AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Two great Americans we honor today, Lieutenant Commander Roger Chaffee and Lieutenant Colonel Edward White, were among them. More than 30 years ago, these two men, along with their commander, Virgil ''Gus'' Grissom, were selected for the very first Apollo mission. Tragedy struck before they could achieve their goal. On January 27, 1967, fire swept through the Apollo capsule during a training session, killing all three of them. In 1978 President Carter presented Commander Grissom with one of the first Congressional Space Medals of Honor. Today I have the privilege of presenting the same medal to his crewmates, Roger Chaffee and Edward White, courageous men who gave their lives in our Nation's effort to conquer the frontiers of space.

Even before they joined the Apollo program, Chaffee and White had already served our Nation with great distinction. Born in Texas and a member of the United States Air Force, Colonel White was the first American to walk in space. At a White House ceremony soon afterward, President Johnson called him ''one of the Christopher Columbuses of our century.''

Commander Chaffee was a Michigan native and a decorated Navy pilot. Though he was the rookie of the crew, he didn't lack self-confidence. He once said, ''Hell, I'd feel secure taking it up all by myself.''

Today we bestow upon Roger Chaffee and Edward White the highest honor in America's space program, but they were honored in our hearts long ago. Their deaths will remind us always that exploring space is dangerous, life-threatening work, work that demands and deserves the bravest and best among us. Though they never got there, astronauts Chaffee, White, and Grissom's footprints are on the Moon. Their presence is felt on every mission of our space shuttle program. Their spirits live on in every successful launch and every safe return. And I'm certain they will be there when the international space station goes into orbit.

America has become the world's leading spacefaring nation because of the selfless pioneering spirits of the men we honor today. I am proud to present these medals to the families of Roger Chaffee and Edward White. On behalf of a grateful Nation, I thank them for their sacrifice.

Now I'd like to ask the military aide to read the citations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Edward H. White, III, son of Lt. Col. White; Martha Chaffee, widow of Lt. Comdr. Chaffee; and Betty Grissom, widow of Lt. Col. Virgil Grissom.

Remarks on the Peace Process in Bosnia and an Exchange With Reporters

December 18, 1997

The President. Good morning. I want to speak with you today about the progress we have made toward a lasting peace in Bosnia and the challenges that still must be faced in order to finish the job.

For nearly 4 years, Bosnia was the battleground for the bloodiest war in Europe since World War II. The conflict killed or wounded one out of every 10 Bosnians. It drove half the country's people from their homes, left 9 out of 10 of them unemployed. We will never be able to forget the mass graves, the women and young girls victimized by systematic campaigns of rape, skeletal prisoners locked behind barbed-wire fences, endless lines of refugees marching toward a future of despair.

The war in Bosnia was abhorrent to our values. It also threatened our national interests. We've learned the hard way in this century that Europe's stability and America's security are joined. The war threatened to explode into a broader conflict in the Balkans, endangering the vital interests of allies like Greece and Turkey and undermining our efforts to build a peaceful, undivided, and democratic Europe.

Then, 2 years ago in Dayton, Ohio, American leadership helped to end the war in Bosnia. With our allies in NATO and others, we launched an extraordinary military and political effort to implement the peace agreement. Twenty-four months later, by almost any measure, the lives of Bosnia's people are better, and their hopes for the future are brighter.

Consider what we have achieved together. We ended the fighting and the bloodshed, separating rival armies, demobilizing more than 350,000 troops, destroying almost 6,600 heavy weapons. We helped Bosnians to put in place national democratic institutions, including a Presidency, a Parliament, a Supreme Court, and hold peaceful and free elections for all levels of government, with turnouts exceeding 70 percent. We've begun to restore normal life, repairing roads and schools, electricity and water, heat and sewage, doubling economic output, quadrupling wages. Unemployment in the Bosnian-Croat Federation has been cut from 90 percent to 50 percent.

We're helping the Bosnians to provide for their own security, training ethnically integrated police forces in the Federation, taking the first steps toward a professional democratic police force in the Serb Republic. We've helped to turn the media from an instrument of war into a force for peace, stifling the inflammatory radio and television broadcasts that helped to fuel the conflict. And we've provided a secure environment for 350,000 displaced persons to return to their homes, while bringing 22 war criminals to justice. Just a few hours ago, SFOR captured and transported to The Hague two more war crimes suspects.

The progress is unmistakable, but it is not yet irreversible. Bosnia has been at peace only half as long as it was at war. It remains poised on a tightrope, moving toward a better future but not at the point yet of a self-sustaining peace. To get there, the people of Bosnia still need a safety net and a helping hand that only the international community, including the United States, can provide.

