

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters March 24, 1994

Air Collision at Pope Air Force Base

The President. Hello. I just wanted to make a brief statement. This morning, I called General Shelton at Fort Bragg and General Floyd at Pope Air Force Base to personally express my sorrow and condolences because of the tragedy yesterday, and to thank them, and through them, the members of our armed services who do the work that they do.

As I said in my statement yesterday, it's sometimes easy for those of us who enjoy the protection of the United States military to forget that it is a dangerous business, even in peace time, because of the training which must be carried out. And I think the hearts and thoughts and prayers of all Americans go out to the families of those who were killed yesterday, those who were injured, and all of those who were involved in this tragedy. We wish them only the best, and we are all thinking of them.

Assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio

I'd also like to say a brief word about the tragic murder of Mr. Colosio in Mexico yesterday. As you know, I called President Salinas last night, and we had a conversation about it which was entirely personal. And again, the United States, all of us, particularly the Vice President and I and Secretary Cisneros and others who had met Mr. Colosio, feel a great sense of loss and feel the pain of the Mexican people and the pain of his family.

The United States has done what we could do today to try to support the people of Mexico and the Government by making it clear that we think that the country's institutions are fundamentally strong. There was a brief delay in the trading of Mexican securities today to give the investors the opportunity to find out the facts in the hope that we would avoid any undue movement there. That delay lasted somewhere around 30 minutes or an hour. And I think it did have a good, salutary effect to make, just to make sure that the investors have all the facts and were not under any misapprehension about what had occurred. And it appears that things are proceeding normally there. So our best wishes go out to the Mexican people and

our grief and our condolences and our prayers to them in this terrible time of loss.

Mexico

Q. Mr. President, are there steps the United States Government can or should take to try to make sure that there's stability in Mexico?

The President. Well, what we can do and what I think we should have done, first of all, is to take the steps we took on the trading. Secondly, I did talk to Secretary Bentsen last night to make sure that if there was serious trading in Mexican currencies, that we could try to help to stabilize that.

But, as you know, their financial institutions were all closed down today. So they took that step, and we'll just have to see whether anything else happens on that regard tomorrow. But I think things will settle down here. And I think fundamentally they are in sound shape. And I hope that will be the case. We'll have to wait and see what happens tomorrow.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, what did you tell the American Jewish leaders today about the status of a united Jerusalem?

The President. I told them that the position—I told them what I've always told you in public. I'll tell you the exact words I used. I said, "My position has not changed on that issue. But my position is also that the United States and other countries should refrain from intervening in these peace talks between the parties themselves. And part of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO was that the disposition of that issue would be a so-called final status issue to be resolved at the end of the talks. And I have respected that process." So I have made it clear that the United States has not changed its position. The way we handled the resolution on the Hebron massacre in the U.N. gave us the opportunity to make that clear again. But we are trying to get these peace talks going, and we are going to let the parties make their decisions for the future of the Mid-

dle East on their own, and we are going to do everything we can to facilitate it.

News Conference

Q. What do you hope to accomplish in your press conference tonight?

The President. Basically, I'm going to make a report to the American people about what we're trying to do up here, about the work we're doing on the crime bill, on health care, on a number of other important issues. And if I don't

get to the Hill now, I'll be behind the curve on health care. So I've got to go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for Capitol Hill. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Henry H. Shelton, USA, Commanding General, 18th Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg; and Brig. Gen. Bobby O. Floyd, USAF, 23d Wing Commander, Pope Air Force Base.

The President's News Conference March 24, 1994

The President. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Yesterday we were reminded that protecting our democracy and expanding its promise around the world can be costly and dangerous. Here at home we mourn the loss of the servicemen in the tragic aircraft accident at Pope Air Force Base, and we pray for a speedy recovery for those who were injured. This tragedy reminds us that the men and women who serve in the military put their lives at risk in the service of our Nation.

In Mexico, an assassin killed Luis Donaldo Colosio, the Presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. We send our condolences and our prayers to his family. And I urge the Mexican people at this difficult time to continue their strides toward economic and political reform and progress.

With the Congress beginning its Easter recess tomorrow, this is a good time to assess the real work we are getting done on behalf of the American people. We're moving forward on our economic plan. The budget now moving through Congress, when passed, will give us 3 consecutive years of deficit reduction for the first time since Harry Truman was President. In 1995, we'll have the lowest budget deficit as a percentage of our annual income of any of the major industrialized countries. A recovering economy produced 2 million jobs last year, and we're on track to create 2 million more in '94.

Around the world, America's efforts have helped to bring much needed calm to Sarajevo and led to an important political accord between the Bosnian Muslims and Croats. Our call for restraint has helped to start talks again the Mid-

dle East. We will continue our efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear program and to seek progress on human rights in China, working to build a more positive relationship with that very important nation. This Friday, a week ahead of schedule, our troops will return home from Somalia. Because of their courageous efforts, Somalia can now build its own future, a step it made in the right direction today with the accord between the leaders of the two largest factions in that country.

Since we came here, our country has been moving in the right direction. Just today, the House of Representatives passed our legislation to limit the influence of lobbyists. Our administration is completing work on a comprehensive welfare reform proposal. We have presented to the Congress our very important reemployment proposal, to change the unemployment system to provide immediate retraining to those who lose their jobs. In a few days, with bipartisan support, the country will have an education reform law that sets national standards for our public schools. In a few weeks, Congress will pass a crime bill and put more police on the street, tougher gun laws on the books, and make "three strikes and you're out" the law of the land. Speaker Foley assured me last night that the crime bill will be item number one on the agenda of the House when it returns to work.

And in a few months we will succeed in passing health care reform. Just yesterday the House Subcommittee on Health passed legislation to provide health security for every American. And while there will be lots of twists and turns in the legislative process, this year Congress will