

The Department of Defense
During the Clinton-Gore Administration
1993-2000

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INTRODUCTION: NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES FACING THE ADMINISTRATION

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe had precipitated a strategic shift in U.S. national security policy away from containment of the Soviet Empire and toward new and emerging threats. The brutal invasion of Kuwait in 1990 had signaled a new class of regional dangers facing America—dangers spurred not by a global, empire-building ideological power, but by rogue leaders set on regional domination through military aggression and the pursuit of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons capabilities. The world's response to Saddam's invasion also demonstrated the potential in this new era for broad-based, collective military action to thwart such tyrants. In 1991, the failed Soviet coup demonstrated the Russian people's desire for democratic change and hastened the collapse of the Soviet Union as a national entity and military foe. At the same time, the incoming Administration had inherited a domestic economy plagued by growing federal debt, sluggish growth, inadequate job creation and a large trade imbalance.

In the aftermath of such epochal events internationally and given domestic economic concerns, it became clear that the framework guiding U.S. security policy during the Cold War was inadequate for the future. Consequently, the Clinton Administration needed to determine the characteristics of the new era, develop a new defense strategy to address new threats and take advantage of new opportunities, and restructure U.S. forces and defense programs accordingly. Against this backdrop, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin decided the Department of Defense would conduct a fundamental review—from the bottom up—of U.S. defense strategy, forces and defense programs and budgets.

Secretary Aspin's so-called Bottom-Up Review (BUR) identified four broad categories of new dangers facing the United States in 1993: (1) nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction threats, including their proliferation; (2) large-scale aggression by a regional power with interests antithetical to our own; (3) threats to democracy and reform in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), Eastern Europe and elsewhere; and (4) economic threats to U.S. national security if we failed to build a strong, competitive and growing economy.

A. NUCLEAR AND OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION DANGERS

At the time of its disintegration, the FSU still contained thousands of nuclear weapons whose continued security was in question with the removal of old mechanisms of control. Though the United States had concluded a number of arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, such as START I and START II, it was unclear whether those agreements would hold. It was unclear what the disposition of weapons slated for dismantling under START would be in advance of START being signed.

At the same time, nations hostile to freedom and democracy, like Iraq and North Korea, appeared determined to acquire nuclear weapons. The prospect of terrorists getting nuclear weapons loomed as well. It was evident that the old rules worked out over the decades by the United States and the Soviet Union to prevent nuclear war and deal with arms control would not apply in addressing the threat of terrorists or rogue states with a handful of nuclear weapons.

The growing threat of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons proliferating was especially worrisome in the FSU, where the ability of some states to exert effective control over significant, inherited stockpiles of NBC weapons, materials and technologies was in doubt. It was also a concern in the Middle East where proliferation of advanced technologies could provide rogue states such as Iran with increasingly sophisticated means to threaten regional security, and in East Asia where such proliferation threatened to upset delicate military balances in a region rife with long-festering territorial disputes. Slowing the diffusion of technology to potentially hostile state and non-state actors was even more difficult because the civilian marketplace was developing technology with both civilian and military applications.

B. NEW REGIONAL THREATS

Secretary Aspin—in a speech at Georgetown University in September 1993 and in testimony before Congress—identified regional dangers as the key driver for defense budgets and planning in the post-Cold War, post-Soviet world. The task for the new Administration was to make a judgment about which regional dangers posed the greatest threat to U.S. interests and how many likely regional contingencies the United States needed to be prepared to deal with simultaneously. The 1993 Bottom-Up Review identified a range of new regional dangers for which the U.S. military must be prepared including: large-scale aggression; smaller conflicts; internal strife caused by ethnic, tribal or religious animosities; state-sponsored terrorism; subversion of friendly governments; insurgencies; and illicit drug trafficking. Specifically:

- North Korea's continuing military preparations—including the development of nuclear weapons and longer-range missiles—alarmed neighbors and threatened to spur massive rearmament throughout East Asia;
- The ambitions of Iraq or Iran to dominate Southwest Asia, which continued to threaten U.S. friends and allies in the Persian Gulf region, could also endanger global economic stability by limiting access to oil supplies;
- The continuing war in Croatia and Bosnia with its terrible human suffering and potential for spillover into other parts of the former Yugoslavia and neighboring states threatened regional stability right in the heart of Europe;
- The possibility that struggles in central and Eastern Europe to consolidate democracy and build market economies could fail, threatening internal instability or regional conflict; and
- Drug-trafficking in Latin America and elsewhere endangered the lives, health and livelihoods of Americans.

