

Remarks on International Efforts To Eliminate Landmines and an Exchange With Reporters *September 17, 1997*

The President. Thank you very much. I want to talk now about what the United States has done and what we will continue to do to lead the world toward the elimination of anti-personnel landmines.

Every year, landmines kill or maim more than 25,000 people: children, women, farmers peacefully going about their business. That is why, since I called for the global elimination of landmines in 1994, the United States has been at the forefront of the effort to ban them, not just in words but in actual, concrete deeds.

Eighteen months ago, I ordered a ban on the most dangerous types of landmines, those that remain active and dangerous long after soldiers have left the scene. These are the mines that are causing all the damage around the world today. These hidden killers prey on innocent civilians. They are responsible for the horrific mutilation of children from Angola to Cambodia to Bosnia.

In the months since I ordered that ban, the United States has destroyed 1½ million of these landmines. By 1999 we will have destroyed all the rest in our stockpiles, another 1½ million, with the exception of our mines at the demilitarized zone in Korea, the cold war's last frontier.

The United States has also led the world in the effort to remove existing landmines, again not with talk but with action that has saved lives. Since 1993 we have devoted \$153 million to this cause. Our experts have helped to remove mines from the ground in 15 nations. They have trained and equipped roughly one-quarter of all the people who work at this effort around the world.

These efforts are paying off. In the areas of Cambodia where we've been active, the death rates for landmines has dropped by one-half. In Namibia, the casualty rate has fallen 90 percent.

These efforts do not come without real cost and sacrifice. The C-141 plane that went down in that terrible collision off the coast of Africa on Monday, in which nine Air Force crew members were lost, had just carried a unit of special forces demining experts to Namibia.

Last month I instructed a U.S. team to join negotiations then underway in Oslo to ban all antipersonnel landmines. Our negotiators worked tirelessly to reach an agreement we could sign. Unfortunately, as it is now drafted, I cannot in good conscience add America's name to that treaty. So let me explain why.

Our Nation has unique responsibilities for preserving security and defending peace and freedom around the globe. Millions of people from Bosnia to Haiti, Korea to the Persian Gulf, are safer as a result. And so is every American. The men and women who carry out that responsibility wear our uniform with pride and, as we learned in the last few days, at no small risk to themselves. They wear it secure in the knowledge, however, that we will always, always do everything we can to protect our own.

As Commander in Chief, I will not send our soldiers to defend the freedom of our people and the freedom of others without doing everything we can to make them as secure as possible. For that reason, the United States insisted that two provisions be included in the treaty negotiated at Oslo. First, we needed an adequate transition period to phase out the antipersonnel mines we now use to protect our troops, giving us time to devise alternative technologies. Second, we needed to preserve the antitank mines we rely upon to slow down an enemy's armor offensive in a battle situation.

These two requests are not abstract considerations. They reflect the very dangerous reality we face on the ground as a result of our global responsibilities. Take the Korean Peninsula. There, our 37,000 troops and their South Korean allies face an army of one million North Koreans only 27 miles away from Seoul, Korea. They serve there, our troops do, in the name and under the direct mandate of the international community. In the event of an attack, the North's overwhelming numerical advantage can only be countered if we can slow down its advance, call in reinforcements, and organize our defense. Our antipersonnel mines there are a key part of our defense line in Korea. They are deployed along a DMZ where there are no villages and no civilians. Therefore, they, too,

are not creating the problem we are trying to address in the world.

We also need antitank mines there to deter or stop an armored assault against our troops, the kind of attack our adversaries would be most likely to launch. These antitank mines self-destruct or deactivate themselves when the battle is over, and therefore, they pose little risk to civilians. We will continue to seek to deter a war that would cost countless lives. But no one should expect our people to expose our Armed Forces to unacceptable risks.

Now, we were not able to gain sufficient support for these two requests. The final treaty failed to include a transition period during which we could safely phase out our antipersonnel landmines, including in Korea. And the treaty would have banned the antitank mines our troops rely on from the outskirts of Seoul to the desert border of Iraq and Kuwait, and this in spite of the fact that other nations' antitank systems are explicitly permitted under the treaty.

We went the extra mile and beyond to sign this treaty. And again, I want to thank Secretary Cohen and General Shalikashvili and especially I'd like to thank General Ralston for the enormous effort that was made and the changes in positions and the modifications in positions that the Joint Chiefs made, not once but 3 times, to try to move our country closer to other countries so that in good faith we could sign this treaty.

But there is a line that I simply cannot cross, and that line is the safety and security of our men and women in uniform. America will continue to lead in ending the use of all antipersonnel mines. The offer we made at Oslo remains on the table. We stand ready to sign a treaty that meets our fundamental and unique security requirements. With an adequate transition period to a world free of antipersonnel landmines, this goal is within reach.

As further evidence of our commitment, I am announcing today a series of steps America will take on its own to advance our efforts to rid the world of landmines. First, I'm directing the Department of Defense to develop alternatives to antipersonnel landmines so that by the year 2003 we can end even the use of self-destruct landmines, that is, those, again, that are not causing the problem today because they destroy themselves on their own after a short

period of time. We want to end even the use of these landmines, everywhere but Korea.

As for Korea, my directive calls for alternatives to be ready by 2006, the time period for which we were negotiating in Oslo. By setting these deadlines, we will speed the development of new technologies that I asked the Pentagon to start working on last year. In short, this program will eliminate all antipersonnel landmines from America's arsenal.

Second, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff David Jones has agreed to be a personal adviser to me and to Secretary Cohen to help us make sure the job gets done. Throughout his career he has demonstrated a concern for the safety of our troops second to none, and in recent years he's been a powerful, eloquent voice for banning landmines. There's no better man for the task, and I thank him for accepting it.

Third, we will significantly increase our demining programs. No nation devotes more expertise or resources to the problem than we do today. Next year, we currently plan to provide \$68 million for worldwide demining efforts, almost as much as the rest of the world combined. We will begin demining work in as many as eight new countries, including Chad, Zimbabwe, and Lebanon.

But we can, and will, do more. I am proposing that we increase funding for demining by about 25 percent beginning next year. We must improve our research and development to find new ways to detect, remove, and dispose of these landmines. We must increase assistance to landmine victims to help them heal and take their place as productive members of their societies. And we must expand our training programs so that nations that are plagued by landmines can themselves do more to clear away these deadly devices. Every mine removed from the ground is another child potentially saved.

Fourth, we will redouble our efforts to establish serious negotiations for a global antipersonnel landmine ban in the conference on disarmament in Geneva. We will begin by seeking an export ban next year and one that applies to the major landmine producers, the people who themselves cause these problems because they're making and selling these landmines—none of them were present in Oslo. In the end, we have to get them on board as well.

I am determined to work closely with the Congress, with Senator Leahy, Senator Hagel,

and others to implement this package, because I think together we can take another step in the elimination of landmines that will be decisive.

In that connection, let me say, I had a brief visit with Senator Leahy today, and I think that there's no way I can say enough about what he has done. He is a genuine worldwide leader in this effort. He has been recognized around the world. He has worked with us very closely, and I thank him. And I'm confident that we can do more by working together.

I believe, and I think everyone in the United States and everyone leading the Pentagon believes, that every man, woman, and child in this world should be able to walk the Earth in safety, that we should do everything we can to guarantee this right, and we can do it while preserving our own ability to secure the safety of our troops as they protect freedom around the world. These steps will make a major dent. We are working hard, and we intend to keep going until the job is done.

Thank you.

North and South Korea

Q. Does that mean the U.S. will not be represented at Ottawa? And how much threat is there of a famine-stricken North Korea being able to invade South Korea? I mean, aren't they starving to death?

The President. Well, first of all, we've done everything we could to prevent them from starving to death, you know. I've strongly supported humanitarian food aid to the North Koreans. But frankly, it depends on how you read the risk. I mean, the tension between the two Koreas is still there. They have a million troops there. And my elemental experience in human psychology—and I think a lot of our experts in military strategies agree that sometimes people are most dangerous when they feel most threatened and most helpless, most frustrated.

So I would just say to you, the fact that they have had some food problems does not in any way, in my mind, mitigate the risk. And anybody who's ever been to the DMZ and who has ever driven from Seoul to the DMZ and seen how short it is and has seen a million—you know, the numbers of troops there, and you see our people up there in those outposts and how few they are—and again I say, these mines are put along the DMZ in clearly marked areas to make

sure that no children will walk across them. There is no place like it in the world.

