

Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York

May 31, 1997

Thank you very much. Please be seated; relax. Thank you, General Christman, for those kind introductory remarks and for your truly extraordinary service to your Nation throughout your military career. Here at West Point and before, when we had more opportunities to work together on a daily basis, I have constantly admired your dedication and your ability.

General Reimer, Secretary West, Senator Reed, Chairman Gilman, Congressman Shimkus, Congresswoman Kelly, Congressman Sessions, former Congressman Bilbray, parents and families and friends of the cadets, and especially to the class of 1997, I extend my heartfelt congratulations.

This has been a truly remarkable class. As General Christman said, you wrote an unparalleled record of academic achievement in the classroom. I congratulate you all and particularly your number one honor graduate and valedictorian, David Ake. Congratulations to all of you on your accomplishments.

Now, General Christman also outlined the extraordinary accomplishments of your athletic teams, and he mentioned that I had the privilege of seeing Army win its first 10-win season in football and reclaim the Commander in Chief's Trophy in Philadelphia. And he thanked me for that. But actually, as a lifelong football fan, I deserve no thanks. It was a terrific game, and I'm quite sure it was the first time in the field of any endeavor of conflict where the Army defeated the Navy not on land but on water. [Laughter]

I know that in spite of all of your achievements as a class and in teams, a few of you also upheld West Point's enduring tradition of independence. It began in 1796 when President Adams' War Department ordered the first classes in fortification. And the troops here thought they already knew all about that, so they burned the classroom to the ground, postponing the start of instruction by 5 years. [Laughter]

Today I am reliably informed that though your spirits are equally high, your infractions are more modest. Therefore, I hereby exercise my prerogative to grant amnesty for minor offenses to the Corps of Cadets. [Applause] The

cheering was a little disconcerting—now, the operative word there was “minor.” [Laughter]

Men and women of the class of '97, today you join the Long Gray Line, the Long Gray Line that stretches across two centuries of unstinting devotion to America and the freedom that is our greatest treasure. From the defense of Fort Erie in the War of 1812 to the fury of Antietam, from the trenches of Argonne to the Anzio and Okinawa, to Heartbreak Ridge, the Mekong Delta, the fiery desert of the Gulf war, the officers of West Point have served and sacrificed for our Nation.

In just the 4 years since I last spoke here, your graduates have helped to restore democracy to Haiti, to save hundreds of thousands of lives from genocide and famine in Rwanda, to end the bloodshed in Bosnia. Throughout our history, whenever duty called, the men and women of West Point have never failed us. And I speak for all Americans when I say, I know you never will.

I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to West Point and a special word of congratulations to the students in this class from other countries. We welcome you here, we are proud to have you as a part of our military service tradition, and we wish you well as you go back home. We hope you, too, can advance freedom's cause, for in the 21st century, that is something we must do together.

Two days ago, I returned from Europe on a mission to look back to one of the proudest chapters in America's history and to look forward to the history we all will seek to shape for our children and grandchildren. This week is the 50th anniversary of the Marshall plan, what Winston Churchill described as the most unsordid act in all history.

In 1947, Americans, exhausted by war and anxious to get on with their lives at home, were summoned to embrace another leadership role by a generation of remarkable leaders, General George Marshall, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, President Harry Truman, leaders who knew there could be no lasting peace and security for an America that withdrew behind its borders

and withdrew from the world and its responsibilities. They provided the indispensable leadership to create the Marshall plan, NATO, the first global financial institutions. They, in effect, organized America and our allies to meet the challenges of their time, to build unparalleled prosperity, to stand firm against Soviet expansionism until the light of freedom shone all across Europe.

The second purpose of my journey was inextricably tied to the first. It was to look to the future, to the possibility of achieving what Marshall's generation could only dream of, a democratic, peaceful, and undivided Europe for the first time in all of history, and to the necessity of America and its allies once again organizing ourselves to meet the challenges of our time, to secure peace and prosperity for the next 50 years and beyond.