C. THREATS TO DEMOCRACY AND REFORM

The post-Cold War trend toward democracy throughout much of the world was tremendously favorable for U.S. security. American democratic values were ascendant. Peaceful resolution of disputes was increasingly likely as democracy spread. But this positive trend was reversible.

A major implication of the FSU's disintegration was uncertainty about whether the reforms underway in the former Soviet republics and other former communist states would continue or whether these areas would return to authoritarian control. In most former communist countries, democratic institutions were not yet firmly established and market reforms had yet to produce tangible improvements in standards of living. Reversal of reform in these places or the emergence of dictatorships, particularly in Russia, would substantially alter the security situation making for "a less peaceful world, a more difficult world for the United States, and a more expensive world for the Department of Defense." (*Secretary Aspin, Speech at Georgetown University, 2 September 1993*)

D. ECONOMIC SECURITY

The final post-Cold War set of dangers facing the incoming Administration was economic. The U.S. economy had been plagued in recent years by growing federal debt, sluggish growth, inadequate job creation and a large trade imbalance. Further, growing U.S. dependence on imported petroleum constituted an economic danger of its own.

President Clinton's economic program acknowledged that economic well being was vital to our country's security. In the short run, U.S. national security depended upon strong, effective military forces. But in the long run, the ability of the United States to remain a superpower depended upon having a strong economy. Secretary Aspin's Bottom Up Review (BUR) confirmed that the Department of Defense would have a central role in revitalizing the economy and laying the foundation for growing a competitive American economy into the next century.

**The Department of Defense
1993-2000
A Narrative History of the Clinton-Gore Administration**

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United States Department of Defense

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Presenter: President Clinton, Secretary Cohen and General Shelton Friday, Jan. 5, 2001, 4:41 p.m. EST

Cohen, Shelton Honor Clintons at Fort Myer

(Remarks by Army Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, and President Bill Clinton at the Full Honors Review for President and Mrs. Clinton at Conny Hall, Fort Myer, Va.)

Shelton: President Clinton, First Lady and Senator Clinton -- that has as nice ring to it, doesn't it? -- (applause) -- Secretary and Mrs. Cohen, members of the Cabinet, other distinguished members of Congress, distinguished guests, fellow members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fellow flag and general officers, and other members of our great Armed Forces, ladies and gentleman.

Thanks to each of you for coming today to honor our president and our commander-in-chief. For me it's a distinct honor, on behalf of more than three million members of our Armed Forces -- active, Guard and Reserves -- to offer a few words in tribute to our commander-in-chief. But first, let me thank the outstanding men and women standing so tall and proud in front of you today. They and the hundreds of thousands -- (applause) -- they and the hundreds of thousands of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen that they represent are truly our nation's treasure. They serve with honor and courage, and they are committed to keeping America strong and free. And they also contribute immensely to the great prosperity, freedom and sense of well-being that we as Americans enjoy.

It's standard fare at these kind of events to talk about the orderly transfer of power in a democracy as one president and commander-in-chief completes his service in office, and as the nation prepares to inaugurate another. But it's something that I hope we never take for granted because it's an incredible symbol of our national strength. Few other countries are as fortunate or as strong as the United States.

And so today, as we say farewell to our commander-in-chief and honor his service, we also celebrate with great fanfare and dignity a process and a system that makes our country great. As always, it's a terrific day to be an American.

A little more than three years ago when President Clinton asked me to serve as chairman, I knew that we were facing some significant security challenges. But I welcomed the opportunity to confront them, just as any dedicated soldier, sailor, airman or Marine would, knowing that with the president's guidance and with the intellectual strength of a great national security team, that we could surmount these challenges.

Little did I realize, however, that we would use force within 18 months on three different occasions, further underscoring the need for maintaining a trained and ready force capable of carrying out their missions across the entire spectrum of conflict, and doing it in a manner that would make all Americans proud.

But we did it, and whether defeating a tyrant in the Balkans, checking aggression in the Middle East, stabilizing the Pacific Rim, fighting drugs in Latin America and other places, or offering hope to a strife-torn Africa, the litany of international security successes under President Clinton's leadership has been extraordinary.

