

Europe; and Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, Commander, U.S. Army, Europe. The President also referred to the NATO-led Implementation Force in Bosnia (IFOR) and the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia (SFOR).

Remarks to the Troops in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina

December 22, 1997

The President. Thank you for your laid-back welcome. [*Laughter*] Thank you, General Ellis. Ladies and gentlemen, I have come here with a great delegation of Americans, including the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Army, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe; many other distinguished military officials and officials from the White House; and a truly astonishing delegation from Congress, of both Democrats and Republicans together.

We have Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska; Senator Joe Biden of Delaware; Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut; Senator Dan Coats of Indiana; Representative John Kasich of Ohio; Representative Jack Murtha of Pennsylvania; Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri; Representative Elijah Cummings of Maryland; Representative Mac Collins of Georgia—anybody from Georgia? [*Cheers*] Representative John Boehner of Ohio; and Representative Steve Buyer of Indiana—anybody here from Indiana? [*Cheers*] I'm proud of all of them.

And let me say, we came here for two reasons today. We came here, first of all, to say thank you to all of you, to say what you are doing for your country is a good and noble thing. You are doing it well, and we are grateful. We know it's tough to be away from home at Christmas time. We know it's hard to be away from your families. But you are doing something profoundly important.

The second reason we came here was so that we could go to Sarajevo and see the leaders of the Muslims, the Croats, and the Serbs, and tell them that they made an agreement at Dayton that we are doing our dead-level best to help them enforce, and they promised that they would live and work together and build one country without ethnic prejudice or unfairness to any group; that we would not only end a war, that they would build a peace together; and that we in the United States were deter-

mined not only to do our part but we expected them to do theirs. And these good people in Bosnia, these little children, who have suffered so much, they deserve leaders who honor the commitments they made at Dayton and build a better, brighter future.

And we wanted to do that with one voice, without regard to party. So I want to say a special word of thanks to Senator Bob Dole and Mrs. Elizabeth Dole for coming. And I would like to give—Senators talk like this all the time; I don't quite know how to do it, but I think this is called yielding a portion of my time. I'd like for Bob Dole to come up here and say a few words.

[*At this point, former Senator Bob Dole made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you, Senator Dole. Thank you for not reading my speech. [*Laughter*] I like the one you gave.

Let me first of all say that I'm delighted to be here with the Iron Soldiers of the 1st Armored Division, with the 2d Armored Cavalry and all of the other units of Task Force Eagle. But I also want the people back home to know, through our friends in the press who are here, that there are a lot of National Guardsmen and Reservists here. And I thank all of you.

Now, Hillary and I, along with the phone time that you all get—I hope you enjoy that hour on the telephone. I know you're all sitting there thinking, "Am I going to use it all at one time or am I going to divide it up? Am I going to call four people or just one?" Decisions, decisions!

We were able to bring some school supplies over here with us, some toys as well. And I know you're going to be able to distribute those to children here who are needy and deserving. I want to thank especially Lieutenant Colonel Mark Little, who started the program to take care of these children who have been so hurt

in this war and who's given thousands of Americans the chance to serve through it.

A few moments ago we gave some of those presents to some Bosnian children, and I wish all of you could have been there with me. I wish all of you could have been with Hillary and Chelsea and me earlier today when we sat around a table in a coffee shop in Sarajevo and talked to a dozen young people, Muslims, Serbs, Croats, all from Bosnia. And I said, "You know, I'm going to see our soldiers today, and if we could do one more thing for your country, what would you like us to do?" And every one of them, it was like a chorus, they said, "Stay. Stay just a little longer. We can't—we're not ready yet, but the young people want peace. We don't understand why we're supposed to hate each other. We don't want that kind of future. Please stay."

And then we walked outside this coffee shop in Sarajevo, and there were three American soldiers, who happened to be from Virginia across the street, standing in front of a church. And Hillary and Chelsea went over there, and I got out, and I went over and shook hands with them. And they said, "We are really proud to be here because we are doing a good thing." You are doing a good thing, and I hope you are proud to be here. America is proud of you.

I also want to tell you that I have enjoyed sort of sampling your life, walking in the mud—[laughter]—imagining what it would be like to spend 6 months in those beautiful tents. [Laughter] I like those Kevlar seats in the Humvee. [Laughter] I have heard all about the wonderful cuisine. We're going to have dinner, and who knows, maybe I'll even get near-beer and vegetable lasagna. [Laughter]

We're having a good time, and we're all cheering. But I want you to be serious with me just for a minute. And when you go to bed tonight, and you wonder what you're doing here, I want you to think about this. These people, for nearly 4 years in this country, fought the bloodiest war in Europe since the end of World War II; massive numbers of people displaced from their homes, huge number of children made orphans, lots of young people walking around without limbs, horrible things happened to people. And because of what you and our other allies did—our NATO allies and our allies from Russia, from Poland, from other non-NATO countries—you know that the country has stayed on the path of peace instead of going

back into bloodshed. Without you, that would not have happened. Without you, the warring parties never would have disengaged, and more than—listen to this—more than 370,000 of them were combatant troops. They've gone back to civilian life now. Without you, there would still be mortars and cannons firing. Now, more than 6,500 heavy weapons have been destroyed and the rest put under international supervision. Because of you, free and fair elections have been held. There is freedom of movement; police reform has begun. A lot of the airwaves now are filled with information instead of vicious, partisan hatred.