To build and secure a new Europe, peaceful, democratic, and undivided at last, there must be a new NATO, with new missions, new members, and new partners. We have been building that kind of NATO for the last 3 years with new partners in the Partnership For Peace and NATO's first out-of-area mission in Bosnia. In Paris last week, we took another giant stride forward when Russia entered a new partnership with NATO, choosing cooperation over confrontation, as both sides affirmed that the world is different now. European security is no longer a zero-sum contest between Russia and NATO but a cherished common goal.

In a little more than a month, I will join with other NATO leaders in Madrid to invite the first of Europe's new democracies in Central Europe to join our alliance, with the consent of the Senate, by 1999, the 50th anniversary of NATO's founding.

I firmly believe NATO enlargement is in our national interests. But because it is not without cost and risk, it is appropriate to have an open, full, national discussion before proceeding. I want to further that discussion here today in no small measure because it is especially important to those of you in this class. For after all, as the sentinels of our security in the years ahead, your work will be easier and safer if we do the right thing, and riskier and much more difficult if we do not.

Europe's fate and America's future are joined. Twice in half a century, Americans have given their lives to defend liberty and peace in World Wars that began in Europe. And we have stayed

in Europe in very large numbers for a long time throughout the cold war. Taking wise steps now to strengthen our common security when we have the opportunity to do so will help to build a future without the mistakes and the divisions of the past and will enable us to organize ourselves to meet the new security challenges of the new century. In this task, NATO should be our sharpest sword and strongest shield.

Some say we no longer need NATO because there is no powerful threat to our security now. I say there is no powerful threat in part because NATO is there. And enlargement will help make it stronger. I believe we should take in new members to NATO for four reasons.

First, it will strengthen our alliance in meeting the security challenges of the 21st century, addressing conflicts that threaten the common peace of all. Consider Bosnia. Already the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, the Baltic nations, and other Central European countries are contributing troops and bases to NATO's peace-keeping mission in Bosnia. We in the United States could not have deployed our troops to Bosnia as safely, smoothly, and swiftly as we did without the help of Hungary and our staging ground at Tazsar, which I personally visited. The new democracies we invite to join NATO are ready and able to share the burdens of defending freedom in no small measure because they know the cost of losing freedom.

Second, NATO enlargement will help to secure the historic gains of democracy in Europe. NATO can do for Europe's East what it did for Europe's West at the end of World War II: provide a secure climate where freedom, democracy, and prosperity can flourish. Joining NATO once helped Italy, Germany, and Spain to consolidate their democracies. Now the opening of NATO's doors has led the Central European nations already—already—to deepen democratic reform, to strengthen civilian control of their military, to open their economies. Membership and its future prospect will give them the confidence to stay the course.

Third, enlarging NATO will encourage prospective members to resolve their differences peacefully. We see all over the world the terrible curse of people who are imprisoned by their own ethnic, regional, and nationalist hatreds, who rob themselves and their children of the lives they might have because of their primitive, destructive impulses that they cannot control.

When he signed the NATO treaty in 1949, President Truman said that if NATO had simply existed in 1914 or 1939, it would have prevented the World Wars that tore the world apart. The experience of the last 50 years supports that view. NATO helped to reconcile age-old adversaries like France and Germany, now fast friends and allies, and clearly has reduced tensions between Greece and Turkey over all these decades. Already the very prospect of NATO membership has helped to convince countries in Central Europe to settle more than half a dozen border and ethnic disputes, any one of which could have led to future conflicts. That, in turn, makes it less likely that you will ever be called to fight in another war across the Atlantic.

Fourth, enlarging NATO, along with its Partnership For Peace with many other nations and its special agreement with Russia and its soon-to-be-signed partnership with Ukraine, will erase the artificial line in Europe that Stalin drew and bring Europe together in security, not keep it apart in instability.

NATO expansion does not mean a differently divided Europe; it is part of unifying Europe. NATO's first members should not be its last. NATO's doors will remain open to all those willing and able to shoulder the responsibilities of membership, and we must continue to strengthen our partnerships with nonmembers.