And Mr. President, on quality of life issues for the members of our armed forces and their families, you

stood tall. (Applause.) You, with great support from the Congress, put us firmly on the road to equitable compensation with the largest pay raise in two decades, and you also worked with the Congress to restore our health care promise to our military members and retirees with TriCare reform. And you led the fight to restore a retirement system for our armed forces members that are fitting for the sacrifices that they make in defense of our nation. Additionally, it is now once again an incentive for new generations of young Americans to serve in uniform.

These initiatives are reflected in the enthusiasm of our men and women in uniform which you saw during your troop visits around the world. You have been a champion for the well-being of our young patriots serving their country and the military's senior leadership is grateful to you for that, Mr. President.

In a speech last summer right here at Fort Myer, we paid tribute to the 50th anniversary of the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and President Clinton said, "Sometimes the hardest job of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs is his coordination with the White House." Mr. President, my predecessors and I knew exactly what you meant by those remarks. But I must thank you for making that test far easier and considerably more enjoyable than most might think.

On a personal note, I also want to thank you for the highest honor that any member of our armed forces could ever have: the honor of serving as their representative at the highest level of government, as the principal adviser to you and to Secretary Cohen. It has been a tremendous opportunity, because the trust that you placed in me to give you my best military advice, knowing that I could do so in full confidence and in full privacy, was always there. And that's just another indication, I think, of why our system is the greatest in the world.

Walter Lippmann once said, "The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him, in other men, the conviction and the will to carry on." You've done that for us, Mr. President, and for that, we all thank you. (Applause.)

Of course, Mr. President, you put together a great civilian leadership team for our armed forces as well. In the office on the floor just above me in the Pentagon, a position which Secretary Cohen himself would tell you is just another symbol of civilian control over the military, both literally and figuratively, is a man of great character and great integrity. Secretary Cohen has worked tirelessly on the most compelling issues of our national security, and he has never wavered in his deep and unabiding concern for our men and women in uniform. A true champion of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and civilians of the Department of Defense and their families, there is no one more appropriate here today to represent our armed forces in continuing the tribute to our commander in chief. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Secretary Cohen. (Applause.)

Cohen: General Shelton, thank you very much for your kind remarks. I might say to all here that one of the most important decisions that I had to make during the past four years was to recommend to our commander in chief that you serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. You've been outstanding in every way, and you've always offered me and the president great insight and wisdom and counsel. And it's kind of redundant for me to say that you stand tall -- (laughter) -- and always humbling to walk beside you -- (laughter) -- but I do thank you for being tall, and strong and wise and acting on behalf of our nation's military. Thank you for your contribution your entire career. (Applause.)

President Clinton, First Lady and as the chairman indicated, now Senator Clinton, welcome to the wonderful world of the world's greatest deliberative body, and you will encounter great challenges as well as quorum calls and other deliberations. But you have a great career ahead of you, and I know that you're going to represent the state of New York and this country in the same extraordinary fashion and inspiring fashion that you have as first lady of the United States. So let me take this occasion to congratulate you on your great victory. (Applause.)

Let me say to my colleague, Sandy Berger, it's been my honor and indeed pleasure to work with you during the past four years. You're tough-minded, but you're fair-minded, and you've always sought our judgment without making judgments about the advice we give or recommendations we give. You've

never been judgmental. And I will always have lasting and fond memories of our time together at Ohio State. (Laughter.) And I here publicly forgive you for that. (Laughter.)

Secretary Slater, service secretaries and chiefs, Janet, distinguished guests, soldiers and sailors and airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen, ladies and gentlemen, in the chronicle of our country, decisive moments have been marked by a convergence of international and industrial transformation, moments when events fundamentally alter our place in the world, and technology fundamentally alters the world in which we live. And future historians are going to note that we faced such moments in the first and final years of the 20th century. At the dawn of the century, the airplane and assembly line established America's industrial dominance. At the end of the century, computers and communications led a resurgence of American economic supremacy.

A century ago, the old order of kings and colonies tore asunder in Europe, precipitated by a war begun in the Balkans. In our time, the world was reordered by the collapse of the Soviet Empire, leading to a war that commenced, but this time was contained, in the Balkans. In that earlier time, a progressive governor from a small state ascended to the White House, and Woodrow Wilson pursued peace through freer trade and international cooperation. In our time, America chose the man that we're honoring today to guide her through a new and uncertain world, to carry us on what the poet Auden called "the dangerous flood of history."

And I know it's tempting to judge a president's role on the world stage by the wars that were won on his watch, but I would suggest that there is a more telling measure -- the foundation that he lays for a future of peace and prosperity and security. And by that standard, history will surely record the past eight years as being nothing short of decisive.

As the Soviet Union gave way to Russia, it was this president who pushed for a greater Partnership for Peace, an enlarged NATO, and a more stable united Europe. And as freelance enemies the world over sought new and deadly means of attack, it was this president who brought about the elimination of nuclear weapons from three former adversaries, and led the fight for a treaty banning chemical weapons. As the end of the Cold War compelled the drawdown of U.S. forces, it was this president who saw to it that unlike after previous conflicts, that as our military forces became smaller, we also this time grew stronger.

And as a dark night of terror descended on the Balkans, threatening the safety of millions, the stability of Europe itself, it was this president who led NATO on its first military campaign, insisting that the worst crimes of the 20th century not be allowed to spill over into the 21st; refusing to allow either inaction or, indeed, indifference to endanger our allies or our vital interests in Europe. And indeed, as one cheerful young Albanian man later said to the president, "We will never forget that you brought us the most precious gift of all -- freedom."

Ladies and gentlemen, as he did at each and every moment, President Clinton acted in the most noble tradition of American foreign policy. America's interest and ideals were the first, the last and the only factors in his deliberations and his decisions.

And as General Shelton has already noted, and I would add, that after an era of shrinking budgets for the weapons and warriors who preserved the blessings of freedom that we enjoy, it was this president's fiscal policy that allowed, and his pen that signed, the largest increase in military spending in some 15 years -- historic investment in the next generation of tools and technologies, and the largest increase in military pay and benefits in a generation. Today, the hearts of the American people can swell with pride as ours do today when we look upon the finest fighting force in the world.

None of these achievements, none of these operations that I've mentioned would have been possible without the consultation and cooperation across the political aisle. Indeed, four years ago, this president reached across what President Washington called the jealousies and heartburnings of the partisan divide, and he selected, for the first time in American history, an elected official from the other party to serve as a senior member of his Cabinet and has sent an unmistakable message to this nation and to the world itself: When it comes to our men and women in uniform, America must always stand as one. And I think

that we will always be indebted to you, Mr. President. (Applause.)

Mr. President, I would like to express just a very personal note. I would like to say that while being the secretary of Defense, I believe it's one of the most demanding jobs on the face of the Earth, second only to being president, I might add. It's also the most rewarding. You have given me and my wife, Janet, who has been by my side for almost all of the 800,000 miles that we have traveled, the opportunity to soar, to sail, and to walk among America's eagles, our patriots, the men and women who are prepared to sacrifice their lives on any given day; their lives to defend our freedoms. And I want to tell you that in 31 years of public service, nothing can ever compare to this experience. It has profoundly touched and enriched Janet and me beyond any earthly reward. And for that, the two of us will always be deeply indebted to you.

Now, I began with a reference to the great Democratic president of the progressive era, and so, in the spirit of bipartisanship, I'd like your permission, Mr. President, to close with a quote from a great Republican of that day as well.

Teddy Roosevelt once offered an assessment of his tenure that I think speaks volumes about the commander in chief that we honor today. He said, "While president, I have been president emphatically." And indeed I would say that few who have served in the spirit of the president who opened the 20th century more than the one that we honor today has represented that spirit of serving emphatically. You have brought to life Roosevelt's description of leaders as those who know the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spend themselves for a worthy cause, and who know, in the end, the triumph of high achievement.

Mr. President, on behalf of the United States armed forces, on behalf of the American people who live under the blanket of freedom that they provide, thank you for your great devotions. Thank you for the worthy causes you have defended, that have defined your presidency. Thank you for the triumph and high achievements of the past eight years.

I believe that history is going to record that the American people are safer and this nation more secure because of your guiding hand and your leadership. Thank you. (Applause.)

Staff: Ladies and gentlemen, President Clinton.

(Applause continues.)

Clinton: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. First, I would like to thank Secretary Cohen for his kind and generous remarks, and even more for his outstanding leadership of the Department of Defense.