Our assistance must be twofold. First we must intensify our civilian and economic engagement. As a result of the progress we've achieved in recent months, we know where to focus our efforts. Civilian and voluntary agencies working with Bosnian authorities must help to do the following things: first, deepen and spread economic opportunity while rooting out corruption; second, reform, retrain, and re-equip the police; third, restructure of the state-run media to meet international standards of objectivity and access and establish alternative independent media; fourth, help more refugees return home; and fifth, make indicted war criminals answer for their crimes, both as a matter of justice and because they are stumbling blocks to lasting stability.

The second thing we must do is to continue to provide an international military presence that will enable these efforts to proceed in an atmosphere of confidence. Our progress in Bosnia to date would not have been possible without the secure environment created first by IFOR, now by SFOR. They've allowed dozens of civilian agencies and literally hundreds of voluntary agencies to do their job in security, laying the foundation for a self-sustaining peace.

In authorizing American troops to take part in the SFOR mission, I said the mission would end in 18 months, in June of 1998. It was my expectation that by that time we would have rebuilt enough of Bosnia's economic and political life to continue the work without continuing outside military support. But following intensive consultations with my national security and military advisers, with our NATO allies, and with leaders from both parties in Congress, it has become clear that the progress we've seen in Bosnia, in order for it to continue, a follow-on military force led by NATO will be necessary after SFOR ends. America is a leader of NATO, and America should participate in that force.

Therefore, I have instructed our representatives in NATO to inform our allies that, in principle, the United States will take part in a security presence in Bosnia when SFOR withdraws this summer. The agreement in principle will become a commitment only when I have approved the action plan NATO's military authorities will develop and present early next year after careful study of all the options. The details of that plan, including the mission's specific objectives, its size, and its duration, must be agreed to by all NATO allies.

Without prejudging the details, let me make clear the key criteria the plan must meet for me to approve United States participation:

First, the mission must be achievable and tied to concrete benchmarks, not a deadline. We should have clear objectives that when set—when met will create a self-sustaining,

secure environment and allow us to remove our troops.

Second, the force must be able to protect itself. Over 2 years we have steadily decreased the number of our troops in Bosnia from about 27,000 Americans in IFOR in 1996 to 8,500 in SFOR today. I hope the follow-on force will be smaller, but I will insist it be sufficient in number and in equipment to achieve its mission and to protect itself in safety.

Third, the United States must retain command. Time and again, events have proven that American leadership is crucial to decisive collective action.

Fourth, our European allies must assume their share of responsibility. Now Europe and our other partners are already doing a great deal, providing 3 times as many troops as we are, 5 times as much economic assistance, 9 times as many international police, 10 times as many refugees have been received by them. And while Bosnia is a challenge to American interests and values, the longer term and fundamental challenge is to make Bosnia a genuine part of Europe, and we hope the Europeans will do more.

Fifth, the cost must be manageable.

And sixth and finally, the plan must have substantial support from Congress and the American people. I have been pleased by the spirit and the substance of our consultations with leading members of both parties. As we develop the details of the new NATO mission, these consultations must and will continue. I am pleased that Members of both parties in both Houses of Congress have accepted my invitation to go to Bosnia with me when I leave in a couple of days. All of us have a duty to explain the stakes in Bosnia to the American people, and I will do my very best to shoulder my responsibility for that.

Now, some say a lasting peace in Bosnia is impossible and, therefore, we should end our efforts now, in June, and/or allow the country to be partitioned along ethnic lines. I believe they're profoundly wrong. A full and fair reading of Bosnia's history and an honest assessment of the progress of the last 23 months simply refutes the proposition that the Dayton peace agreement cannot work. But if we pull out before the job is done, Bosnia almost certainly will fall back into violence, chaos, and, ultimately, a war every bit as bloody as the one that was stopped.

And partition is not a good alternative. It would sanction the horrors of ethnic cleansing and send the wrong signal to extremists everywhere. At best, partition would require a peacekeeping force to patrol a volatile border for years to come. More likely it would set the stage also for renewed conflict.

A lasting peace is possible, along the lines of the Dayton peace agreement. For decades, Muslim Croats and Serbs lived together, worked together, raised their families together. Thanks to the investments of America and others in Bosnia over the past 2 years, they have begun again to lead more normal lives.

Ultimately, Bosnia's future is in the hands of its own people. But we can help them make it a future of peace. We should finish the job we began for the sake of that future and in the service of our own interests and values.

Go ahead. We'll take—yeah.

Benchmarks for Troop Withdrawal

Q. Mr. President, a number of Americans are understandably going to be concerned about an open-ended U.S. military commitment to Bosnia. Can you at least assure the American people that by the time you leave office, a little more than 3 years from now, those American troops will be out of Bosnia?