And let me also say, this is not a unilateral American presence there. We are there under an armistice agreement that proceeded from the authority of the United Nations to conduct the Korean war in the first place and then to have the armistice. We are there fulfilling the worldwide community's responsibility to preserve the peace and safety there.

And it's very easy if you're not one of those Americans in uniform up there, saying, "Oh, well, this will never happen. They'll never do it." But you could move a million people into Seoul pretty quickly. And no one I know believes that under present circumstances, with the hostilities that still exist between the two countries, that we could do anything to stop that if we didn't have the strong deterrent of the landmines that are in that very carefully marked field there.

United States Action Against Landmines

Q. Sir, does it pain you to be in the company of Russia and China, Iran, Iraq—other countries that won't be signing in Ottawa?

The President. No, we're not in their company. It pains me that for whatever reason—and I understand—I have a lot of sympathy with a lot of these countries in Ottawa, that were in Oslo. I have a lot of sympathy with the countries that have themselves had a lot of people killed from landmines. But the argument that I have tried to make to them is that what we really have to do—we will never solve this problem until we get the producers, the people that are making these landmines, to stop making them, stop selling them, and stop using them. That's what we have to do. And I believe the United States is in a better position to work with the rest of the world to get that done than nearly any other country. But I don't feel that I'm in their company at all.

We unilaterally stopped producing, stopped selling, stopped using these landmines. We have unilaterally destroyed a million and a half of them. I imagine that no country in Oslo can make that claim. We're going to destroy another million and a half by 1999. I doubt that any country in Oslo can make that claim.

We have done everything we could. We have even said we are going to unilaterally give up our self-destruct landmines that do not—as far as I know, have not killed a single civilian or

maimed a single child anywhere in the world. And thousands of them have been tested. They all self-destructed when they were supposed to, except one that was an hour late.

So we are not in their company. I wish we could sign the Oslo agreement. I understand the difficulties of the countries involved and the emotional feelings surrounding this issue, but we have to have some time to deal with our challenge in Korea. And our antitank mines, we believe, are more effective than other countries' are, and there is an explicit exception for antitank mines that is written in such a way that doesn't cover ours. And I could never agree not to have antitank weapons, given the kinds of combat that our people are likely to be in, in any kind of projected scenario, over the next 20 to 30 years. I couldn't do it. We have to have some resolution of that. It would just be—that would be completely irresponsible for me to let our people be in combat situations without an antitank device that I thought was the most effective available.

Proposed Tobacco Legislation

Q. Will you ask Congress to stay in session in order to pass tobacco legislation?

The President. Well, let me just say, what I will ask Congress to do is to get into this now, bring all the parties together, have hearings as quickly as possible, and move as quickly as possible. I think the most important thing is that we make it clear that this process is not dead. It's taken new life. It's gone on to a new step. Congress has to resolve all these jurisdictional questions—how many committees in the House, how many committees in the Senate, who does what. But I'm going to work with them. I hope to give new life, a new impetus to this by the announcement I made today, and I think we did.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Sir, you have the Secretary of State with you. What do you think are the next steps for the Middle East peace process, and what impact will that have on your remarks to the U.N. on Monday?

The President. Well, first of all, I think she did a superb job in the Middle East with a very difficult circumstance. And I have nothing—I could sit here until midnight and not give a better synopsis than the one line she used in the Middle East where she said, "The good news is we made some small steps, but we need to take big steps." And that is my—that Secretary Albright distilled in that one phrase where I think we are.

But Mr. Berger and the Secretary and all of us, we're putting our heads together. We're going to do everything we can to keep pushing this. And I have seen some encouraging signs in the last couple of days that all the parties realize that they have special responsibilities to get this thing back on track. And we're going to look at our options and do everything we can.

But I also say what I've said from the beginning: If you look at all the good things that happened early on in my administration in the Middle East, the United States facilitated them but did not create them. In the end, the peace is for the parties there to make, and they have to have the vision and the courage and the strength to do it. But we're going to do everything we can to try to create the conditions in which they can succeed and to try to protect them from the downsides if they do take risks for peace.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:30 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Message to the Congress Reporting on the National Emergency With Respect to Iran

September 17, 1997

To the Congress of the United States:

I hereby report to the Congress on developments concerning the national emergency with

respect to Iran that was declared in Executive Order 12957 of March 15, 1995, and matters relating to the measures in that order and in