

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Cornelio Sommaruga of the International Committee of the Red Cross

March 8, 1991

The President. I might take this opportunity just to salute the International Red Cross. And from the very beginning, it seemed to the Americans that you tried very hard to do what was compassionate and right, and you ran into some obstacles, but you stayed with it. And I think we owe you a vote of gratitude. And I want to assure you of our continuing interest and support, and of course, we're very proud of the new president of the American Red Cross because Elizabeth Dole being there, I think, is more than a symbol—it shows a part of the commitment that we all feel to the work of the Red Cross.

So, it gives me a chance anyway to welcome you back and to say thank you.

Mr. Sommaruga. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I am extremely glad to be here today; also to express appreciation for the excellent cooperation we were able to have in the field with the military, with the commands of the coalition forces, in order to carry out our mandate, which is

a mandate given us by the Geneva convention. And we will continue to carry out this mandate. And I think that what happened in the Gulf will also be for us all a sort of lesson on how one has to proceed in the implementation of internationally maintained law and possibly also in the enlargement of it.

Q. Mr. President, is there any indication that the POW's were mistreated?

The President. I'll not take any questions here. I am concerned about reports that some of them were clapped on the ears and it affected their hearing. But I don't know the details yet on all of that.

Note: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole, president of the American Red Cross. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Memorandum on the Return of Desert Shield/Desert Storm Participants to Federal Civilian Employment

March 8, 1991

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Return of Desert Shield/Desert Storm Participants to Federal Civilian Employment

Now that our Armed Forces and their Coalition partners have achieved success in meeting our military objectives in the Gulf region, we can look forward to the return of the valiant men and women who participated in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

Many of these participants are members of the Reserve Forces and the Air and Army National Guard who left their regular civil-

ian employment to join in this national effort, with great disruption to their families and their normal pursuits. In recognition of the sacrifices they have made, it is essential that their civilian employers do everything possible to ease their return to civilian life.

The Federal Government has always been a model for other employers in the protections and benefits provided for those who serve, and I am committed to ensuring that we continue to set an example for the Nation in this regard. Accordingly, I have determined that the following actions by executive departments and agencies are appropriate: