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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF THE REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT TO BE DELIVERED  
TO THE 85TH CONTINENTAL CONGRESS  
OF THE SOCIETY OF THE DAUGHTERS  
OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

CONSTITUTION HALL

It is a great honor and privilege for me to meet with you again. In this Bicentennial year we have a special reason for rededication to the ideals and principles that motivated American patriots in 1776.

I am proud that my mother was a very active and dedicated member of the Sophie de Marsac Campau Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The principles of loyalty and love of country which she cultivated in her children are just as important today as they were throughout her life. They will continue to be important throughout our third century of freedom.

The patriots of 1776 -- men like George Washington and Patrick Henry -- did not mince words. Nor will I -- 200 years later -- in reporting to you on a matter of growing national concern.

Over the past several weeks, as the 1976 political campaigns have begun to heat up, more and more attention has focused on the issue of America's military strength. Frankly, I suppose, because a grab-bag of other issues has been tried and failed.

However this should not be a partisan discussion. On national defense matters, some of my supporters are Democrats; some of my critics are Republicans. Nevertheless, politics does have a way of confusing the extremely complex issues of national security. This is particularly evident every four years when we have a Presidential election campaign.

I welcome the emergence of this debate because during the next four years many crucial decisions must be made about our armed forces -- decisions that will affect our freedoms until the end of this century and beyond. Nothing is more vital to our individual personal security than the security of our Nation.

At the same time, however, the gravity of this subject demands that it be addressed honestly, factually and fairly.

Unfortunately, too much of the debate so far has been cast in exaggerated rhetoric that tends to mislead and confuse, not to enlighten and clarify.

I believe the American people -- as well as our friends and adversaries abroad -- have too much common sense to fall for these oversimplifications, but as your President and as Commander-in-Chief, I do have a responsibility to set the record straight. And obviously, it is time for a little straight talk.

Recent charges that the United States is in a position of military inferiority and that we have accepted Soviet world domination are complete and utter nonsense.

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If there is any single standard which has guided my years in public service, it has been this: The freedom and security of the United States of America must always be preserved. America is the greatest nation on earth and we will keep it that way. I know the D.A.R.'s record on national defense and you know mine.

My knowledge, my concern and my record in support of a strong national defense does not go back merely a few days, weeks or months -- but all the way back to 1949 when I first went to the Congress.

-- For 25 years in the Congress I stood for, I spoke for and I voted for a strong defense force.

-- For 14 years, I served on the House Subcommittee that each year examined in great detail every one of the programs and then provided the appropriations for the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Marines. And always -- in all of those years -- my stance was on the side of strength.

-- During the years before I became Vice President, as Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, I fought openly and hard, year after year, for the maximum military strength recommended -- whether by Republican Presidents or Democratic Presidents.

-- For these last two years as your President, I have called upon the Congress to approve the two biggest defense budgets in our entire history.

-- And my pledge to you today is this: That as long as I hold this Office, I intend to see to it that the United States will never become second to anybody -- period.

Let's look at the record more closely for a few moments.

When I became President in August of 1974 -- some 20 months ago -- I reaffirmed my conviction that our military power must be strong enough to carry out three essential objectives, and I found that we successfully met all three:

We were -- and remain today -- ready and able to protect our own vital security interests.

We were -- and remain today -- ready and able to deter aggression against our allies.

And we were -- and remain today -- ready and able to keep the peace.

Yet, as I was sworn into Office, it was also apparent that we could not afford complacency about our armed forces. Quite the contrary. For the past 10-15 years, the Soviet Union had been striving with dogged determination to overtake us in military strength. In our own country, on the other hand, many people -- especially in the United States Congress -- seemed oblivious to the growing Soviet military capability. Instead, they seemed to believe that we could channel more and more of our tax dollars into rapidly growing social programs and that our military should receive a smaller and smaller share of our financial resources.

In the 10-year period from 1964 to 1974, estimated in real dollar terms, the Soviets expanded their defense spending by fully one-third. By stark contrast, military requests of successive Presidents were slashed by 50 billion dollars in the Congress during that same period. When I became President, defense spending represented the lowest share of our G.N.P. since 1947.

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There was cause to be concerned about the future security of the country, particularly if the Congress continued to hack away at our military budgets. If the Soviet Union continued to expand its capabilities and we continued to bleed our own defense forces, it was inevitable that the United States would eventually become a second-rate power. Clearly the adverse trend had to be reversed, and I set out to make that one of the foremost objectives of my Administration.

In January of 1975 -- five months after I came into Office -- I submitted my first budget to the Congress, calling for a ten percent increase in overall defense spending.

However, that year the Congress cut my defense budget request by 6.5 billion dollars, which included reductions of more than 1.5 billion dollars in operations and maintenance for our forces, more than three billion dollars in procurement of weapons and other equipment, and more than 700 million dollars in research and development. Specifically the Congress:

- refused to provide the full funding I requested for new Naval ships;

- took away funds for two of our new airborne warning and control systems aircraft designed to vastly improve our surveillance, warning and control capabilities;

- denied us additional attack aircraft;

- reduced the funds for modifying civil reserve air fleet aircraft, delaying our back-up airlift capability for support in military contingencies;

- cut our intelligence and communications programs;

- reduced the program for our new B-1 strategic bomber;

- cut into the Air Force program for development of a new air combat fighter to maintain our air superiority in the future;

- reduced our ballistic missile defense technology program;

- reduced the fund request for war reserve stocks and spare parts needed to sustain our fighting men in combat.

I could go on, but the point is clear: No President could countenance such disregard for the Nation's security needs.