Bosnia is no longer the powder keg at the heart of Europe because of you. And I cannot thank you enough. Your children and your grandchildren will look back on this moment and know that you have done something not only of surpassing importance but something that is profoundly good.

We gave you a mission, and you delivered. So when you go to bed tonight, thank God that you were given the chance to do something like this. A lot of people live their whole lives and never ever, ever are able to give something so profoundly important to others as the gift you have given to the children of Bosnia. Thank you, and God bless you for it.

Let me also say that even though this has been a remarkably nonviolent mission, it has not been free of risks. I was thinking today coming here to Tuzla that in August a couple of years ago, when we were working on the peace process, we lost three remarkable people, Bob Frasure, Joe Kruzel, and Nelson Drew, who were part of our team trying to make a peace agreement. And their vehicle crumbled on a weak road, and they were killed in a horrible accident. We had a couple of other accidents on the road. We lost one soldier who was killed when he walked over to a mine and just kneeled down and started dealing with it.

But the most important thing I was thinking about today, from a purely personal point of view, is that it wasn't so very long ago that my good friend, the Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown, was here in Tuzla. He spent the last day of his life here before his plane crashed. And I want to tell you, I've seen the pictures. He had a very happy last day because he was here with the men and women of the United States Armed Forces, glorying in and participating in this mission.

I also want to say to you that in spite of all you have done, I think it is imperative that we not stop until the peace here has a life of its own, until it can endure without us. We have worked too hard to let this go.

I thank the Members of Congress from both parties who have come here out of concern for you and your work. I want to say a special work of thanks again to Senator Dole. He said something to me on the phone the other day; he says so many things that are funny and pithy that if I start stealing his lines without attribution, I'll get in trouble. So I want to tell you—he said this to me. We were talking about Bosnia, and he said, "Look, it's worked." He said, "I didn't necessarily agree with everything you did, but on the whole this thing has worked. And this is like being in a football game, and we're ahead. It's the fourth quarter. Who wants to walk off the field and forfeit the game? We ought to stay here, finish the game, and take home the win for the world and for freedom." And that's exactly what I intend to do, thanks to what you have proven that America can stand for and that we can accomplish. And again I say, thank you very, very much.

One other thing, just for my information. How many of you here are on your second tour here? [*Cheers*] I met a young man today; I said, "How long have you been in the Army?" He said, "I've been in the Army 5 years." And he said, "The last time I saw you, I was in Haiti." He said in 5 years he's done two tours in Haiti and one tour in Bosnia. Just sort of laying around, you know. [*Laughter*]

I don't think many Americans understand exactly how deep the burdens are on our men and women in uniform today. Because we have downsized the military in the aftermath of the cold war, when we take on these responsibilities, it is very hard for a lot of people. We rotate these missions a little more rapidly than we

would like to. We draw out Reservists and Guardsmen more often than we would like to. But you have always done what you were asked to do. And you have always delivered for America.

So on this Christmas season I ask the American people, who will see this on television tonight or tomorrow, to remember what we owe to the soldiers, the sailors, the airmen, the marines of the Armed Forces at home and around the world, in the Persian Gulf, on the DMZ in Korea, here in Bosnia. Our Nation is at peace and our people are secure because of you. Our country can grow stronger and more prosperous. Our people can live out their dreams. Our children can sleep well because of you. Your sacrifice makes this possible.

I think that one of the things that you may wonder is whether people back home know you're here and appreciate what you're doing. Since you've done it so well, there aren't any visible problems, and you make it look easy.

I got a fascinating letter the other day from the mother of a soldier stationed in Camp Eagle, Specialist Christina Campbell. And the mother said, "So as you get busy spreading holiday cheer, don't forget the peacekeepers and those they hold dear." And Specialist Campbell actually wrote a poem. So I want to tell you, I took just a little bit out of it, because I want you to know that at this Christmas you are in the hearts of the American people. And her words are your words. Listen to these; she says, "No, this is not our soil, and it's not our own fight. But if you've seen what I have, then you know that it's right."

God bless you all, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:30 p.m. at Club 21. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Larry R. Ellis, USA, commander, 1st Armored Division.

Message on the Observance of Christmas, 1997 December 22, 1997

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Christmas.

At this time of year, when the nights grow longer and often colder, our lives are brightened

and our hearts warmed by the lights of Christmas. So much light surrounds our memories and celebration of Christmas: candlelight in the windows, colored lights twinkling on the tree,