

Finally, let me say that here at home we need to retain our religious faith and our religious freedom as a source of our common community and strength and not as a source of division. The spiritual richness of our society was visible to many Americans and perhaps some of you in this room who attended a ceremony at the White House in November in which I signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. It was a very important bill for Americans because it restored what the law was in our country before a decision of the Supreme Court. The law now says that in our country, the presumption is that people of any religious faith should be able to practice their faith and that the law should bend over backwards to let them do it, unless there is some serious and substantial damage to the public interest in so doing.

We had Jewish leaders here, the U.S. Catholic Conference, the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Islamic Prison Foundation. You wouldn't have believed all these people would stand together, arm in arm, to support a law. I hope that those groups in our country will not only support that law but will support its spirit. That is, we can't bend over backwards to respect each other's religious practices unless we actually do it in fact as well as in law. And we cannot use this power of political argument to beat down other people's religious convictions just because on occasion they conflict with our own. We are trying to do that in this country. I hope you will wish us well.

One of our counties, just one of our counties, Los Angeles County, has people from 150 different racial and ethnic groups. We believe this diversity can make America the greatest country in the world into the 21st century. But we have to find a way to take the guns out of the hands of our children, to restore peace and security to our streets and to our schools, to meet the basic needs of our people so that they will be able to live with security and in comfort, not physical comfort but emotional comfort, the comfort that comes from believing you live in a just society where you are respected not only for your shared values but for the differences you have embraced.

That is the world we are working for. It may be that we will never achieve it, but it

is certain that if we work together we will get much closer to our common goal.

Thank you very much.

### **Bosnia**

**Q.** Mr. President, will there be air strikes against the Serbs?

**The President.** Just a moment, I have an announcement.

I just was informed—I was hoping to announce this before we talked—that as I was speaking, in Cairo Foreign Minister Peres and Yasser Arafat announced an agreement on self-rule and on the terms of withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho. So I think another big milestone has been achieved today.

Thank you.

And from the questions in the back on Bosnia, we simply have not completed the NATO meeting yet. I thought we would have by now, but as soon as we have I will be glad to comment on that also. But the meeting is not over.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:07 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Edgar Bronfman, president, World Jewish Congress.

### **Remarks Announcing the NATO Decision on Air Strikes in Bosnia and an Exchange With Reporters**

*February 9, 1994*

**The President.** Good evening. Over the past year, our administration has been working to do what we could to help to end the tragic conflict in Bosnia and to ease the suffering it has caused. Like people everywhere, I was outraged by the brutal killing of innocent civilians in the Sarajevo market last Saturday. The events of the past year and the events of the past few days reinforce the belief that I have that more must be done to stop the shelling of Sarajevo and the murder of innocents.

Therefore, the United States, working with our allies, has developed a series of proposals to address the situation in Sarajevo and to reinvigorate the negotiations to bring the bloodshed and the aggression in Bosnia to an end. As a result, just now in Brussels

NATO has decided that if any Bosnian Serb heavy weapons are found within 20 kilometers of Sarajevo within 10 days—or after 10 days—or if there is any further shelling of Sarajevo, NATO commanders stand ready to conduct air strikes against Serb artillery positions. NATO would carry out such strikes in accord with procedures it agreed on last August.

There are reports that as a result of NATO's impending action, Bosnian Serbs have already agreed to withdraw their heavy guns. If these reports are true, I welcome them. We hope that the Bosnian Serb actions will make air strikes unnecessary. But no one should doubt NATO's resolve. NATO is now set to act. Anyone, anyone shelling Sarajevo must recognize this fact and be prepared to deal with the consequences.

Our Nation has clear interests at stake in this conflict. We have an interest in helping to prevent a broader conflict in Europe that is most compelling. We have an interest in showing that NATO, history's greatest military alliance, remains a credible force for peace in post-cold-war Europe. We have an interest in stemming the destabilizing flows of refugees that this horrible conflict is creating. And we clearly have a humanitarian interest in helping to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo and the continuing slaughter of innocents in Bosnia. These interests do not justify unilateral American intervention in the crisis, but they do justify the involvement of America and the exercise of our leadership.