I must say, Bill, when I asked you to become secretary of Defense, in an attempt to strengthen the bipartisan or, indeed, nonpartisan support for the Defense Department among the American people and the Congress, I didn't know that I was the first president in history to ask an elected official of the opposite party to hold that job. Shoot, I might not have done it if I had known that. (Laughter.)

It's one of those occasions where ignorance was wisdom, because you brought to the challenge a sharp mind, a fierce integrity, a loving heart for the men and women in uniform. Your wife, Janet, touched people who serve in our military forces all around the world in a unique and special way. And I'm glad that you believe this is the most important service of your 31-year career. But on this, sir, you gave as good as you got and we thank you. (Applause.)

And, General Shelton, I want to thank you. I will never forget the day when General Shelton, in his previous command post, stepped out of the boat, into the water, onto the beach in Haiti -- in his boots and his beret. I think he could have gone alone and prevailed just as well as he did with the help of the others who went with him.

I'll never forget the time I came to your office, sir, in your previous job. I looked on the wall and there

was a picture of Stonewall Jackson. And I said to myself, I wonder if Stonewall Jackson would be a Democrat or a Republican if he were alive today. I've often commented to General Shelton that we have made -- he, Secretary Cohen and I -- an unpredictable but, I think, quite a successful team. And you have been a great Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sir -- a great Chairman, and we thank you. (Applause.) And we thank Carolyn for her leadership, as well.

I thank Deputy Secretary Rudy De Leon, for the many capacities in which he has served since the first days of this administration. Thank you, Secretary Slater, today, for what you have done as Secretary of Transportation with the Coast Guard. I thank the Service Secretaries, General Myers, the Service Chiefs, the other officers here and enlisted personnel.

I thank especially the members of the White House: my Chief of Staff, John Podesta; my National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, for the work that they have done with me on issues relating to the Armed Forces.

And I thank you for the medals you gave to Hillary and me. We were honored to receive them, but far more honored to spend the last eight years in contact with the 1.4 million men and women on active duty, the more than 850,000 men and women serving in the Guard and Reserves -- those who keep us secure, and advance the cause of peace and freedom.

There is no greater honor in being President than to be Commander in Chief of these magnificent people, so many of them so very young. They are at the disposal of the President to defend our interests, to advance our values, to realize our vision. Most of the time, they do it with all the gusto and fervor of youth, all the discipline that long training brings. But on occasion, they do it at the cost of their all too young lives. We saw it most recently in the USS Cole; but every year, in ways that don't make the headlines, about 200 of these young people give their lives just doing their jobs.

No one who has not held this job can possibly understand the awesome sense of humility and honor and the sense of strength and capacity it brings to any President, to know that there are people like these who have sworn their lives and fortunes in sacred honor for the United States.

In July of 1776 our first Commander in Chief, George Washington, ordered American troops to assemble on Manhattan Island in New York, to hear the Declaration of Independence read aloud -- in full view, I might add, of the British forces then landing in Staten Island. He did it because he knew how important it was that our troops understand that the survival of our new nation depended upon their success. For over 220 years now, the survival of our nation has depended upon the military's success; and for over 220 years, our military has succeeded.

For these last eight years, as Secretary Cohen chronicled in a very different time, in a world after the Cold War, more interdependent than ever before, with new conflicts and old demons, the American military has again succeeded, and succeeded brilliantly.

Thanks to you, the world is safer, and America stands taller. Thanks to you, working with our Korean allies, there is peace in the Korean Peninsula and new hope for reconciliation across the last dividing line in the Cold War.

Thanks to you, arm in arm with an expanded NATO, ethnic cleansing and slaughter in the former Yugoslavia, in Bosnia and Kosovo has ended. Refugees have returned to their homes. Freedom has a chance to flower.

Thanks to you, we are closer than ever before to building a Europe for the first time in history as peaceful, undivided and democratic, a Europe where it is far less likely that young Americans will have to fight and die in this new century.

Thanks to you, Iraq has not regained the capability that threatened the world or its neighbors with weapons of mass destruction. Thanks to you, Haiti is free of dictators, East Timor free of oppression, Africa is beginning to prepare itself to solve more of its own problems. Latin America has been aided in

natural disasters and against narco traffickers. And the United States has led the world in removing more land mines than any other nation by far without sacrificing the safety and security of our troops in battle.

