

EMBA 30ED FOR RELEASE

UNTIL 6:30 A.M., EDT, APRIL 15, 1975

APRIL 14, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED TO THE 84TH CONTINENTAL
CONGRESS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

CONSTITUTION HALL

It is an honor for me to address this gathering.

As descendants of the brave Americans who founded our Nation, you have a proud heritage.

But I think you would be the first to agree that this heritage belongs not only to the DAR, but to all Americans inspired by our history. We share a common heritage.

Although you are the "daughters" of the American Revolution, all of us are in a sense the children -- the heirs -- of the American Revolution.

And, this year especially, as we prepare for the celebration of our bicentennial, it would be good for all Americans to do some soul-searching about where we are going as a Nation and what we are doing with the precious heritage of freedom that we inherited. This is a good time both to look backward and to look forward -- a good time to take stock.

In doing so, we should not fall into the trap of blind nostalgia -- of persuading ourselves that America's best years are behind us.

There is a lot of negative talk like that going around. It can be answered in one word: Nonsense.

The truth is that if we were to somehow travel back in time together to the American Revolution -- we might be more shocked by the similarities than by the differences. If anything, times were far tougher then.

We were a divided people. Many historians estimate that the colonists were split into three factions: those who favored independence, those who supported the royal cause, and those who straddled the fence, waiting to see which side would win.

Inflation was more than a serious problem during the American Revolution -- it was a near-fatal disease. Printing-press money, the so-called Continental Dollar, was only worth a fraction of its paper value. Many farmers and merchants refused to accept it, even from hungry American soldiers trying to buy provisions.

Too often, American armies were defeated in battle and driven to humiliating retreats. Disease, lack of equipment and lack of training were chronic. We were dependent on foreign assistance for many of our weapons, uniforms, and equipment -- and even for foreign "advisors" to train our troops.

If the French Government had not spent millions to help equip American forces, and if we had not been assisted by a French army and fleet at Yorktown, the American Revolution might have dragged on inconclusively for years.

Yet, out of all that suffering and uncertainty, a new Nation was born and grew up into one of the biggest and most powerful in the world.

Character had a lot to do with it -- the courage and vision of men like Washington, shared by the thousands of nameless soldiers in the ranks.

(MORE)

Call it luck or call it fate, thirteen small colonies clustered along the Atlantic coast somehow managed to produce one of the most brilliant generations of leaders known to history--the soldiers and statesmen we know as the founders of this great country.

But even more remarkable than the genius of the founders themselves is the fact that generation after generation of Americans have continued to build on the foundation they left us. We have never lost sight of their dream.

Other countries have had brilliant leaders. But no other country can point to two centuries dedicated to expanding and perfecting a continuing revolution in a free society. That is what makes America unique. And that is why--although our experience in Indochina has been one of heroic sacrifices and great disappointments--I am convinced that we can and will emerge from this ordeal stronger and wiser as a nation just as we have from others even greater in the past.

And this brings me to the soul-searching--the inventory of opportunities, of challenges before us today. How do we stand today? Are we still on the right course? It would be impossible in the time here to go over every single issue--political, military, diplomatic and economic--that this question raises. So let me focus today on one of them--our national defense. Are we strong enough today? And, just as important, will we be strong enough tomorrow?

According to a recent poll, some Americans have questions about our world position and the cost of maintaining that position. The poll indicated that Americans want the United States--and I quote--"to play an active role in the world." Yet, at the same time, they believe the defense budget should be reduced.

Americans still believe that being strong militarily is important. They want--in the words of the poll's report--"a powerful and militarily secure standing for the United States in the world." What they don't like is the price tag that comes with it.

This is a basic dilemma. When a nation wants to achieve contradictory goals--such as military security and less defense spending--sooner or later, citizens must make a choice.

It is becoming fashionable in some quarters to charge that military force is outmoded in the modern world. It is argued, for example, that modern weaponry, especially nuclear armaments, are too destructive to use--and that, therefore, they won't ever be used. Further, it is argued that, when we have applied military power, it has not produced the results we wanted--as in Southeast Asia.

Finally, it is said that we are unlikely to be attacked in any event. Detente, according to this reasoning, guarantees that future conflicts will be non-violent ones which may be settled by negotiation.

These arguments ignore a basic fact of international politics--one that has been proven repeatedly throughout history: national interests can be guarded only by national strength--and, in a conflict-ridden world, national strength, in the broadest sense, must be supported by military strength.

