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Office of the White House Press Secretary  
(Vail, Colorado)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have signed S. 3394, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974, with some reservations, but with appreciation for the spirit of constructive compromise which motivated the Congress.

I sought a bill which would serve the interests of the United States in an increasingly interdependent world in which the strength and vitality of our own policies and society require purposeful and responsible participation in the international community. Foreign assistance is indispensable in exercising the role of leadership in the cooperative and peaceful resolution of conflicts, in pursuing political stability and economic progress, and in expressing the American spirit of helping those less fortunate than we are.

In most respects, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 will serve those ends. It includes, however, several restrictions that may pose severe problems to our interests. I must bring them to the attention of the Congress as matters which will be of continuing concern and which may require our joint efforts to remedy if circumstances require.

First are the numerous and detailed limitations on assistance to Indochina. The economic and military assistance levels for Cambodia, particularly, are clearly inadequate to meet minimum basic needs. Our support is vital to help effect an early end to the fighting and a negotiated settlement. This is also the objective of the United Nations General Assembly which approved a Resolution calling for a negotiated settlement. I intend to discuss this critical issue with the Congressional leadership at the earliest possible time.

In South Vietnam, we have consistently sought to assure the right of the Vietnamese people to determine their own futures free from enemy interference. It would be tragic indeed if we endangered, or even lost, the progress we have achieved by failing to provide the relatively modest but crucial aid which is so badly needed there. Our objective is to help South Vietnam to develop a viable, self-sufficient economy and the climate of security which will make that development possible. To this end, the economic aid requested represented the amount needed to support crucial capital development and agricultural productivity efforts. The lower amount finally approved makes less likely the achievement of our objectives and will significantly prolong the period needed for essential development.

I appreciate the spirit of compromise which motivated the Congress to extend to February 5, 1975, the period during which military assistance to Turkey may continue under specified circumstances. I regret, however, that the restriction was imposed at all. Turkey remains a key element of U.S. security and political interests in the eastern Mediterranean. The threat of cut-off of aid, even if unfulfilled, cannot fail to have a damaging effect on our relations with one of our staunch NATO allies whose geographic position is of great strategic importance. This, in turn, could have a detrimental effect on our efforts to help achieve a negotiated solution of the Cyprus problem.

I regret the action of the Congress in cutting off the modest program of military assistance to Chile. Although I share the concern of the Congress for the protection of human rights and look forward to continuing consultation with the Chilean Government on this matter, I do not regard this measure as an effective means for promoting that interest.

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Finally, the Congress has directed that during the current fiscal year no more than 30 percent of concessional food aid should be allocated to countries which are not among those most seriously affected by food shortages -- unless the President demonstrates that such food is required solely for humanitarian purposes. I understand and share the spirit of humanitarianism that prompted a statement of congressional policy on this subject. But that policy could unduly bind the flexibility of the United States in an arbitrary way in meeting the needs of friendly countries and in pursuing our various interests abroad.

As with other differences which the Congress and the Executive Branch worked out in consideration of this bill, I look forward to working with the 94th Congress in meeting and solving the problems that are still before us. We share the common goal of best serving the interests of the people of the United States. Working together, we shall continue to serve them responsibly.

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