And, yet, those are only the headlines. On Christmas Eve, as I do, or have done, every Christmas Eve for the last eight years, I telephoned a number of our men and women in uniform serving a long way from home, doing critical work, unknown to most, but benefiting all Americans. I thanked Navy Petty Officer Second Class Mario Solares, who serves in Bahrain, making sure we have the piers, the bridges, the towers our vessels need as they protect peace in the Persian Gulf.

I thanked Air Force Staff Sergeant Erin McKenzie, who serves with the 607th Air Support Operations Group at Osan Air Base, making sure members of the 7th Air Force get a paycheck every two weeks as they guard the skies over South Korea.

I thanked U.S. Army Specialist Jeremy Kidder, who serves on a very remote Pacific island, an atoll, 800 miles west of Hawaii, working to destroy our Cold War stock of chemical weapons.

I thanked Marine Staff Sergeant Robert Sheridan, who guards our Embassy in Belarus. He was named Marine Security Guard of the Year in 2000 -- and we know how tough the competition is because, unfortunately, we have been reminded how dangerous that job can be.

I thanked Petty Officer Michael Sandwith, who serves in the Bering Seas on the Coast Guard Cutter Midgett -- and was recently forced to give chase to a vessel illegally fishing in our waters in the middle of a snowstorm with gale force winds and 24-foot swells.

There are another 1.4 million stories like this: Americans in uniform with compelling missions, serving in places and doing jobs our fellow citizens don't hear much about. Behind the desk in the Oval Office, I have a now famous rack of coins from the military units, commanders and senior enlisted personnel I have visited these past eight years. There are almost 500 of them, not counting the duplicates.

Whenever I look at them, I remember the faces of the service members I've met, men and women of every race, creed, religion, who trace their ancestry to every region on Earth, yet are still bound together by the common mission of defending freedom and the common faith in the American creed: E pluribus unum -- out of many, one. It is not only inscribed on our coins, it is inscribed in the hearts of America's service men and women, and it is the coin of America's moral authority in the world.

I can tell you, after eight years of traveling the world and dealing with the world's problems at the dawn of a new millennium, people elsewhere marvel at it. Our ability to live and work together in the military forces, in spite of all those differences, is by itself a powerful force for peace and reconciliation throughout the world. You are America's finest. And America must always be prepared to give you what you need to do your job. We can never pay you enough, but we can always pay you more.

I am proud that a year ago we put in place the biggest increase in military pay and retirement in a generation; proud that we reversed a decade of decline in defense budgets, and now can point to four straight years of growing investment in our future security. No one should think for a moment that investing in the strength of our military is less important in times of peace. The strength of our military is a major reason for our peace. We live in peace in no small measure because your courage and strength makes peace a wiser choice than war for other adversaries.

History will record triumphs in battle, as General Shelton said. But no one can ever write a full account of the wars that were never fought, the losses that were never suffered, the tears that were never shed because the men and women of the United States Military risked their lives for peace. None of us should ever forget that.

Last year I visited a refugee camp in Macedonia, full of Kosovar Albanians who had been driven from their homeland. As I walked through the camp, young children picked up a chant, "USA, USA, USA." Kids everywhere I turned, chanting "USA," children who did not speak English, but knew enough, with their small voices, to thank America for giving them the chance to reclaim their land and their dreams.

I had the same response when I saw elderly people in Normandy in 1994, on the 50th Anniversary of D-Day. There, American veterans were approached by French citizens who told them that no matter how young they were when it happened, or how old they might be then, they could never forget what America did for them.

Years from now, I hope some of our young veterans who served in the Balkans will have a chance to go back and see in person the fruits of their service. Years from now, I hope some of our veterans who served in Korea during this period of historic change, or in the Gulf, when nations there were under such stress, will have a chance to return and find grateful people. I hope some of our veterans who served in Africa or Asia or Latin America or Eastern Europe will be able to return to where they helped to keep the peace, to relieve suffering, to set an example for a fledgling democracy.

If they do, I think they will find people who will still be wise and kind enough to say, "God bless you. You gave us a future."

And I hope that your nation understands whatever you have done to the rest of the world, you have done that tenfold for America. For by helping to advance the cause of peace and freedom around the world, you have made freedom more secure here at home. May it always be so.

I thank you for the honor of doing my part these last eight years. God bless you and God bless America. (Applause.)

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