

I am committed to lowering trade barriers between us, both to speed recovery and to build a free-trade area in this region that will benefit all the citizens of all the countries. I am committed to a common struggle against violence and drug trafficking and drug abuse, to shared responsibility for the care of our environment, for the education of our children, for the health of our people. I am committed to justice and to institutions which will maintain it. I am committed to fair immigration laws, fairly enforced, and especially to the principle that we should treat people from Central America equitably, whatever their country of origin, and recognize the special circumstances of those nations that Hurricane Mitch hit hardest.

Our new partnership has made quite a bit of progress since our last summit in Costa Rica. We still face daunting challenges. But now we face them with a unique sense of solidarity and a common commitment to freedom, to democracy, to open markets, and to meeting the demands of our people for better schools, safer streets, wider opportunities.

Even before the United States was created, a North American poet, Anne Bradstreet, com-

plained about the harshness of our weather. But she added, "If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant." Well, Central America has had a long and difficult season, aggravated by the recent hurricanes, but we can truly rejoice that the springtime of renewal and rebuilding is here. The Sun shines on us today, in Guatemala and throughout this region. For all the problems that people face, we must never forget how far they have traveled, and we must never lose sight of the path that leads to a brighter tomorrow. We must go on that path together, to build a new American century for all the people of the Americas.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:36 a.m. in the courtyard at the Casa Santo Domingo. In his remarks, he referred to summit participants President Alvaro Arzu of Guatemala, President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua, President Carlos Roberto Flores of Honduras, President Armando Calderon Sol of El Salvador, President Miguel Angel Rodriguez of Costa Rica, President Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic, and Prime Minister Said Musa of Belize.

Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange With Reporters

March 11, 1999

The President. Good afternoon. President Aleman, thank you for your words and your leadership. President Arzu, thank you so much for bringing us to this magnificent place and for hosting this very valuable meeting. To all my fellow leaders of the Americas, I thank you for the examples you are setting within your countries and by working together.

As we see here in Guatemala and, indeed, in all the nations represented in this extraordinary region, they are blessed with natural and with man-made monuments of ancient grace and spectacular beauty. Now the people have built a new monument—also spectacular and, hopefully, just as enduring—the monument of peace.

Kosovo

Because of developments in Washington and in Europe, I hope my fellow leaders will forgive

me if I take my only opportunity today to appear before the press to say something about another area in which we are working for peace—in Kosovo, where a serious civil conflict has been occurring and where much bloodshed might still occur.

Today our House of Representatives in Washington is debating a resolution on the potential deployment of American troops. I hope the House will act in a way that supports our efforts to achieve a strong peace agreement. I have and will continue to work closely with the Congress as we seek to bring peace to Kosovo. As I have repeatedly said, a final decision on whether we would send our troops as part of a peace force depends upon the achievement of a genuine agreement, on an immediate cease-

fire, on rapid withdrawal of most Serbian security forces, and demilitarization of the insurgents.

Both sides must agree to a NATO force. Europe's troops must make up the great majority of the forces. And we must have a NATO strategy that includes a clear plan for bringing our forces home. If, and only if, these conditions are met, I strongly believe United States forces should contribute to securing the peace in Kosovo. We have a strong stake in bringing peace there, just as we have a strong stake in peace in Central America. If we don't end the conflict now, it will spread; and when it does, we will not be able to avoid participating in stopping it; and when we do, it will come at far greater risk and far greater cost.

Central America Summit

Now, let me talk a moment about what we have met about today, how to turn this region of peace and shared values into a region of joint endeavors and common progress. I have made it clear that the United States supports greater debt relief, and I outlined my proposal for that; that we support more open trade to create jobs and opportunity through an enhanced initiative of the Caribbean Basin, the countries of Central America and the Caribbean, and eventually through a free-trade area of the Americas.

We also discussed other economic issues: what can be done to increase investment in tourism, what can be done in the environment. Our United States Agency for International Development, I am pleased to say, will contribute another \$25 million to support CONCAUSA, the agreement we signed in 1994 in Costa Rica to promote environmental cooperation among us. This contribution will help the people of Central America to protect their forests and coastlands, to reduce industrial pollution, to fight climate change.

We talked a lot about immigration, as you might imagine. I reaffirmed my intention to support our immigration laws fairly and justly but to work strongly for the elimination of any disparities in our law so that they treat Central Americans equitably, whatever their country of origin.

We also spoke today about the danger of gangs and guns and drugs. In many ways, they represent the final stage of Central America's

internal conflicts. We talked about what we could do together to combat them.

Let me just say in closing that this has been a very moving trip for me, personally. When my wife came here a few months ago, in the aftermath of the hurricane, she came home and talked to me a lot about what she saw and what people were doing. But no description can adequately replace the personal experiences of what I have seen.