The President. In order to answer that, let's go back and see what our experience has been. First of all, the big military mission, IFOR, really was completed within a year. In fact, it was completed in less than a year; that is, the robust, large military presence we needed there—I think we had over 60,000 total allied troops there—to end the war, separate the forces, establish the separation zone between the parties. It was achieved quickly and with remarkable peace and remarkably low loss of life for all of our allied forces who were there.

But then we went to the smaller force to try to support the civilian implementation of the Dayton agreement. Now, what has happened? An enormous amount of progress has been made; we don't believe the peace is self-sustaining. I think the responsible thing

for me to do, since I do not believe we can meet the 18-month deadline, and no one I know now believes that, is to say to the American people what the benchmarks are.

What are the benchmarks? Let's talk about that. Can they be achieved in the near-term? I believe they can. Do I think we should have a permanent presence in Bosnia? No. I don't believe this is like Germany after World War II or in the cold war or Korea after the Korean war. This is not what I'm suggesting here. But what are the benchmarks? First, let me say the final set of benchmarks must be developed by our NATO allies working with us. But let me give you just some of the things that I think we ought to be asking ourselves. Number one, are the joint institutions strong enough to be self-sustaining after the military operation? Number two, have the political parties really given up the so-called state-run media that have been instruments of hate and venom? Number three, is the civilian police large enough, well-trained enough, well-managed enough to do the job it has to do? Number four, do we have confidence that the military is under democratic rule?

Those are just some of the benchmarks. I think, when we go through this, I want a full public discussion of it. But I will say again, I understand your job is try to get a deadline nailed down, but we tried it in this SFOR period, and it turned out we were wrong. I am not suggesting a permanent presence in Bosnia. I am suggesting that it's a more honest thing to do to say what our objectives are and that these objectives should be pursued, and they can be pursued at an affordable cost with fair burden-sharing with the Europeans. If that can be done, we should pursue them.

Go ahead.

Prosecution of War Crimes

Q. Mr. President, the lead prosecutor in the War Crimes Tribunal says that Mladic and Karadzic can rest easy because the French won't try to capture them. What is the United States willing to do to bring these men to justice?

The President. Well, I don't want to comment on what the prosecutor has said about the French. I can tell you this, that we were involved this morning with the Dutch, and it was in their sector, and they took the lead. They asked us for support just like we were involved with the British not very long ago when they made their arrests. And we believe that provision of the Dayton agreement is important, as I said again today, and we think that all of us who are there should be prepared to do what is appropriate to implement it. And I think that, having said that, the less I say from then on in, the better.

We believe the war crimes process is an important part of Dayton. The United States, indeed, is supporting an international permanent war crimes tribunal even as we speak. We've got countries working on trying to establish that.

Yes.

Benchmarks for Troop Withdrawal

Q. Mr. President, sir, one of the benchmarks you listed was the willingness of the political parties there really to work toward progress. Does that not make us hostages of those political figures there, particularly those who don't want progress? They can simply undermine the attempt to reach that benchmark and keep U.S. troops there forever.

The President. Well, let me—I don't think I was clear about that. What I mean is the willingness of the political parties—or whether they're willing or not, our capacity to stop them from, in effect, perverting the state-run media and using them as an instrument of violence and suppression. I don't think it's necessary for us to stay until everybody wants to go have tea together at 4 o'clock in the afternoon in a civil environment. I think it's—I do think that there are—and again let me say, we will make public a final set of benchmarks before we go forward with this, and our allies have to work on this. I'm just telling you what my thoughts are.

But if you look at where we've really had problems—or let's flip the question—why do we think we still need some military presence there after June? I think because we believe there is more venom still in the political system than there otherwise would have been if there had been no perversion of the so-called state-run media by the political parties

that control them. We believe that if the joint institutions were working a little more effectively they would—the people would see the benefits of the joint institutions more than they will by June.

We're grateful that there are 2,000 civilian police working there. And I might say, while the United States has put up 90 percent of the money, as I said, the Europeans have put up 90 percent of the personnel for the training and the preparation of the civilian police. But there should be more.

So I think that's what we have to do. I do not want to hold us hostage to the feelings of the people of Bosnia, although I believe the feelings will change as the facts of life change. But I do think we should stay there until we believe we've got the job done.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Prosecution of War Crimes

Q. Mr. President, how did you get Secretary Cohen on board on this? And you know, the whole public perception—unless you go after the highest profile alleged war criminals, it doesn't have much of an impact. Why the restraint?

The President. Well, first of all, there are—the circumstances under which the SFOR troops will apprehend war criminals have been fairly well-defined. We did not send SFOR there to mount major military campaigns.

Secondly, I don't want to discuss the circumstances in detail under which we might or might not go after anyone. But let me go to the point underlying your question—I think it is—which is, can this peace be made to work unless Mr. Karadzic is arrested? I mean, let's just sort of get to the bottom line here.

