

**Remarks Prior to a Briefing With the National Security Team and an Exchange With Reporters**

March 25, 1999

**Airstrikes on Serbian Targets**

**The President.** I'm about to receive a briefing from the national security team, as you can see. I'm very grateful that our crews returned home safely after their work last night. And I'm very grateful that the United States Congress has expressed its support for them.

I want to say again that our purpose here is to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe or a wider war. Our objective is to make it clear that Serbia must either choose peace or we will limit its ability to make war. And we're going to get a briefing and lay further plans today.

**Q.** Mr. President, yesterday you listed in the briefing room three objectives of the airstrikes, but among them was not a demand that Milosevic return to the negotiating table if he signed a peace agreement. Yet, others in the administration are saying this morning that is a precondition for ending the strike. What are the facts?

**The President.** Well, he has to choose peace, or we have to try to limit his ability to make war. That's what we're trying to do. And I think that's been very clear. If you look at what happened at the Rambouillet talks, the arrangement was basically supported by all of Europe, the United States, the Kosovars. The Russians agreed that it was a fair agreement. They did not agree to the military involvement of NATO, but they agreed that it was a fair agreement. Only Mr. Milosevic and the Serbs declined to deal with the evident responsibility they have to choose the path of peace instead of the path of aggression and war.

So I think that it is clear—I don't know how to make it any clearer—that we either have to have a choice for peace by Serbia, not just stopping the killing for an hour or two but a choice for peace, or we will do our best to limit their ability to make war on those people.

**Exit Strategy**

**Q.** What is the exit strategy?

**The President.** The exit strategy is what it always is in a military operation. It's when the mission is completed.

**NATO Ground Troops**

**Q.** Do you believe the Kosovars can be safe without the intervention of ground troops from NATO? Can your goals be achieved just through airstrikes?

**The President.** I do. I believe we can create a situation in which we have limited their ability to make war and thereby increase the prospects that they can protect themselves better. I do believe that.

**Russia**

**Q.** What about Russians threatening to arm Belgrade?

**The President.** Well, you know, they have quite a lot of arms on their own. They made a lot of arms in the former Yugoslavia. I told the American people they had a very impressive air defense system, and they had lots of other arms and weapons. I have no intention of supporting any lifting of the arms embargo on Serbia. I think that would be a terrible mistake. We would be far better off if they didn't have as many arms as they do; then they would be out there making peace and accommodating these ethnic differences and figuring out ways they can live together.

**Domestic Support**

**Q.** Are you concerned that the American people aren't more strongly behind you on this?

**The President.** No. I believe that many Americans really had not thought a lot about this until the last 2 days. I hope that a lot of them heard my presentation last night. I did my very best to explain what we were doing and why, and I believe that a majority of them will support what we're trying to do here. I also believe very strongly that it is my responsibility to make this judgment based on what I think is in the long-term interests of the American people.

**Kosovo Peace Process**

**Q.** [Inaudible]—achieve peace or you will limit his ability to make war, but need he come back to the conference table?

**The President.** I think he knows what needs to be done.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:10 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). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## **Videotape Address to the Serbian People**

*March 25, 1999*

As you know, the United States and its NATO allies have begun a military campaign to reduce President Milosevic's ability to make war on the people of Kosovo. I want to speak candidly to all Serbian people, to explain our reasons for this action and how there could be a quick resolution of the crisis.

First, I cannot emphasize too strongly that the United States and our European allies have no quarrel with the Serbian people. We respect your proud history and culture. We joined together on many occasions, including our victory over nazism in World War II. Our own history has been honored by the contributions of Serb families who came to America to start a new life.

But our common future has been put in jeopardy by a war that threatens the peace of Europe and the lives of thousands of innocent people in Kosovo. After exhausting every other option, all 19 members of NATO—from France to Poland, from Italy to Greece, from across Europe to Canada and the United States in North America—all of us agree that only swift action can save peace in the Balkans.

Let us turn from Serbia's history to the facts of the last 10 years. There has been too much propaganda and too little plain truth. President Milosevic has spoken often of Serbia's standing in the world, but by his every action he has diminished your country's standing, exposed you to violence and instability and isolated you from the rest of Europe. He waged senseless wars in Bosnia and Croatia, which only ended after enormous bloodshed on all sides. And he lost a cruel campaign against the Albanian people of Kosovo. It was not simply a war against armed Kosovar forces but also a campaign of violence in which tanks and artillery were unleashed against unarmed civilians.

Now, one out of eight people in Kosovo have been driven from their homes, entire villages have been burned and cleared of their people. Thousands of Serbs also have suffered and been forced from their homes. As a result, the bitterness in Kosovo is deeper than ever, and the prospect that Kosovars and Serbs will be able to live together in the same country has been harmed. No one has benefited from all this, certainly not Serbia.

We understand the region has more than its share of painful history, and we know that all peoples of the former Yugoslavia have their legitimate grievances. The NATO allies support the desire of the Serbian people to maintain Kosovo as part of your country. With our Russian partners, we insisted on that in the peace talks in France. The result was a fair and balanced agreement that would guarantee the rights of all people in Kosovo, ethnic Serbs and Albanians alike, within Serbia.

The Kosovar leaders accepted that. They agreed to demilitarize their forces and to end the paramilitary attacks on Serbs that also have contributed to the crisis. At the invitation of Serbs and Kosovars, NATO troops, under the agreement, would be deployed in Kosovo as keepers of the peace, not as some occupying force.

Now, I know the Serb Government and many Serbian people may not see NATO that way. And it is true that it was the Kosovar Albanians who insisted on NATO peace-keeping forces but largely because of President Milosevic's violations of his own commitments regarding the use of police and military units.

Nevertheless, I want you to understand that NATO only agreed to be peacekeepers on the understanding that its troops would ensure that both sides kept their commitments and that terrorism on both sides would be brought to an end. They only agreed to serve with the understanding that they would protect Serbs as well as ethnic Albanians and that they would leave when peace took hold.

Now, only President Milosevic rejected this agreement. He could have kept Kosovo and Serbia and given you peace. But instead, he has jeopardized Kosovo's future and brought you more war. Right now he's forcing your sons to keep fighting a senseless