In Honduras and Nicaragua, I met people who were devastated, but undaunted, determined to rebuild in a way that reinforces the transformation of this region. In El Salvador, and today in Guatemala, I have been privileged to see two nations that have found the courage to face a painful past and move forward to build a truly hopeful future.

At this summit I have seen Central America's leaders working together for the future. And I have tried to demonstrate that for the future, beyond the service of my Presidency, America must be a partner and a friend, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is in our interest to do so.

We have never been closer to realizing the dream of a hemispheric community based on genuine respect and genuine partnership. Something great has happened here in Central America in the last decade. As we move out of the past and away from the damage of the hurricanes, we do so in a way that we are determined to see this area emerge from adversity, in a way that places all of us on higher ground. I am proud to have been given the chance to be a part of it.

Thank you very much.

Global Strategy for Central America

Q. Good afternoon to all the Presidents. My question is for the President of the United States, Mr. Clinton. What do you think of the statement by President Alvaro Arzu with regard to the need to have a global strategy, a long-term strategy for the Central American region?

The President. I think he's right about that. One of the things that I pointed out in our morning meeting is that Central America, for all of its economic difficulties, basically is being well managed. And I believe that if there were a way for all these leaders together to demonstrate to the world that they are determined to avoid the kinds of financial problems and economic problems, for example, that have

caused such trouble in Asia and, frankly, caused difficulties for all developing economies—caused the interest rates for funds even in Central America to go up—if there were a way for this region to say as a region, look, we know what caused those problems there; we’re not going to do that here; this is a good place to invest—then I believe not just the United States but people in Europe, people in South America, people in Asia would be far more likely to invest here, to bring Central America not just into a better partnership with the United States but with all the world in a way that would lift the lives of people here.

So I agree with President Arzu that there should be a global strategy. But I believe that because we’re neighbors, for the foreseeable future, for the next 50 years, our major economic relationship should be one with another. And that imposes special responsibilities on the United States, but it also gives us a lot of opportunities.

The President said to me, and I’d like to say to my fellow Americans not only here but those who might be listening to this press conference or who will hear the reports of it, that our trade with Central America far outstrips our trade with countries that are much, much larger than the combined population of Central America. And it has an enormous potential to benefit not just the people of this region but the people of the United States, as well.

U.S. Congress and Kosovo/Apologies for Past Administrations

Q. For President Clinton. Mr. President, particularly given that part of your reason for being down here is to express your regret and apologies for what past White Houses have done over the objections of Congress, can you please explain why it is that your administration has been so adamant about Congress not registering its opinion on the situation in Kosovo, and what exactly is your exit strategy if U.S. troops are sent over there?

The President. Well, first of all, Congress has a right to express its opinion on anything it likes. I have two things to say about it. One is, it’s premature. I do not believe that—until we know that we have maximized the chances for both sides to say yes to the peace agreement—it’s not at all clear that they will—I do not believe that the Congress should take any action that will, in effect, preempt the peace

process or encourage either side to say no to it. So I thought it was premature. I don’t object to Congress expressing its opinion on anything. That’s their job.

Secondly, every President has reserved the right to both receive the advice and consent and support or endure the opposition of Congress, but not to give up the constitutional responsibility to deploy United States forces in peacetime. And I think that my predecessors were right about that.

It’s not that—what I apologized for has nothing to do with the fact that there was a difference between the policy of the administration and the Congress in previous years, going back for decades, and including administrations of both parties. It is that the policy of the executive branch was wrong. And what we’re doing here is in the open; it’s not a secret.

What was your other question? Oh, the exit strategy. Well, the exit strategy should be defined by the missions. You will be able to see that we have an exit strategy if we define the missions properly—just as in Bosnia we defined the missions and we have cut, I think, reduced our troop strength by more than 70 percent now. And we continue to bring them down.

I’m in a sort of a double bind here, you know. We tried in Bosnia to give a date certain for when we thought we could withdraw, based on what the Pentagon said they believed would happen in cooperation with our other agencies. We turned out to be wrong. Then people said, “Well, maybe the President misled us about how long we would stay there.”

So we decided in Kosovo the right thing to do was to say what the benchmarks of the mission would be, and the Congress has to approve money every year for such things so they would be able every year to see whether we were meeting the benchmarks, but we wouldn’t mislead them about knowing in advance exactly how long it would take. So when we did it that way, then people said, “Well, we’re making an open-ended commitment.” That’s not true. I don’t intend to make an open-ended commitment; I think that would be wrong.

Guatemalan Peace Process

Q. Question for the President of the United States, Bill Clinton. What is your personal opinion of the peace process of Guatemala?

