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Abroad at Home

ANTHONY LEWIS

The Speech Not Given

My fellow Americans:
I want to speak to you this evening about a challenge facing our country and our allies. It is a painful challenge, one that none of us would seek. But there comes a time for nations, as for individuals, when it is more dangerous to avoid trouble than it is to make a stand for what is right. That time has come in Bosnia.

Many of you will be asking, Why should we care about such a faraway country? why should we get involved? It is a President's duty to answer those questions—to explain our interests and our goals when we take action abroad.

Three years ago some of the Serbs in Bosnia launched an aggressive war against that state. Armed with weapons from the army of the former Yugoslavia, they captured much of Bosnia's territory. They used murder, rape and torture to remove or frighten non-Serbs out of that territory. They shelled civilians in the capital, Sarajevo, and other cities. They blew up churches and mosques.

The outside world did not intervene militarily to stop the aggression and genocide. Instead the United Nations sent a force with a very limited mission: to feed the people in Sarajevo and elsewhere who were being shelled and starved by the Serbs.

The United Nations force, with its narrow mission, was impartial between aggressor and victim. It stood by while Serbian snipers killed children on the streets of Sarajevo. It asked permission of the Serbs to get humanitarian convoys through, and the Serbs often said no.

Our allies, France and Britain, sent troops to the U.N. force. We did not. But when the U.N. asked for NATO air strikes to help the mission, our men and planes took part. We were there last week when the U.N. called for a NATO strike after heavy Serbian shelling of Sarajevo.

You all know how the Serbs responded. They shelled the city of Tuzla, killing 71 civilians, most of them children. And they seized more than 100 U.N. soldiers as hostages.

In my judgment the North Atlantic Alliance, the great protector of peace and security in Europe, cannot let that kind of outrage continue in Europe. Even after three years of an ill-defined U.N. mission, it is not too late for meaningful action. Indeed, action is more essential now than ever.

We need a new mission with clearly defined goals. It must be committed to do all that can be done to protect the victims of aggression from siege and assault. It must be able to respond vigorously and protect its own soldiers. And it must be ready to persist until Bosnian Serb outrages cease, opening the way to a realistic settlement.

If NATO is prepared for that kind of effort—serious, with clear rules, not muddled and half-hearted—I would be willing to contribute a small number of American soldiers to help set up the new mission. That is a risk. But unless we share the risk, our allies will not so easily respond to American leadership. And without American leadership, strong action is unlikely, and aggression and genocide will prevail for the first time in Europe since the Nazis.

If our allies are not prepared for that kind of tough mission, one with real military aims, the U.N. force should be pulled out. Then we should help arm and train the Bosnian Government's forces, and help with strategic bombing of Serbian military facilities and headquarters.

It is often said that air strikes will not tip the balance in war. But if that is so, why did the Bosnian Serb leaders react so outrageously when NATO carried out the first meaningful strikes of this war? They were worried—that is why.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, President Bush said, "This will not stand." And it didn't. Here again we have unscrupulous leaders, who kill children because they are of another faith. And this time the evil is in Europe, where we have invested so much to keep the peace for the last 50 years.

That is why it is vital for us to take a stand in Bosnia. The aggression there does not immediately threaten our lives, but it threatens our civilization in an insidious way. If we and our European allies cannot work together to stop this menace, the alliance may come apart—and all of us be adrift in a dangerous world.

Ladies and gentlemen, some of the commentators have said that taking a stand against the evil in Bosnia will be politically damaging. If so, I am prepared to pay the penalty. But I do not believe that Americans are afraid to stand up for what is right. God, fight, and God bless you.
On My Mind

A. M. ROSENTHAL

Bill Clinton's War

President Clinton is not leading the United States to war in Bosnia. He has already done that. The question now is whether Congress and the public will stop him before he sends American troops into the land of their approaching death.

Until now, Americans did not much care or little note that they were at war. Only foreign lives were involved, not the real stuff. Congress and the press cheered, crying bombs away to Mr. Clinton and his sorrowful little team.

Americans are not cheering now that he is telling us that soon he is likely to send actual American troops to shed American blood in Bosnia, despite years of his promises of never ever.

Psychiatrists who examine the President's weird record in Bosnia would understand what he is saying as he wanders the road from President Peace to Bomber Bill to Commander Clinton: Somebody please stop me. I warn you I may order in the troops any day now. Don't you hear me? All the U.N. or our allies have to do is ask me and I will do it! Somebody — Russians, Serbs, allies, Congress, public, press, somebody — help me not to do it.

Republicans and Democrats, even journalists, are rubbing their sweet sleepy eyes. Troops, they ask? That would mean war?

Where do they think we have been? When American planes bomb another nation, that is war. Bombers do not like it, you see. They fight harder. So we bomb them harder.

When harder-fails, bomb bomb must lead to a decision on whether to commit ground forces. There's no free bombing.

But even when Mr. Clinton changed months ago from no, never, to saying that he would send 25,000 Americans to extricate U.N. forces if it came to that, Congress and the press did not understand that American soldiers were being prepared to meet live ammunition in Bosnia. Congress did not even ask for a vote. But Bosnians understood, all sides.

Now Bomber Bill is getting ready to wade ashore; he says he may also send in troops while the U.N. "redeploys." That is jargon for digging in against "the Serbs." And that is politicized journalese implying rebel Serbs are not genuine "Bosnians" like the Muslims, whom the press just calls Bosnians. But these Serbs are native Bosnians fighting a Western-backed Government of other native Bosnians they see as enemies and from which they want out, out.

The bomb bomb brigade is beginning to understand, almost. No U.S. troops, they say! Just keep bombing, flatten them.

Bosnia's Serbian Christians will kill more Bosnian Serbian Muslims and U.N. soldiers. American troops will go in eventually. Soon we may be on some embassy roof, praying for helicopters.

Mr. Clinton did something worse than just go to war without public or Congressional consent. He did it under pressure.

In the first years of the war he and his advisers believed the U.S. should not get in, with bombing or troops.

It was not simply because of the sickening atrocities of the Serbian Christians against Serbian Muslims that Mr. Clinton changed his mind and brought America into war. The U.S. barely noticed when President Assad slaughtered thousands of Syrians in Hama. Now Mr. Clinton sends the White House lawn for him.

Rwanda, Chechnya, Sudan, Tibet — terrorism by slaughter, and the U.S. sends no bombers or troops.

But Mr. Clinton bowed to the line of American desk-warrior bureaucrats, politicians, academics and journalists that if the now-inevitable partition of Bosnia gave Serbian Christians any territory they had won in battle, NATO would die of sheer humiliation.

For a half-century, Americans thought correctly that the reason for creating NATO was to contain the Soviet Union. But, well, the NATO hierarchy is seriously in need of a little work.

Poignant. But when and by whom in American officialdom was NATO made responsible for putting down every rebellion or secession in Europe? When did Washington decide that NATO's face was so vital that Americans had to rouge it up even at the cost of dying in the Balkans? At that price, who needs it?

While we think that ever, Congress should at last bar U.S. bombing and U.S. troops, subject to swift release of U.N. prisoners. It will not end the war. Americans cannot do that just Bosnians. But it will answer Mr. Clinton's urgent need for help.