

May 31 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1995

of biological and chemical weapons; to keep our military flexible and strong. These must be the cornerstones of our program to build a safer America at a time when threats to our security have no respect for boundaries and when the boundaries between those threats are disappearing.

Abroad, as at home, we must measure the success of our efforts by one simple standard: Have we made the lives of the American people safer? Have we made the future for our children more secure?

Let me say to this class, I know that the rewards of serving on the front lines of our foreign policy may seem distant and uncertain at times. Thirty-four years ago, President Kennedy said, "When there is a visible enemy to fight, the tide of patriotism runs high. But when there is a long, slow struggle with no immediate visible foe, your choice will seem hard indeed." Your choice, your choice, ladies and gentlemen, to take on the problems and possibilities of this time, to engage the world, not to run from it, is the right choice.

As you have learned here at the Academy, it demands sacrifice. In the years ahead, you will be asked to travel a long way from home, to be away from your loved ones for long stretches of time, to face dangers we perhaps cannot yet even imagine. These are the burdens you have willingly agreed to bear for your country, its safety, and its long-term security.

Go forth, knowing that the American people support you, that they admire your dedication. They are grateful for your service. They are counting on you, the class of '95, to lead us into the 21st century, and they believe you truly do represent the best of America.

Good luck, and Godspeed.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. at Falcon Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Paul Stein, USAF, Superintendent, and Brig. Gen. John D. Hopper, Jr., USAF, Commandant of Cadets, U.S. Air Force Academy; Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman, USAF, Air Force Chief of Staff; and Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado.

Interview With the United States Air Force News in Colorado Springs May 31, 1995

Q. Sir, thanks for letting us have the interview, first. Could you give me just your impressions after giving the speech at the Air Force Academy? What are your thoughts about our next generation of military leaders?

The President. Well, I was terribly impressed with them. You know, I stood up there and shook hands with every one of those young people when they came across to get their diplomas. I talked to many of them, and I looked them all over pretty good, and I feel a lot better about my country. I think every American would feel an enormous sense of pride and confidence in our future if our people, if all of our people could have seen what I saw today.

Q. Quality of life is a major concern in the military today. Military members spend a lot of time away from their families. Housing is a problem. Depending on who you talk to, you get different quotes of how far the military trails their civilian counterparts. What can you do to

assure the military people that the military is a good career? What incentives can you offer?

The President. Let's talk about the quality of life issues, apart from pay, just for a moment. One of the things that I have done since I have been President is to go back to Congress on a couple of occasions to try to get more funds to fund quality of life improvements, to improve the housing, to improve family supports like child care centers, to do the kinds of things that would make the military more attractive to stay in, and to make it more family-friendly, because you know a majority of our enlisted personnel now are married. And I think that's very important.

I am, frankly, reassured that the new Congress, even though we're going to have to cut a lot of spending, has committed to maintain the defense budget that I have laid out and also continue to support my request for extra funds for quality of life improvements.

I visit a large number of bases every year, and whenever I have time, I try to talk to not

only our uniformed personnel but some of the spouses, and when possible, even some of the children, about what the quality of life is like and how we're doing. So I can tell you that I think the Congress, and I know the President, we are committed to trying to address these issues and improve them. In the years when the drawdown was so quick, from '87 forward, I think some of the quality of life issues did suffer, the quality of housing and some of the other supports. But we're going to have an opportunity to try to address that, and I'm committed to doing it.

Q. You touched on the increased OPS tempo, and we will get to the pay, but is the drawdown over? I mean, can we say that the drawdown is—

The President. Yes, it's leveling out. And the other thing I wanted to say about the quality of life is that so many people are being asked to do so many more missions away from home and more different things. That is inevitable; that's part of the changing nature of our security mission in the world. But we are looking at using more reserves, more guardsmen to help us.

I just got back from Haiti not very long ago, and I was quite encouraged by the success of the reservists and the guardsmen in Haiti, how happy they seemed to be to be there and how it helps to alleviate overly stringing out our full-time personnel. So that's another thing we're going to look at.

We've got a real problem with AWACS teams with that, as you probably know. And we're going to look at that as well as the possibility of using some reservists in fulfilling our AWACS missions.