Now, let me be clear to all of you: These benefits are not cost- or risk-free. Enlargement will require the United States to pay an estimated \$200 million a year for the next decade. Our allies in Canada and Western Europe are prepared to do their part; so are NATO's new members; so must we.

More important, enlargement requires that we extend to new members our alliance's most solemn security pledge, to treat an attack against one as an attack against all. We have always made the pledge credible through the deployment of our troops and the deterrence of our nuclear weapons. In the years ahead, it means that you could be asked to put your lives on the line for a new NATO member, just as today you can be called upon to defend the freedom of our allies in Western Europe.

In leading NATO over the past 3 years to open its doors to Europe's new democracies, I weighed these costs very carefully. I concluded that the benefits of enlargement—strengthening NATO for the future, locking in democracy's gains in Central Europe, building stability across

the Atlantic, uniting Europe, not dividing it—these gains decisively outweigh the burdens. The bottom line to me is clear: Expanding NATO will enhance our security. It is the right thing to do. We must not fail history's challenge at this moment to build a Europe peaceful, democratic, and undivided, allied with us to face the new security threats of the new century, a Europe that will avoid repeating the darkest moments of the 20th century and fulfill the brilliant possibilities of the 21st.

This vision for a new Europe is central to our larger security strategy, which you will be called upon to implement and enforce. But our agenda must go beyond it because, with all of our power and wealth, we are living in a world in which increasingly our influence depends upon our recognizing that our future is interdependent with other nations and we must work with them all across the globe, because we see the threats we face tomorrow will cross national boundaries. They are amplified by modern technology, communication, and travel. They must be faced by like-minded nations working together, whether we're talking about terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, or environmental degradation. Therefore, we must pursue five other objectives.

First, we must build a community of Asia-Pacific nations bound by a common commitment to stability and prosperity. We fought three wars in Asia in half a century. Asia's stability affects our peace, and Asia's explosive growth affects our prosperity. That's why we've strengthened our security ties to Japan and Korea, why we now meet every year with the Asia-Pacific leaders, why we must work with and not isolate ourselves from China.

One of the great questions that will define the future for your generation of Americans is how China will define its own greatness as a nation. We have worked with China because we believe it is important to cooperate in ways that will shape the definition of that great nation in positive, not negative, ways. We need not agree with China on all issues to maintain normal trade relations, but we do need normal trade relations to have a chance of eventually reaching agreement with China on matters of vital importance to America and the world.

Second, we are building coalitions across the world to confront these new security threats that know no borders: weapons proliferation, terrorism, drug trafficking, environmental degradation.

We have to lead in constructing global arrangements that provide us the tools to deal with these common threats: the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and our efforts to further reduce nuclear weapons with Russia. Now our great task is also to build these kinds of arrangements fighting terrorism, drug traffickers, and organized crime. Three weeks from now in Denver, I will use the summit of the eight leading nations to press this agenda.

The third thing we have to do is to build an open trading system. Our security is tied to the stake other nations have in the prosperity of staying free and open and working with others, not working against them. In no small measure because of the trade agreements we have negotiated, we have not only regained our position as the world's number one exporter, we have increased our influence in ways that are good for our security. To continue that progress, it is important that I have the authority to conclude smart new market-opening agreements that every President in 20 years has had.

Some of our fellow Americans do not believe that the President should have this authority anymore. They believe that somehow the global economy presents a threat to us, but I believe it's here to stay. And I think the evidence is that Americans—just as we can have the world's strongest and best military, we have the strongest and best economy in the world. The American people can out-work and out-compete anyone, given a free and fair chance.

Not only that but this is about more than money and jobs; this is about security. The world, especially our democratic neighbors to the south of us, are looking to us. If we don't build economic bridges to them, someone else will. We must make it clear that America supports free people and fair, open trade.

Fourth, we have to embrace our role as the decisive force for peace. You cannot and you should not go everywhere. But when our values and interests are at stake, our mission is crystal clear and achievable, America should stand with

our allies around the world who seek to bring peace and prevent slaughter. From the Middle East to Bosnia, from Haiti to Northern Ireland, we have worked to contain conflict, to support peace, to give children a brighter future, and it has enhanced our security.