The President. Well, first of all, I think the fact that you had elections and that people are

free to speak their minds, that I met with an elected Vice President of Guatemala, who is a representative of the indigenous population, yesterday, that the differences are freely expressed, and that according to President Arzu, you have a free and sometimes contentious and critical press—I'd say that's all healthy.

I also think this commission report was a brave thing to do. And I think you know that the United States supports the peace process, including the effort to find the truth, even if it's not that favorable to the United States. We contributed a million and a half dollars to the work of the commission; we declassified 4,000 documents at the request of the commission. So I basically support what you are trying to do, strongly.

No nation can tell another exactly how to come to terms with its past and to move into the future. And the answer will necessarily be different from nation to nation. What South Africa did, what Chile did, what El Salvador did will not necessarily work in Guatemala. Neither will what you do necessarily work for some other country. The main thing is, is there an honest effort being made to bring about reconciliation and the rule of law and human rights and genuine freedom? And I don't think there is any question that Guatemala has been moving in the right direction. And for that, all of us who believe in freedom and human rights can be grateful.

Chinese Nuclear Espionage and National Security Adviser Berger

Q. President Clinton, did your administration ignore evidence of nuclear espionage by the Chinese in order to further your policy of engagement? And what do you have to say to Republicans calling for Sandy Berger's resignation?

The President. Well, first of all, we did not ignore evidence. Quite the contrary; we acted on it. Let me say for the benefit of all the press, both American and others, looking at this issue there are two questions that need to be looked at separately. One is, did we respond in an appropriate, timely, and aggressive way to indications of espionage? The second is, is our policy toward China of engagement the right one?

Now, the answer to the first question is, I believe the record is clear that we did respond in an appropriate way. In 1996 we were notified

that there was some indication of a breach of security at one of the Energy labs and that the appropriate agencies were investigating. The appropriate congressional committees were notified at the same time. Since then, they have received at least 16 briefings on this issue.

Now, in 1997, in July, we were notified that the scope of the potential espionage might be very broad and might be directly related to lax security at the Energy labs. At that time, we moved quickly and decisively not only with the continuing FBI investigation and with the CIA review but also with an intense review of the counterintelligence capacities of our Energy Department labs.

As a result of that, in February of '98, I signed a Presidential directive to dramatically improve the counterintelligence capacities of the lab. In April of '98 we set up a counterintelligence office by the Energy labs, headed by a 35-year FBI veteran with a record of dealing with espionage. We doubled the counterintelligence budget. We raised the standards for foreign visitors to the labs; we said foreign scientists had to be accompanied to the labs. I think we began to polygraph DOE employees at some point. Only two agencies, DOE and the CIA, have their employees subject to polygraphs.

Simultaneous with that, in terms of technology controls, we subject China to the tightest restrictions of technology transfer that we have on any country that is not on an embargo list for the United States. So I think the record is that we acted aggressively. I think Mr. Berger acted appropriately, and therefore, I would not release him or ask for his resignation. I just don't think there's any evidence to support that.

Now, let me say, the second question—and this affects the welfare of everybody else in the world, if you realize how China is growing, both economically and the size of their population; this affects the welfare of every person in Central America—whether the United States and China are at odds in a conflict or have a constructive relationship that has honest disagreements, where nobody is under any illusions that the facts are different than they are.

I would argue that our efforts to have an honest and open policy with China, so that they don't think that we have made a decision in advance to try to contain and limit them in their economic growth and their development as a nation, has paid dividends. I do not believe

that China would have signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; I do not believe they would have practiced the restraint they have practiced in the transfer of various dangerous materials to countries like Iran and Pakistan if we had not been constructively engaged with them.

I do not believe that we would have had the level of cooperation in Korea in trying to limit North Korea's ability to develop nuclear capacity that we have had. I do not believe we would have had the cooperation we have had in trying to limit the impact of the Asian financial crisis, which has plunged tens of millions of people from the middle class into poverty in Asia and represents the biggest short-term threat to democracy and to stability in Asia. I do not believe those things would have occurred if we had not had an open, candid, honest relationship with China, aware of all the facts.

Keep in mind, this is about a case that developed in the mid-eighties. We have known about China's nuclear capacity and their capacity to pose a strategic threat and, more or less, what the dimensions of that were since the 1980's. And this raises the question of whether some espionage in the eighties was somehow related to that capacity. We have investigated it; we continue to investigate it. We have dramatically increased our counterintelligence. I believe we have taken all appropriate steps.

I do not believe that that evidence justifies an isolated no-contact relationship with China when we have gotten the benefits, not only to ourselves but to the rest of the world, of our engagement policy.

Central American Immigrants

Q. I have a question for President Clinton. What are the commitments that the U.S. has acquired with Central America with regard to the migratory problem?

