

Remarks to the Community at Fort Polk, Louisiana March 18, 1996

Thank you. General Shalikashvili, Deputy Secretary White, General Sheehan, General Tilelli, General Shelton, Admiral Miller, General Sherfield, Command Sergeant Major Austin, Command Sergeant Major Laye; to the Members of Congress who are here, Senators Johnston and Breaux and Congressmen Jefferson, Fields, Hayes, and McCrery; to the members of the Joint Readiness Training Center, the members of the Fort Polk community, to the Department of Defense civilians, and to all the men and women of America's Armed Forces.

Let me say I was very impressed by that recent maneuver where you rushed the ropes—[laughter]—and I was very impressed when all the people behind you rushed up behind you, and I know you're a lot warmer now and that's the main reason you did it. [Laughter] I wish you were about 5 feet taller; you could be a windbreaker for us up here. [Laughter]

I am delighted to be the first sitting President ever to visit Fort Polk. I know well the Joint Readiness Training Center. As some of you may know, before it came here it was located in my home State when I was Governor, in Little Rock at the air base there and at Fort Chaffee. I must say when I was Governor and it was announced that we were losing the JRT Center to Fort Polk, I had some qualms about it. But from the looks of things today, it's been a good move. It's stronger than ever before, and the JRTC is serving the United States well. Thank you very much.

As all of you know, I come here today primarily to stand with the veterans of Operation Uphold Democracy, the men and women who restored freedom to Haiti. We have been true to our word and true to our mission because of your skill and professionalism. The vast majority of our forces have returned from Haiti on time, just as we said they would. The last 500 American peacekeepers are now packing up, and in less than 30 days they too will be home.

You made history by showing once again that when America acts on behalf of its values and its interests, it gets the job done. You undertook a difficult task, and every single one of you who served in Haiti can say with great pride, "Mission accomplished." You made a difference

for our Nation's security and for a neighbor in need. We and other nations will now have to help Haiti in the hard road ahead of it, but the military job was done, done by you and other allies who came to work with you. And for that, every single one of you should be very proud.

Eighteen months ago our Nation faced a serious challenge. Just a few hundred miles from our shores a brutal regime was torturing and murdering the citizens of Haiti. More than 3,000 of them had been killed in a reign of terror. The democracy that they had voted for in overwhelming numbers was stolen from the people. Tens of thousands were fleeing to America and to other nations in unsafe boats and rafts, and many died along the way. There was a clear threat to our borders and to the civility of our region. Because it was the right thing to do and because it was in our interest, we decided to intervene. We gave our word that democracy would be restored. And because the military dictators came to the United States and broke their word when they promised to leave, you, the men and women of Uphold Democracy, kept America's word.

From beginning to end, this mission was a testament to the skill and professionalism of America's Armed Forces. The coup leaders knew from the outset they were facing the best trained, the best equipped, the best prepared fighting force on Earth. When they learned that the 82d Airborne and other units were on the way, they gave way. That enabled our troops to land on the ground without bloodshed and prove once again that our military might is the indispensable muscle behind our diplomacy. You are trained to fight. Time and again, you have stood down aggression and triumphed in battle.

In Haiti you came to a different kind of mission and showed the world another side of America's magnificent military. You and our troops who are now in Bosnia have demonstrated a dedication to fighting for peace as great as your ability to prevail in war. You've paved the way for the return of Haiti's democratic government. You took guns off the street. You helped to develop a local police. You gave the people there a new sense of security. You

fixed the roads and bridges and brought the food and medicine and cleared the way for a return to normal civilized life. You gave the people of Haiti the breathing space they need to reclaim their democracy, to get their economy started, to undertake the hard work that only they can do of building a free nation. Now Haiti has enjoyed its first democratic transfer of power in 200 years as a nation, thanks to you.

While the country remains poor, while its institutions remain fragile, this country now has better prospects for the future than at any time in the past. You did the job. When I sent America's troops to Haiti in September of 1994, joined by 27 other countries' troops, I said that the United States forces would remain through the inauguration of a new president. That took place on the 7th of February.

I want to now thank and ask you to join me in thanking the extraordinary men who led the U.S. and the U.N. efforts in Haiti, General Hugh Shelton, General Dave Meade, General George Fisher, and General Joe Kinzer. Let's give them a big hand for their service and leadership. *[Applause]*

There was a lot of extraordinary service from others in uniform as well, people like Army Special Forces Sergeant First Class Gregory Cardot, who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Today we remember his loss. We honor his devotion to duty. And we honor that of all those of Uphold Democracy. Like American service men and women everywhere, those of you who served in Haiti went above and beyond the call of duty.

I would like to mention just a few of those in closing who went the extra distance and made the extra difference. Sergeant First Class Joseph Register, Jr., saw a mob beating a Haitian man. Ignoring his own safety, Sergeant Register plunged into the crowd, shielded the badly wounded man, and gave him first aid. He protected the man despite great personal risk until other soldiers arrived to help. And he probably saved that man's life. For his brave actions, Sergeant Register received the Soldier's Medal, the Army's highest peacetime award for heroism.