Finally, we have to have the tools to do these jobs. Those are the most powerful and best trained military in the world and a fully funded diplomacy to minimize the chances that military force will be necessary.

The long-term defense plan we have just completed will increase your readiness, capabilities, and technological edge. In a world of persistent dangers, you must and you will be able to dominate the conflicts of the future as you did the battlefields of the past.

Fifty-five years ago, in the early days of World War II, General George Marshall, the man we honored this week, spoke here at your commencement about the need to organize our Nation for the ordeal of war. He said, "We are determined that before the Sun sets on this terrible struggle, our flag will be recognized as a symbol of freedom on the one hand and of overwhelming power on the other."

Today, our flag of freedom and power flies higher than ever, but because our Nation stands at the pinnacle of its power, it also stands at the pinnacle of its responsibility. Therefore, as you carry our flag into this new era, we must organize ourselves to meet the challenges of the next 50 years. We must shape the peace for a new and better century about to dawn so that you can give your children and your grandchildren the America and the world they deserve.

God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in Michie Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Daniel W. Christman, USA, Superintendent, and Adam K. Ake, valedictorian, U.S. Military Academy; and Gen. Dennis J. Reimer, USA, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army.

Statement on the Department of Justice's Report on Crime June 1, 1997

Four years ago, my administration made a commitment to take our streets back from crime and violence. We have a comprehensive anticrime plan, and it is working. More community police, tougher punishments, and fewer guns in the hands of criminals are making a difference. Today's Justice Department release marks the largest one-year decline in murder, aggravated assault, and violent crime in the past 35 years. The continued downward trend over the past 4 years is further evidence that we are on the right track with increased community policing, tougher penalties, and greater juvenile crime prevention efforts.

Much work remains to be done, however. Juvenile crime and violence must be our top law enforcement priority for the next 4 years. My anti-gang and youth violence strategy declares

war on juvenile crime and gangs, with new prosecutors and tougher penalties; an extension of the Brady bill, so violent teenage criminals will never have the right to purchase a handgun; and resources to keep schools open after hours, on weekends, and in the summer. While the House-passed juvenile crime legislation falls short of the goals outlined in my strategy, I am hopeful that the Senate will improve on this measure and pass it without delay. We must keep the crime rate coming down, and every child's prospect of a bright future going up.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 30, but it was embargoed for release until 6 p.m. on June 1.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Deployment of United States Forces to Sierra Leone May 30, 1997

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

On May 25, soldiers from the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) mutinied against the country's democratically elected President, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Battles between the mutineers and the President's Nigerian security guard resulted in several rocket propelled grenade rounds hitting the U.S. Embassy. In addition, the RSLMF soldiers have engaged in looting, rape, armed robbery, and carjackings throughout the city. Sporadic gunfire and looting diminished with the arrival of additional Nigerian military forces that attempted to restore order. However, the security situation is deteriorating as tensions rise between Nigerian troops on the one hand and the mutineers and their supporters on the other hand. While there is no evidence that Americans are being directly targeted, the disorder and violence in Freetown subjects American citizens to continued risks ranging from criminal acts to random violence.

On May 29 and May 30, due to the uncertain security situation and the possible threat to American citizens and the American Embassy in Sierra Leone, approximately 200 U.S. military personnel, including an 11-member special forces detachment, were positioned in Freetown to prepare for the evacuation of certain U.S. Government employees and private U.S. citizens. Evacuation operations began on May 30, as U.S. military helicopters transported U.S. citizens and designated third-country nationals to immediate safety aboard the U.S.S. *Kearsarge* from where they will be taken to Conakry, Guinea, for further transportation. In addition to those evacuated by helicopter, 18 U.S. citizens departed Sierra Leone on May 29 via a British charter airline flight.

The Marines involved in this operation are from the Marine Expeditionary Unit currently embarked aboard U.S.S. *Kearsarge*, operating off the west coast of Africa. Special forces personnel are from the U.S. Army Third Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Although