I think the answer to that is, under the right circumstances—that is, if he flees the country, if he is deep enough underground, if he can't have any impact on it—we might make the peace work anyway. After all, a great deal of progress has been made. I would point out that more progress has been made in the Bosnian-Croat—the Muslim-Croat Federation part of Bosnia economically than in the Serbian part, in part because reactionary elements there have resisted doing the right thing across the board in many areas.

Q. Are you considering aid for Serbia in that respect?

The President. I'm considering—what I'm going to do is to work with the allies to implement the Dayton accords. And our position is going to be we're going to support the people that are trying to implement the Dayton framework; we're going to oppose those who are opposing it, in all specifics. If you use that benchwork, I think it will get you there.

One last question. Go ahead, Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network].

Timelines and the Peace Process

Q. Just to wrap up this by asking you the question that a lot of Republican critics of yours are suggesting that your credibility was undermined on Bosnia by imposing these two deadlines which you failed to meet, and knowing that some of your own advisers at the time were saying, ''Don't give these deadlines because they're unrealistic; the job can't be done within a year or within 18 months.'' So how do you answer your critics now, like Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison or Arlen Specter or Newt Gingrich, who say that you have to prove your credibility because you failed to honor these two earlier imposed deadlines?

The President. Well, first of all, let me say, I have a fundamentally different view of the first deadline. I mean, we did—the mission I defined for IFOR was achieved, and it was achieved before a year was out. And I was—it's not worth going through and rewriting history there about who said what at the time.

I did think that in 18 months—I honestly believed in 18 months we could get this done at the time I said it. And it wasn't—I wasn't right, which is why I don't want to make that error again. Now, having acknowledged the error I made, let's look at what we were right about. Let's flip this around before we get too much into who was right about what happened after 18 months.

What has happened? With the leadership of the United States, NATO and its allies, including Russia, working side by side, ended

almost overnight and with virtually no bloodshed the worst war in Europe since World War II. We have seen democratic elections with 70 percent participation take place; hundreds of thousands of people have been able to go home under circumstances that were difficult, to say the least; economic growth has resumed; infrastructure has been rebuilt; the conditions of normal life have come back for tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people.

So if I take the hit for being wrong about the timetable, I would like some acknowledgement that in the larger issue here, the United States and its allies were right to undertake this mission and that the results of the mission have been very, very good. They have justified the effort. And the cost of the mission in lives and treasure to the United States and to its allies has been much lower than even the most ardent supporters of the mission thought that it would be.

So I think—I don't mind taking a hit for being wrong about the timetable. But after the hit is dished out, I would like the larger truth looked at. That is, did we do the right thing? Was it in our interests? Did it further our values? Are the American people less likely to be drawn into some other conflict in Europe 10, 20, 30 years from now where the costs could be far greater if we make this work? I think they are.

And I'd like to close basically with a conversation I had from my opponent in the last election, Senator Dole. I want to give him—he said something that I thought was very good and pithier than anything I've said about this. We had a talk about it the other day on the phone, and he said, "Look," he said, "you know, I didn't necessarily agree with all the details about how you got to where you were. But," he said, "What's happened in Bosnia? It's like we're in a football game. We're in the fourth quarter, and we're winning, and some people suggest we should walk off the field and forfeit the game. I don't think we should. I think we ought to stay here, finish the game, and collect the win."

And that's a pretty good analogy. And with due credit to the Senator, I appreciate it. I wish I'd have thought of it myself.

Thank you very much.

Merry Christmas.

Buddy

Q. How is Buddy?

The President. Good.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. The President also referred to the NATO-led Implementation Force in Bosnia (IFOR).

Message on the Observance of Hanukkah, 1997

December 18, 1997

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Hanukkah.

The Festival of Lights is a powerful reminder each year that the age-old struggle for religious freedom is not yet over. From the days of the ancient Maccabees down to our present time, tyrants have sought to deny people the free expression of their faith and the right to live according to their own conscience and convictions. Hanukkah symbolizes the heroic struggle of all who seek to defeat such oppression and the miracles that come to those full of faith and courage. This holiday holds special meaning for us in America, where freedom of religion is one of the cornerstones of our democracy.

The coming year will mark the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel, where the story of the first Hanukkah took place so many centuries ago. As families come together in prayer for the eight nights of Hanukkah, to reaffirm their hope in God and their gratitude for His faithfulness to His people, may the candles of the menorah light our way to a true and lasting peace for the people of the Middle East.

Hillary and I extend our warmest wishes to all those celebrating Hanukkah, all those who work for religious freedom, and all those who devote themselves to the cause of peace throughout the world.

Bill Clinton