Q. The drawdown, are we at—

The President. The drawdown, we're about done. We're leveling out now. And we're going to be able to—we're going to have to manage it very carefully from here on out, because we are committed still to maintaining throughout this century a level of force in Europe somewhere around 75,000 to 100,000. We have obligations in Korea which we certainly can't shrink from now, particularly as we're trying to work through this difficult issue of the North Korean nuclear capacity. And we're also heavily committed in other parts of Asia in ways that I think would be a mistake to walk away from.

And then, of course, a lot of our forces that are based here in the United States are being

used all around the world in different ways. We have obligations in the Atlantic and in the Adriatic related to Bosnia and NATO generally, and we have to be available to do the kinds of things that we had to do in Haiti, the kind of things we did in Rwanda.

So I believe we're just about leveled out. And I think it's important that we not go too low. We don't want to repeat the mistake that we've made after every single conflict in the 20th century. We went down too fast. We did it after World War I; we did it after World War II; we did it after Korea; we did it after Vietnam. And we went down too far.

I think that the length of the cold war has given—and the experiences, the bitter experience of trying to rebuild after Vietnam has given our current crop of military leaders and our political leadership a little better historic memory. And I think there's a real sense of pride that the United States clearly has the finest military in the world, the most well-motivated, the most—the best trained, the best equipped, and in many ways the most talented. And I don't think anybody wants to do anything to undermine that. So—and I think all of us who know anything about it know that we have stretched you about as thin as we can.

Q. How do you attract the kind of people that it takes to maintain that best equipped, best Air Force, especially with the gap in the pay?

The President. Well, I think the—I think—first of all, let's talk about the pay. We now have the funds from Congress to now resume pay increases and to keep it up at whatever the legal level is. And if Congress chooses to raise the legal level—that is, they choose to let us do a little more percentage-wise per year—we'll even be able to keep up with that as long as it's not too much. But now we at least know we can fund pay increases every year up to the legally authorized limit, which is a good thing.

And I think what—most people that join the military know they'll never get rich, but they want to know that they're not going to be impoverished, and they want to have a predictable income. So my goal here is to have a predictable income that goes up on a regular basis so that if you join or if you reenlist, you'll know what the 5-year trend is going to be, for example.

In addition to that, I think it's important to maintain the educational benefits, both the

Montgomery GI bill benefits and to emphasize what I think a lot of people get out of the military, which is that they can do exciting and interesting things and they're almost continually being educated and trained. I mean, if every major company worked on developing the capacity of its people the way our armed services do, we would be even more powerful economically than we are.

So I think that—I think the mission is what really attracts people, and knowing that if they join the United States military forces, they'll be the absolute best in the world at what they do and they'll be doing something wonderful for their country.

But I believe that maintaining the quality of life issues and keeping the training and readiness up and making sure that people have the chance to be continuously retrained for different things, those issues—based on what the service personnel I have visited with in Europe and Asia, in the Pacific, and all over the continental United States, based on what all those folks have told me, I would say those are the major issues.

Q. Mission: what is the mission, do you see, in the future for the military? Are we going to be a security force for the world, or do you see it turning more to looking inside our own borders? Or is it going to be a happy medium of that?

The President. Well, I think that we will do more and more things in cooperation with others, just by the nature of it. I think we will be working with the United Nations; we'll be working with NATO; we'll be working with the Partnership For Peace. I think we'll be called upon in small numbers to—just because our prestige means so much—to help do things. We had 10 personnel, I think only 10, that were involved in trying to help resolve the border conflict between Ecuador and Peru. But it made a huge difference that a small number of American military personnel were willing to be part of a bigger unit. And we felt comfortable that our people were not going to be put in harm's way by doing that.

So I think we'll be doing a wide variety of things. But our fundamental mission will be, first and foremost, as long as there is a threat to the United States from nuclear powers, we will be arrayed so that we can protect against that threat. Secondly, we will be deployed so that we can protect our treaty alliances, the peo-

ple to whom we have sworn mutual security commitments. And we have those obligations, and we will honor them. Thirdly, we will try to use our military resources so that we can reduce the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of terrorism to our people and the threat of disruptions in other countries which could affect our security. That's what we did in Haiti, for example, where we were able to restore democracy there. And then when we can perform a humanitarian mission with an acceptable limitation on the mission, an acceptable level of risk, and we have enough control over the circumstances that we have to be involved in, as we did in Rwanda, I think we still should be prepared to do that.

