

Remarks Announcing the Nomination of General Henry H. Shelton To Be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and an Exchange With Reporters July 17, 1997

The President. Good morning. Mr. Vice President, Secretary Cohen, National Security Adviser Berger, General Shalikashvili, members of the Joint Chiefs, General and Mrs. Shelton. Let me begin by saying that it has been my great honor for these last 4 years to work with General John Shalikashvili as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. When he departs at the end of September for his return to civilian life, he will have spent nearly four decades standing up for our interests and our ideals. At a later time I will have more to say about Shali's extraordinary service to our Nation, but today I have to thank him on behalf of the American people and the President. He has done a magnificent job. We thank you, sir.

Gen. John M. Shalikashvili. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I also want to thank Vice Chairman General Ralston, the Joint Chiefs, the other commanders in chief for all they have done and will do working with Secretary Cohen to ensure that we continue to have the finest military in the world and that America remains the world's greatest force for peace, security, and freedom.

Today I am pleased to announce my decision to nominate General Hugh Shelton as the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Over more than three decades of service to our Nation, he has distinguished himself as a decorated soldier, an innovative thinker, a superb commander. From Vietnam to Desert Storm, he has proven his skill and courage in combat, and through long experiences in special operations, he also brings to this job a unique perspective in addressing the broad range of challenges we face on the brink of a new century, from warfighting to peacekeeping, from conventional threats to newer threats like the spread of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.

General Shelton's extensive experience in joint military operations and building coalitions with other nations give him invaluable tools to serve as Chairman in our more interdependent world. Many of you recall his skill and professionalism in Operation Uphold Democracy, which restored hope and freedom to Haiti. As the Commanding

General of the 18th Airborne Corps, General Shelton played a decisive role in planning the operation. As joint task force commander, he oversaw our last-second shift from a forced entry to a peaceful arrival. And as the first commander of the U.S.-led multinational force in Haiti, his qualities personified the best of America, strong and skillful with great sensitivity and no nonsense. Our mission in Haiti was a model of effectiveness, flexibility, and safety. It proved that our military's will to defend peace is as great as its ability to prevail in war. And thanks in large measure to General Shelton's determined leadership, America got a tough job done and helped the people of Haiti return to democracy's road.

Most important, General Shelton has always shown an exceptional concern for the men and women under his command. Their safety and well-being are his number one priority in times of peace as well as war. He's led a platoon, a company, a battalion, a brigade, a division, a corps, a unified command. But he always remembers the individual soldier, sailor, airman, or marine. General Shelton has the knowledge, judgment, and experience to advise Secretary Cohen and me on the very best way to defend our interests and to protect our men and women in uniform. I believe he is the right person for the job, the right person for our troops, for our security, the right man for our country, and I'm proud to nominate him to help to lead our military into the 21st century.

General.

[At this point, General Shelton made brief remarks.]

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, one of the great situations facing any new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is whether or not the troops will be coming home from Bosnia next summer as scheduled. Could you perhaps clarify your position on this? The American people really I think would like to know this.

The President. We expect the SFOR mission to end on schedule, as we have repeatedly said. We also know that there will be continuing work

that has to be done in virtually every area of the Dayton accords. The question of what, if any, role should be pursued by NATO after that in a different way and to what extent we should be a part of it has simply not been decided yet. But I think it's fair to say that none of us want to see Bosnia revert to what happened before we started this, and none of us want to see the extraordinary efforts which had to be made by the United States and our allies in NATO have to be made all over again a few years from now because Bosnia goes back into war and we all watch the same horrible, horrible scenes on television that we went through once.

We have been able to pursue our mission there with an ever more reduced presence. Today, the United States forces, I think, are about 25 percent of the total number there, with a remarkable amount of effectiveness and with virtually no casualties, as you know. There was a stabbing yesterday, but we have no conclusive evidence that it was related in any way to the arrest of the people who are wanted for trial on war crimes.

"Mir" Space Station

Q. [Inaudible]—the *Mir* critical now, and are you giving second thoughts to ever sending another American to be on the *Mir* spacecraft?

The President. Well, when I came to the office this morning I got a briefing about it, and as far as we know right now, they have gotten control of things and there seems to be no immediate crisis. But I have no—I'm not sure that I have all the information I need. We have the—that's the basic report I have now, and it's too soon after the incident for me to draw a conclusion about the question you ask. I can't say that we would not continue cooperation based on what little I've heard this morning; I just don't know enough.

TWA Flight 800 Tragedy

Q. Mr. President, on this anniversary of the TWA Flight 800 disaster, are you disappointed that a solution has not been found to what caused the crash, and what efforts do you think need to be redoubled in order to find a solution?

The President. Of course I'm disappointed that we don't conclusively know, but I'm not sure what else we can do. This is an issue that I have had a great deal of personal interest

in. The Vice President, who as you know has done an enormous amount of work on our behalf for airline safety, has spent a lot of time on. I don't know what else we can do. If anybody has any ideas about what else we can do to try to definitively put this issue behind us, I would be happy to explore them. But it's been a very frustrating experience for me not to be able to know 100 percent what caused that crash.

Q. There are some who say—

Boeing-McDonnell Douglas Merger

Q. Are you determined to make sure the Boeing-McDonnell Douglas deal goes through even if it means a trade war with Europe?

The President. Let me say I'm concerned about what appear to be the reasons for the objection to the Boeing-McDonnell Douglas merger by the European Union, and I think that it would be unfortunate if we had a trade standoff with them. But we have a system for managing this through the World Trade Organization, and we have some options ourselves when actions are taken by Europe in this regard. I don't know that Airbus—the Europeans have more people living on their continent than we do in the United States, and I don't believe Airbus has an effective competitor in Europe. So I have mixed—quite a lot of concern about what the Europeans have said. But I think there is an orderly process for our handling this, and I think we had better let the orderly process play itself out before we talk ourselves into a trade war. I think we're a long way from that, and I think we'll probably avoid it.

Thank you very much.

Joint Chiefs of Staff Nomination

Q. Do you have any reason to believe that General Shelton will survive confirmation, Mr. President?

The President. Yes. I think—I have reason to believe that General Shelton can survive just about anything.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:55 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to General Shelton's wife, Carolyn.