So in January of this year -- only three months ago -- I submitted an even bigger defense budget: 112.7 billion dollars, or 14 percent bigger than the defense budget of the year before.

I also made it clear that if the Congress sent me a defense bill that shortchanged the needs of the country, I would take the unprecedented step of vetoing it. Furthermore, I have gone to the American people on the issue.

To my satisfaction, it seems the American people share my concern and are communicating that message to the Congress. And their message was loud and clear: Stop cheating the country's defenses. Two weeks ago, the Congress took the first steps toward committing us to the biggest single increase in defense spending since the Korean War. I thank you and millions of other Americans for your help on this crucial matter.

I hope you will keep the pressure on.

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The defense program that I am advancing will mean that the United States will remain unsurpassed for years to come.

-- Just about two weeks ago we laid the keel for the first of a new class of nuclear submarines to be armed with the most accurate submarine ballistic missiles in the world. This Trident missile fleet will be the foundation for a formidable, technologically superior force through the 1980s;

-- We are now completing the final testing of the world's most modern and capable strategic bomber, the B-1;

-- We are also accelerating work on a new intercontinental ballistic missile for the 1980s;

-- We are developing a new cruise missile for our air and naval forces.

-- Nor does our effort stop with weapons, for we are also expanding our Army from 13 to 16 combat divisions.

We are seeking to achieve new efficiencies across the board -- better ways to carry out our military missions that will not only save taxpayers over 2.8 billion dollars for the next fiscal year, but will also improve our readiness capability.

This is a program designed to ensure that America will never become number two in military power. It is a sound investment in our future, and I intend to see it through -- this year, next year, right through to the end of this decade.

I have spoken of our military strength. Let us never forget that our strength will be meaningful only if it is matched by our resolve -- our resolve to keep the peace, our resolve to preserve our precious freedom.

No one should mistake our internal debates as a weakening of our intention to protect our interests and to live up to our obligations to our friends. The United States will not only remain secure in its power, but I assure you, we shall not hesitate to use that power when it must be used in our national interest.

Even as we are determined in our defense, we shall also be determined in our efforts to reduce the potential for nuclear holocaust.

We are continuing the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the Soviet Union for the simple but good reason that these negotiations offer the best hope for sanity in super-power relations. Ever since the beginning of serious arms negotiations with the Russians years ago, there have been political pressures either to speed up or slow down the negotiations and those pressures continue.

Instead, I have chosen a steady but persistent course based on a realistic appreciation of our national interests. Those interests do not lie in an uncontrolled nuclear arms race but in maintaining an equitable strategic balance at the lowest possible level.

Those who argue that the SALT talks jeopardize the security of the United States are mistaken. In Vladivostok, we began negotiating an agreement which if successfully completed will place equal ceilings on missiles, heavy bombers and multi-warhead missiles.

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There are still important issues to resolve in the SALT talks. I do not know whether we will succeed. But under no circumstances will we be stampeded by arbitrary deadlines or demagogic political charges. We will be guided solely by the national interests of the United States. If a sound agreement is reached, I will submit it to the Senate for ratification.

My friends, this election year is still young. There is still time to restore reason and perspective to our debates over national security. Those who seek our Nation's highest Office have an obligation, I believe, to spell out the alternative directions they propose in our foreign policy and our defense policy. It is not good enough to criticize current policies while refusing to propose specific alternatives. Those who seek the Presidency must be equal to its burdens.

To charge that this Administration -- an Administration that has fought for the two biggest defense budgets in history and for the first time in ten years is convincing the United States Congress to spend enough for defense -- to charge that we have led our Nation into military inferiority is preposterous on its face.

The American people have had enough distorted allegations that we have become a second-rate nation.

We must see the world as it is. We must form our policies out of hard facts, not political fiction.

First and foremost is the fact that the United States is today the single most powerful nation on earth -- indeed, in all of history. And we're going to keep it that way.

Our economic power is far and away the largest and the most productive, producing an estimated 24 percent of the world's wealth with less than six percent of the world's population.

At a time when the number of democracies in the world has dwindled to less than two dozen out of over 140 countries, we remain the best hope of freedom and the inspiration for liberty of mankind.

I say that those with faith in America must speak the truth to the American people:

- The truth that we are the greatest nation on earth;
- The truth that we have the strength to defend our interest and the resolve to uphold our values;
- The truth that though we are strong, we can never relax our guard;
- The truth that for the first time since the days of Dwight Eisenhower, a President standing for election can say we are at peace; and finally,
- The truth that we must remain actively engaged in maintaining world peace and defending freedom.

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I promise to you that I will do everything within the power of the Presidency to keep America strong -- militarily, economically and morally -- as I have throughout my public life.

But I need your help.

Without your support -- without the informed, intelligent, confident constructive support of all the American people -- no President can keep the Ship of State on a safe, steady course.

But with your help, our 200th birthday as a Nation can be truly a rebirth of America.

For 200 years, we have more than justified the faith and far exceeded the wildest dreams of our Founding Fathers. Time and time again we have repeated the hardships of Valley Forge and the sacrifices of Iwo Jima to protect and defend our precious freedom. Our dedicated armed forces stand guard today in that same spirit.

America today is unsurpassed in military capability. We have the greatest industrial capacity in the history of mankind. Our farmers outproduce everyone in history. We are ahead in education, science and technology. We have the greatest moral and spiritual resources of any modern nation.

Let us resolve today to build upon those great strengths so that one hundred years from now, our great grandchildren can look back and say that they, too, are proud of America and proud to be Americans.

Thank you very much.

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