman purposes.

America still faces great challenges in this world, but we look forward to meeting them. So, tonight I ask you to be proud of your country and very proud of the men and women who serve it in uniform. For in Kosovo, we did the right thing; we did it the right way; and we will finish the job.

Good night, and may God bless our wonderful United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); NATO Secretary General Javier Solana; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland; and former Prime Minister and Special Envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner

June 10, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Charlie, wait a minute. Before Chairman Rangel sits down—you know, Dick Gephardt got up there and said, “You know, the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee is as powerful as the President.” [Laughter] Bob Johnson said, “That’s a scary thought.” [Laughter] And I said, “No, no, he’s more powerful than the President.” [Laughter]

You should know that among all the things we have to be grateful for tonight and to celebrate, tomorrow is Charlie Rangel’s birthday. So I think we should sing “Happy Birthday” to him.

[At this point, the participants sang “Happy Birthday.”]

Representative Charles Rangel. My only response is, save Social Security now! [Laughter]

The President. That’s just like we rehearsed it. [Laughter]

Let me say to Congressman Rangel, and in his absence, Chairman Clyburn, Eleanor Holmes Norton, all the members of the caucus who are still here and those who have

come and gone, to the members of the Cabinet that are here—I saw Secretary Slater and Secretary Riley, there may be others here—and my former Cabinet member Jesse Brown, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs back there, I’m glad to see you. My wonderful friend from Chicago and fellow Arkansan, John Stroger and all the others who did so much to make this night a possibility. I thank the chairman of the DNC, Joe Andrew, for being here; and Lottie Shackelford, others from the DNC who are here.

I want to say—I have so many friends here, but there’s one young couple here that I’m particularly pleased about being here, because they’re new Washingtonians, the newly acquired new quarterback for the Washington Redskins, Rodney Peete, and his wonderful wife, Holly Robinson Peete. You all stand up there and say hello. [Applause] They are a big addition to this community and wonderful people, and I’m glad to have them.

I want to say a few things rather briefly tonight. First of all, Congressman Rangel, my wife said to tell you hello, and once again, thank you for your friendship. [Laughter] Secondly, I want you to know when we had the New York Yankees at the White House today to celebrate their championship last year, I called them the Bronx Bombers, and I emphasized “Bronx,” and I said I was doing it at your behest. [Laughter]

Finally, let me say I was looking at Dick Gephardt standing up here, and I have known him for many years, and I thought he was a good man and an able man when I first met him. But I have watched him grow in his responsibility, in the depth of his understanding and his spirit. He should be the Speaker of the House. He should be the Speaker of the House.

The last thing I want to say by way of introduction is, I’m delighted to see Lionel Hampton again. We had—John Conyers and I had a 90th birthday party for him at the White House last year, almost a year ago, and they actually let me play with the band. And I hadn’t played in months, and it was really one of the nicest nights I’ve had in the White House, and I’m very grateful for that. And I’m grateful for him. If I look half

as good at 60 as he does at 90—[laughter]—if I can hear to play my horn as well as he can hear to play his vibe, I will be a happy fellow.

I apologize for being late here tonight. I think all of you know why. I addressed the people of the United States tonight about the end of the conflict in Kosovo. I want to say a couple of things about that and what it has to do with all of the things that have already been mentioned and all the issues we don't have time to mention tonight.

The unimaginable horrors that were inflicted on those people, which led to an unprecedented indictment of a head of state, Mr. Milosevic, for war crimes and crimes against humanity, came to them solely because of their ethnicity and their religious faith. And it is, indeed, ironic that here we are on the edge of a new century and a new millennium, with the world growing closer together, with technology literally exploding opportunities for all of us, with America becoming more and more diverse by the day, that the world is most bedeviled by the oldest problem of human society: people are scared of people who don't look like them and who worship God in a different way than they do and who basically come from a different tribe.

We have learned, in ways good and bad, that our differences make us stronger; they make life more interesting; they make life more fun. But if that curious balance that exists inside all of us gets out of whack and our fears overcome our hopes, we can go quickly from fearing people to hating them, to dehumanizing them, to justifying all manner of repression and abuse of them.

What the conflict in Kosovo was about at bottom is whether or not, after all we have learned from what happened in World War II to the Jewish people and others in Nazi repression and all we have seen since, would or would not provoke the world, especially after the agonizing experience we had in Bosnia and the awful experience we had in Rwanda, when everyone was caught flat-footed, with no mechanism to deal with it—whether we would say, “Okay, from now on we don't expect everybody to get along. We don't think we can abolish all war. But if innocent civilians are going to be slaughtered

and uprooted and have their lives destroyed and their families wrecked only because of their racial or ethnic background, or their religious faith—if we can stop it, we intend to stop it.”

The United States did not go there for any territorial gain or economic gain. We went there because we want there to be peace and harmony, first in Europe and, wherever possible, in the rest of the world. We went there with an Army that looks like America; an Air Force that looks like America. We landed a Marine expeditionary unit in Greece today, going into Kosovo to help those folks come home, that looks like America.

There are people from every conceivable racial and ethnic group and all different religious backgrounds, bound together by what they have in common being more important than the interesting things that divide them.

I say that because I am grateful for what they have achieved with our Allies. But I know, as I look toward the future, when I am long gone from this job, and the world grows closer and closer—but we will still have struggles between those who are left out and those who are included in the bounty of the world. We will still have to deal with terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and international criminal gangs and all, and people will always be trying to feed on the differences, to switch the balance from hope to fear. And it will be very important that the United States of our children and grandchildren be a force for bringing people together, not tearing them apart. And we will not be able to do that, over the long run, to do good around the world, unless we first are good at home.

That is why—that's why I've worked as hard as I can on all the issues involving race, why I know we've got to get rid of this racial profiling, why I know we've got to do more to deal with the threat of violence to our children, why I have asked everybody from the entertainment community to the gun community, to the schools, the people that provide counseling and mental health services, to the parents, to do something—all of us to do something to give our children their childhood back.

That is why I have asked the Congress to invest more in education, to adopt this new