Airman First Class Patricia Hasboun, who we just saw receive the Joint Service Commendation Medal, used her own Creole language skills to help teach a Haitian town's police chief to drive as she distributed food and toys and clothes to orphanages throughout Haiti.

While on patrol in Port-au-Prince, Staff Sergeant Mark Maxwell and Sergeant Bill Fitzpatrick, now stationed here at Fort Polk, pushed through a crowd to find a woman lying on the ground in labor and in great pain. Sergeant Fitzpatrick secured the area. Staff Sergeant Maxwell, using his skills from the combat lifesaver course, delivered that woman's healthy baby boy.

Special Forces Staff Sergeant Jorge Ramos took it upon himself to restore the sanitation system and public washing facilities in the town of Leogane. He organized local volunteers and gave a community that had been badly neglected one of the essentials of a decent existence. And out of gratitude to the sergeant and his troops, the townspeople painted a 4-foot-high replica of his Special Forces patch on a nearby wall.

These are only a few of the stories of Uphold Democracy. We know that our success in Haiti would never have been possible without the strong support of the military families of Operation Uphold Democracy. And I would like to now say a special word of thanks to all of them. We Americans know that the burden of our leadership in the world weighs heavily on the families of men and women in uniform, here and around the world. We ask our troops to travel a long way from home, to be apart from their loved ones for long periods of time, to take on difficult and dangerous missions. So I thank them.

And let me also say here publicly what I will have a chance in a few moments to say personally to the families of the troops in Bosnia who are here today, we also honor your strength and your sacrifice. You are giving the people of Bosnia an opportunity for peace. You are helping to prevent the recurrence of the most vicious bloodshed Europe has known since the end of World War II and to prevent a widened war which could have drawn in American forces in the fighting. We know it's tough for one parent to be left to carry all the family responsibilities, to bear the extra burden of running a household and raising the family. We ask a great deal. But time and again, America's military families deliver too.

All of you have shown what is best about our country: the determination to stand up for freedom and to stand against oppression, the readiness to give a helping hand, to do all of that together as one America. I thank you for that. Your example explains why people all over

the world look to America for hope and for inspiration. We can't be everywhere, and we can't do everything. But where we can make a difference and where our values and interests are at stake, we must act. That was the case in Haiti. You acted and acted well, above and beyond the call of duty.

I congratulate you on your tremendous achievement. I thank you for a job well done. Your Nation is grateful and proud.

God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. on the parade ground. In his remarks, he referred to Deputy Secretary of Defense John P. White; Gen. John J. Sheehan, USMC, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Command; Gen. John H. Tilelli, Jr., USA, Army Vice Chief of Staff; Gen. Henry H. Shelton, USAF, Commander in Chief, U.S. Special Operations Command; Adm. Paul D. Miller, USN (Ret.); Brig. Gen. Michael B. Sherfield, USA, Commander, Joint Readiness Training Center; Command Sgt. Maj. Johnny Austin, Joint Readiness Training Center; and Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Laye, U.S. Atlantic Command.

Remarks to the Community in Alexandria, Louisiana March 18, 1996

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for waiting in the cold and the wind. I am so glad to be here. I want to thank the Tioga High School band for playing. Didn't they do a great job? *[Applause]* Mayor Randolph, Mayor Baden, Senator Johnston, Senator Breaux, Congressman Fields, Congressman Jefferson, Chairman Meyer, I am delighted to be here, and I thank you for waiting for me.

I want to talk just a minute, very briefly, about what you have done here with England Air Force Base and why that's a model of what I hope we'll see more of all across America. You know, when the cold war ended and we were moving into this global economy, the first thing that happened that scared a lot of Americans was the need to downsize the military and the plain need that the country had to reduce the size of our bases. A lot of people were afraid, but you people were not afraid. You worked together, and you were determined to make some good things happen here. And I have to tell you that I have been all over this country looking at military bases. I have worked with communities all over America, personally, to help them start their communities up and to use these bases as economic assets. There is no place in the entire United States that has done a better job than Alexandria has.

Now, what I want to say, even in all this wind, is that there are other challenges facing us. You read in the press, I'm sure, that some big companies, for example, are restructuring

and laying off a lot of people. All the time in this economy there are jobs being created, jobs being abolished, jobs being created, jobs being abolished. But what I want to say to you is that this country is moving in the right direction. We have 8.4 million more jobs today than we had 3 years ago because the American people, when they work together, can find ways to solve problems, meet challenges, and move forward. And if we will commit ourselves to a few simple things, educating all of our children and providing education for adults whenever they lose jobs, the moment they lose jobs; making the most of our resources; selling America's products around the world; and taking the things we have in this country, like these military bases, and turning them into opportunities; and if we will commit to say if a person loses a job they at least ought to be able to carry their health insurance and their pension with them so they can take care of their families when they start anew; if we will commit ourselves to making it possible for people to start small businesses and for every community in America to participate in the economic recovery, then this country is going to do just fine.

I want you to know, when I became President, because I had been through a base closing in my home State, I started a whole new program to get the Pentagon to move more quickly, to move properties out and give them to the communities so that they could be used to generate jobs. And that is what we have done now