I think that we did a lot of good in Somalia. We had the most painful experience that I've had personally as Commander in Chief there. But our people did a lot of good. They saved hundreds of thousands of lives. But because of the relationship between the United States and the United Nations, we were in an untenable position there for a period of months, and we paid a terrible price for it. But we learned from it. And in Rwanda, we went in under different circumstances and again saved countless thousands of lives, in ways that again helped the security of the United States because of what it did for our relationship to all the African countries.

So there will be a lot of things we have to do. But we have these core security missions that I mentioned first and foremost that we must continue to maintain.

Q. Finally, sir, you've basically got the attention of the entire Air Force. Is there anything you would like to pass along, add, that we didn't cover today?

The President. I would like to say, first of all, a simple thank-you to the members of the Air Force for their service and for their dedication. I realize that these last few years have been very difficult for people who have been through them with downsizing. There's never been anything like it, as far as I know, in the public or the private sector, for a successful enterprise to come out on its feet the way our military has. And I'm very grateful, not only as President but as an American citizen.

Secondly, I would like to say that I and my entire administration are committed to trying to improve the quality of life, to trying to keep the pay coming, to trying to make the cir-

cumstances as good as they possibly can be, that the future will be more exciting, more diverse, and therefore a little more strenuous in some ways than perhaps the past has been, but we will do our best to make the Air Force an attractive career for dedicated, committed American patriots. And as long as the people

out there are doing their best, we owe it to all of them to do our best. And that's what I'm committed to doing.

NOTE: The interview began at 2:25 p.m. in the Tea House at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Remarks to the Community at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs May 31, 1995

Thank you very much. It's wonderful to see all of you, all of the service personnel, all of your families, all the kids who are here. I thank you for coming. And I just want you to know I kept the rain away. They thanked me at the Air Force Academy, and I said, "You know, when you're President, you get blamed for so many things you didn't do; it's okay to take credit for a thing or two you didn't do, either." [Laughter] But I'm very, very glad to be here, glad to see all of you. I want to thank Chief Master Sergeant Sue Turner for her introduction. If she were running for office, she'd get a lot of votes just on being brief, I think. [Laughter] And I thank her for what she said. I'm glad to be here with your Governor, Roy Romer, General Ashy, and others.

Earlier this month—I want to say something serious, if I might, for a moment—our Nation lost six patriotic reservists of the 302d Airlift Wing based here at Peterson. Today, I, as their President, just want to remember them with my respects, my gratitude, my thanks. And I'd like to ask if we could all just have a brief moment of silence in their memory, please.

[At this point, a moment of silence was observed.]

Thank you very much.

Like the Rockies, the men and women here of Peterson stand tall and strong and proud. You're always ready. You are the sentinels of our air sovereignty. You're the home base for our Space Command and for NORAD. You are our eyes in space.

I did a couple of interviews yesterday with some Colorado newspapers, and one of them asked me if we still needed eyes in space since

the cold war was over. And I said, the last time I checked we had more stuff up in space every day; I thought we needed more eyes, not fewer. I thank you for what you're doing.

You have made America safer. You have made the world safer. And as we face the new challenges of the 21st century, you know as well as I do that the American military will continue to play a vital role, not only in the defense of our freedom and our security but also in advancing the cause of democracy and freedom throughout the world.

We have seen painfully in the United States in the last several months, first at the World Trade Center and then at the awful incident at Oklahoma City, that our security can be threatened in a global economy with open borders and lots of personal freedom here at home as well as beyond our borders. We had those two terrorist incidents: One of them occurred from people I believe were deeply disturbed and way off track within our country; another occurred because this is a free country and people can come and go here, and people who bore us ill will and wanted to destroy a symbol of American democracy came into this country and set that bomb at the World Trade Center.

I'm also happy to tell you that other sentinels of freedom working to thwart terrorism stopped two terrible incidents that were planned, one to blow up another bomb in New York and another that was designed to take some aircraft out of the air, flying out of the West Coast going over the Pacific.

But we now know that the security threats we'll face in the future, rooted in terrorism and organized crime and drug trafficking, are closely tied to things the military has had to work on