The President. Well, as you know, for one thing, I stayed all the deportations for all the countries affected by the hurricanes. I had to lift the stay for all the countries, other than Honduras and Nicaragua, because under our law a temporary stay because of the collapse, in effect, of the national infrastructure of a country due to natural disaster is very specific in our law.

The fundamental problem with American law is that, essentially, with regard to people who

have been in the United States a long time, is that we treat people from different Central American countries differently based on the source of the oppression of human rights, rather than whether people had hardships that caused them to come to the United States.

The commitment I made was twofold: One, that within the law—and I brought Doris Meissner, our Immigration Commissioner here with me—that within the law, I would do all I could to avoid a disruptive return to people because of the law that I think we all admit is unfair; but that in the end, to fix the problem entirely, we would require legislative change, and I would seek that from the Congress. And I believe there is support from Members of both parties for that sort of change.

Now, beyond that, I recognize that most of the people who might still want to come to the United States, particularly in the aftermath of the hurricanes, are not by nature lawbreakers. They're people looking for a better life for themselves and for their families. But we have to enforce our immigration laws. And if we don't, it's not fair not only to people in other parts of the world but to other Central Americans. There are thousands and thousands of Central Americans who have registered to come to our country, under the laws that exist now, in a lawful way. There is no reason that people who line up like that and try to do it should be deprived of their legal right to come to the United States as a result of a reaction in our country because of the large flow of illegal immigrants.

So I made a commitment to try to be as reasonable as possible under the existing law, but I have to uphold the law. I made a commitment to try to change the law to treat all people from all Central American countries the same. And finally, let me say, I believe the most important commitment that I made is the commitment on debt relief, to pass our aid package to help the reconstruction effort—which is a genuine emergency—to try to expand trade, to try to develop the economy. In the end, economic development at home will stem the flood of illegal immigration—genuine opportunities for people—more than anything else we can do. So those were the commitments that I made.

NATO and Kosovo

Q. President Clinton, you've said often that NATO is prepared to act if the Serbs attacked

ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Violence is now on the rise. Why isn't NATO responding, and what are you doing to keep the peace talks from collapsing there?

The President. Well, as you know, Senator Dole has just come back from Kosovo, also I think quite frustrated. The real problem, of course, is—I don't want this to be misinterpreted. There is no, in my view, moral equivalence between what has been done by the Serbs and what has been done by the Kosovar Albanians to try to secure the autonomy which was unlawfully stripped from them a decade ago. But it is clear that in this interim period, when they went home from Rambouillet and they're arguing about whether they should take this peace agreement, there are a lot of tensions and crosscurrents.

The consensus among our NATO Allies now is that in the next few days we should be doing everything we possibly can to get these people on both sides to realize that this is—it is crazy for them to go to war, to kill each other, to compromise their children's future, when they have an agreement which, from the point of view of Mr. Milosevic, only requires him to do what the law requires him to do anyway, to respect the autonomy of the Kosovar Albanians; which, from the point of view of the Kosovars, avoids a bloody war and gives them a chance to establish the mechanisms of self-government without foreclosing or guaranteeing a future of independence, to see how they do in the next 3 years.

Declaration of Antigua

March 11, 1999

We, the Presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States of America, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, and the Prime Minister of Belize, meeting in Antigua, Guatemala, on March 11, 1999, welcome the special opportunity afforded by this meeting to secure a prosperous future for our peoples after the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Mitch and Georges.

Hurricane Mitch was the worst disaster in the history of our Hemisphere, killing nearly 10,000 people, affecting at least 6 million others,

and causing property damage totaling approximately \$6 billion. Aware of the enormous impact on our countries of this disaster, we are meeting to combine efforts to rebuild and transform the region in such a way as to bring swifter development that will ensure the prosperity of all our citizens.

For the first time in the history of our region, all our countries are enjoying peace, stability, democracy, and freedom. Preserving these achievements requires decisive, forward-looking action in order to avoid jeopardizing the stability

It seems to me that a present war is the worst of all circumstances. Now, if the prospect of the agreement were totally destroyed by an outright military offensive, I would be the first to argue that our NATO Allies have to take action and take action now. But the situation is, frankly—even though you're absolutely right; there have been some actions by the Serbs—the situation is sufficiently murky and the present status of the peace agreement and whether either side can bring itself to agree is sufficiently shaky that all the NATO Allies at this moment on this day believe that we should devote all of our energies trying to get the agreement.

But I can speak for myself and, I believe, at least for most of my NATO Allies, that if this thing come apart at the seams, we still have a commitment. And I'm determined to honor our commitment.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:07 p.m. in the Casa Santo Domingo, Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua; President Alvaro Arzu and Vice President Luis Alberto Flores of Guatemala; Edward Curran, Director of Counterintelligence, Department of Energy; former Senator Bob Dole; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The President also referred to the Joint Central American-United States Declaration (CONCAUSA) and Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 61.