I have been meeting over the last hour with leaders of both parties in Congress, and I stressed to them that our contribution to resolving the Bosnian conflict will be proportionate to our interests, no more and no less. We have also insisted that NATO not commit itself to any objectives it cannot achieve. Important as these NATO actions are, we must understand that in the end this conflict must be settled at the negotiating table by the parties themselves. In short, they must want to stop killing each other and to settle, to resume their peaceful life before that will occur.

I have directed the Secretary of State to have the United States play a more active role in the negotiations. These efforts are

well underway. We hope that our efforts and the efforts of other NATO countries and the efforts of perhaps other nations as well can help to reinvigorate the process of peace and bring these parties to an agreement.

The ongoing tragedy in Sarajevo and Bosnia should catalyze all of our efforts to seek negotiated solutions. The actions that I have proposed and that NATO has approved today demonstrate that our Nation and the international community cannot and will not stand idly by in the face of a conflict that affects our interests, offends our consciences, and disrupts the peace.

#### **Russia**

**Q.** Mr. President, did you talk to President Yeltsin today about this, and what is Russia's reaction to this ultimatum?

**The President.** I did not talk to him today, although I tried to for a couple of hours and there were technical problems that we couldn't get through. So I expect to talk to him—well, you know it's several hours ahead of us now, so I expect to talk to him either late tonight before I go to bed or maybe even sometime in the middle of the night. I am trying to get in touch with him, and he knows that I will take the call whenever we can put it together.

I think when President Yeltsin understands that the action taken by NATO today applies to anyone who violates the safe zone around Sarajevo, and not only to Serbs, and understands that the United States is going to put new energy into its own efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement and that we would welcome the Russians' involvement in bringing about a negotiated settlement, that he will, if not agree with our action, at least understand it more.

#### **Air Strikes**

**Q.** Mr. President, now that this warning has been given, what's your understanding of exactly what it takes to trigger an air strike?

**The President.** Well, keep in mind now, I have not seen the language; I was just informed that the agreement was finally reached. But if the position presented to NATO this morning is, in fact, what emerges—and I believe it was—then you have the same situation here that we had last

August when the first NATO out-of-area action was proposed, which is that the first air strike must be approved by the Secretary-General.

He has asked us, by the way, to do this, so that we now have no reason to believe that he would ask NATO to take a meaningless action. In fact, we think he's clearly in sync with us on this. After which all subsequent air strikes would be the result of coordinated decisions by the commander of the United Nations troops on the ground there and the NATO commander in that area, Admiral Boorda, the American admiral.

**Q.** Given the difficulty of the terrain, can you give us some sense of what you think the risk is for the pilots involved, for the other personnel involved; what the level of American involvement will be in this NATO action?

**The President.** Well, the level of American involvement in this NATO action, I again will say, there is not expectation—in fact, we have made it quite clear that this will not involve American ground forces. From the beginning of the administration, we have said that the American forces could only be used, if at all, in the implementation of an agreement that had been freely reached as a part of a broader united force in which, since the problem is in Europe, the American forces would be in the minority. So there will be no American ground troops involved in this action.

I can only say to you what General Shalikashvili has said to me and to the leaders of Congress, which is, there is no such thing as a risk-free air operation. I don't want to mislead the American people on that. We have, regrettably, fine young American pilots who die every year in training operations. So there is no such thing as a risk-free operation. However, we believe that the air defenses are sufficiently rudimentary that the risks are minimal. That is the conclusion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Q.** Don't they have to fly very low, given this terrain?

**The President.** Well, I don't want to reveal what we would do and how we would do it. All I can tell you is that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has told me he considers the risks to be small. But you can

never tell anybody, when you get in a high-speed airplane with weapons and when people can at least shoot rockets on shoulder weapons against you, that there is absolutely no risk. I can't say that to the American people. But the risks are small.

