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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

January 17, 1990

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
DURING PHOTO OPPORTUNITY WITH
GENERAL MAXWELL THURMAN AND SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CHENEY

The Colonnade

11:00 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me just say that this is my first chance to, in person, thank General Thurman and his troops for the outstanding job they did for our country in Panama. Secretary Cheney and I are extraordinarily grateful to this, our Commander. He served with great distinction and General Steiner and General Cisneros and many others as well. But before our meeting we're having in here, I want to bring him out and publicly tell him how strongly I feel about the wonderful mission, the way it was accomplished and the professionalism -- and I guess, particularly, Max, the dedication of those kids. I'll tell you, it is so moving, as apparent to visit with some of the parents of those that have fallen and wounded. And it's something you see all the time, but I'll tell you, these were remarkable young people.

And well done, and thank you.

GENERAL THURMAN: Thank you very much, sir. You ought to be proud of them -- soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen -- they did a dynamite job.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, they did. Well, we're proud of you.

GENERAL THURMAN: We appreciate your support.

THE PRESIDENT: Very proud of you.

Q When do you think the troops will be coming home -- all the troops will be out?

THE PRESIDENT: We'll be talking about that right now. And they're down substantially and democracy is on the move. General Thurman's just briefed the Secretary and me very quickly here on the moves that Panama is taking. We want to give them economic help; we want to offer hope to the individuals there who are out of work, some of it because of the sanctions that we had to place upon Panama. So we're committed. But obviously -- I think I speak for him, but I know I speak for me -- we want them out of there as soon as possible. And most -- I think a large number are out now.

GENERAL THURMAN: Yes, sir. We're down to 18,900 this morning, which is about 8,000 below what we had in country at the maximum 27,000 --

THE PRESIDENT: Eight out and we've got about four or five to go. South Com obviously will remain. It has a mission, it has a -- we have rights and obligations under the Treaty, and I'm sure that's agreeable to the Panamanian leadership.

Q How much aid do you think you're going to get?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know. We're going to be talking about that right now, Helen.

MORE

Q Do you want to get them all out before the drug summit so that it's not an obstacle particularly for Peru?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I want to do what's right for Panama. I want to do what Panama wants. And obviously, there's still some security considerations that General Thurman was telling Secretary Cheney and me about. But it's Panama's show now. Panama is strengthening their democracy. And we want to know what they want, we want to work closely with them. It is my objective to get the troops out, to get back to the levels before this military action. We will do that. But it has nothing to do with the summit in Cartagena at all. This is prudent, it is right, and it doesn't -- I'm not driven by the summit --

Q Are you having trouble finding countries that will accept Vice President Quayle as a visitor because of --

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q Is he going to Panama?

THE PRESIDENT: I expect he will. I hope so. His itinerary I don't think has been set yet, but I hope so.

END

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