

Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Secretary General Manfred Woerner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

March 2, 1993

Branch Davidian Religious Sect Standoff

Q. Mr. President, the incident in Waco appears to be ending. Do you have any misgivings at all about how that was executed?

The President. I don't think now is the time to discuss that. I'm pleased that it's ending. I think it's ending in a way that's very consistent with a similar incident that occurred in my State, very similar, when I was Governor there many years ago.

Q. Are you satisfied that the appropriate action was taken in the first place?

The President. I don't think this is the time for me to comment on that. It's not appropriate at this time for me to comment on it.

Haiti

Q. Are you having any second thoughts about your criticism of George Bush's Haiti policy during the campaign, given that today you went to court to essentially support his position?

The President. But our position is different. Our position now is that there's a difference if there are extreme circumstances, and I think there are. You know, maybe I was too harsh in my criticism of him, but I still think there's a big difference between what we're doing in Haiti and what they were doing in Haiti. And there's a big difference between the kinds of problems that are created by the Haitian circumstance. I mean, something that was never brought up before but is now painfully apparent is that if we did what the plaintiffs in the court case want, we would be consigning a very large number of Haitians, in all probability, to some sort of death warrant. I mean, if you look at how many people have been lost at sea, look at the number of people who died not even trying to come to the United States in a much shorter trip recently, given the means they had to get here, the kinds of boats they have and all of that.

We have now cut from 2 months down to 1 week the amount of time it takes to process people who want to be considered to be refugees in Haiti. When we bring people back, we meet them there now. We don't just let them get dispersed into the country. We're going out into the country and doing the refugee handling. So it's a very different set of circumstances than it was.

NOTE: The exchange began at 4:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement by the Press Secretary on the President's Meeting With Secretary General Woerner

March 2, 1993

The President welcomed NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner to the White House today. The President reaffirmed the fundamental importance of NATO and the transatlantic relationship and his commitment to maintaining a significant American military presence in Europe to defend the interests of the United States and its allies and friends.

The President and Secretary General Woerner discussed the crisis in the former Yugoslavia and what actions NATO could take to support the efforts of the international community to bring that tragedy to a peaceful conclusion.

In addition, the President and Secretary General Woerner discussed the ongoing work in NATO to develop the alliance's peacekeeping capabilities in support of the United Nations and the CSCE and with the involvement of NATO's partners in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council.

The President thanked Secretary General Woerner for his continued stewardship of the Atlantic alliance, and looks forward to working closely with him in continuing to adapt the alliance to meet the common challenges of the future.