#### **Peace Process**

**Q.** Mr. President, can you tell us more about the diplomatic track? Do you have any new initiatives going into the Geneva meetings tomorrow? There have also been reports that you are going to pressure the Bosnian Moslems to back off some of their demands in order to make peace easier.

**The President.** No—well, that's not exactly true. First of all, I don't think we or anybody else can impose a peace. What the United States has agreed to do as a result of the new energy brought to this whole matter by our European allies is to talk again to the Bosnian Moslems—as you know, I have been very sympathetic with their position and have made no secret of it—to ascertain what their legitimate bedrock requirements are and to share with them as clearly and honestly as we can what we think both the political and the military situation is and then, using that as a basis, to go back to do what we can to facilitate an end to this conflict and an agreement. I think that we have a lot of interests in doing the same thing by the Germans, by the French, by the British, really new interest in making a committed effort to persuade these parties that the time has come to quit killing each other. But ultimately, they will have to decide that.

I think we all believe, those of us who have been following this closely, that there is an awful lot of fighting and an awful lot of dying going on now over relatively small patches of land and issues like a path to the sea for the Moslems and where would—that ought to be able to be resolved without a huge amount of further bloodshed. And we hope that they too have been sufficiently affected by the carnage involving innocent civilians in the last few days that they will see that as well.

And as I said to you, I wish that I could report to you on my conversation with President Yeltsin. There were just problems that it didn't work out because of where he was

and where I was. But I think I will talk to him soon, and I hope that he will also want to weigh in on the peace process. He has expressed a willingness to do that before and has encouraged me in that regard before, so I'm hopeful.

**NATO Decision**

**Q.** [Inaudible]—conversations with some of the other leaders who were reluctant to do this? Did you convince them to come along, or did you say, “This is what we’re going to do”?

**The President.** I wouldn’t say they were reluctant. Let me say again, look at the position of the Canadians with their soldiers in Srebrenica surrounded by Serbs. They’re in a different position. The French, the British, the Spaniards, the Dutch—there are Europeans who have soldiers on the ground in relatively small numbers for the purpose of carrying out the United Nations missions. They are all legitimately concerned with the prospect of retaliation against their armed forces. And one of the things that we have really given a lot of thought to is what we can do to provide maximum protection to those people. They have bravely carried on in very difficult circumstances, as you know, for some time. And so we have talked about that.

I think it’s a real tribute to those who have forces there that they were so determined finally to try to stop the deterioration of conditions. I think they began to be worried that their forces would be perhaps at more risk if nothing was done. So I am grateful to them for their agreement for this position. And we’re going to do the very best we can to make it work.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:05 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. J.M. Boorda, USN, commander in chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**Appointment of Director of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting at the United States Information Agency**

*February 9, 1994*

The President today announced the appointment of Richard M. Lobo to be Director of the U.S. Information Agency’s Office of Cuba Broadcasting, which manages Radio and TV Marti. The two services provide a mix of Spanish-language news, feature, cultural, and entertainment programming to the people of Cuba.

“Richard Lobo’s 35 years of experience in journalism, broadcast management, and community affairs make him very well suited for this job,” said the President. “Our administration honors the memory of José Martí, whose birthday we marked last week, and will continue our efforts in support of freedom and democracy for the Cuban people. Radio and TV Marti are an integral part of those efforts.”

NOTE: A biography of the appointee was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

**Nomination for Four Federal Judges**

*February 9, 1994*

The President today nominated four individuals to serve on the Federal bench. To the U.S. Court of Appeals, he nominated Guido Calabresi for the Second Circuit and Robert H. Henry for the Tenth Circuit. The President also named Frank M. Hull to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia and W. Louis Sands to the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia.

“I am proud to nominate these distinguished individuals to serve in our Federal judiciary,” the President said today. “Their commitment to public service and equal justice for all Americans is outstanding.”

NOTE: Biographies of the nominees were made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.