It is often overlooked that detente--the process of reducing tensions with the USSR--has been possible only because of U. S. strength and resolve. It was after a prolonged period of Cold War testing and confrontation--during which the United States and the rest of the Western World stood fast--that it became possible to move forward with the USSR in negotiations aimed at reducing the chances for grave miscalculations and reducing the risk of nuclear war. In these negotiations, we have safeguarded our vital defense interests. To weaken our defenses is to weaken one of the foundations of detente. (MORE)

A posture of deliberate weakness is most dangerous when the world-wide military balance threatens to deteriorate. But at any time, weakness would be folly for the United States, a great nation, with interests spanning the globe.

If we were to cut ourselves back to such a weak posture -- as some in the Congress recommend -- we would soon find ourselves paying an unacceptable price. We cannot shrink our economy back to pre-1939 dimensions. We cannot turn our back on the rest of the world as we foolishly sought to do in the 1930's.

Like it or not, we are a great power and our real choice is whether to succeed or fail in a role we cannot shirk. There is no other nation in the free world capable of stepping into our role. If we conclude, as I believe we must, that we still need a strong national defense, the next issue is obvious: How much, and what kind?

The answer depends on our continuing, vigilant assessment of those defenses needed to safeguard this great Nation -- an assessment measured in terms of the intentions and capabilities of potential adversaries and the common strengths forged by our alliances. Our nuclear deterrent must be gauged against the nuclear capabilities and intention of others, and in particular the Soviet Union. It is for this reason that the SALT negotiations and the Vladivostok agreement I signed with General Secretary Brezhnev are of such importance. We are working to put a cap on the nuclear arms race. Similarly, the amount and type of conventional forces required will depend on our continuing ability to maintain a truly effective national defense. It also will depend on our ability to meet our security commitments and on our ability, with our allies, to work with the Warsaw Pact nations toward reductions in forces which will increase the prospects for international stability.

It is of fundamental importance to both the United States and the world at large that the strategic balance be maintained -- and strategic nuclear forces are the foundation of our defense. We will work toward further strategic arms limitations, we will maintain a strategic arms balance. Neither we nor our allies can afford the consequences if this fundamental balance shifts against us. I promise you that no defense budget I submit to the Congress will ever sell us short nor shift that balance against America.

And I call on each and every member of the Congress to make the same pledge, for our survival as a Nation could well depend upon it. And I call upon you to let your Senators and Congressmen know how you feel. Let us never forget this: that our Pledge of Allegiance is to one nation indivisible -- not one nation, indefensible!

In the area of conventional forces, we also confront some difficult challenges. Our troops in Europe, for example, are a key element in shielding Europe from military attacks or pressures. Present force levels are necessary to maintain a satisfactory conventional military balance between the Alliance and the Warsaw Pact nations. Unilateral U.S. reductions would upset that balance and constitute a major political change. The United States has agreed with our allies that there will be no unilateral troop reductions except through mutual negotiations.

(MORE)

Our troop levels there are not an obstacle to improved East-West relations in Europe. On the contrary, a stable military balance has been the starting point for hopeful new diplomacy.

For their part, the Europeans contribute the largest part to the conventional defense of the Alliance. Unilateral U. S. reductions would undercut their efforts, and would undermine confidence in U. S. support for the Alliance.

There are two other crucial areas of conventional forces necessary to maintain our side of the strategic balance--our long-range airlift capability and sea power.

If we are to sustain our ability to react appropriately to threats to our interests far from our shores, we may need to increase our already considerable ability to airlift troops and supplies long distances.

The United States and its Allies depend heavily on the freedom of the seas for trade and commerce. Thus, it is vital for us to maintain a full range of capabilities at sea.

Now what about the price tag--what is it costing us to maintain our military strength? Critics of a strong defense say that the defense budget is higher than ever. But the truth is that, in terms of what each dollar will buy, the defense budget is now lower than at any time since 1964, prior to our Vietnam buildup. The reason for this is that inflation has taken just as high a toll on the defense dollar's purchasing power as it has throughout the economy.

Take away the effects of inflation and real pay increases--which are necessary to recruit our new, all volunteer forces--and the defense budget has actually declined in purchasing power during the last four years.

Last summer, the Atlantic Alliance celebrated its 25th anniversary--25 years of peace through strength on the European continent. To mark the occasion, and to reaffirm our collective resolve, we joined with the other member nations in a Declaration on Atlantic Relations. I will be meeting personally with allied leaders in the near future to seek further progress toward our common goal--a peaceful and secure free world.

But neither NATO nor the United States can guarantee a peaceful and secure free world if we allow our defenses to erode. In 1968, defense spending represented about 60 percent of our Federal Government spending. Today, it is down to about 27 percent.

We cannot afford to let our defense strength slide down while other nations build their forces up. It is the obligation of each of us to keep America strong--the obligation of the Congress, of the Administration, and of each American concerned about the future of this country. I pledge to you that I will do my part.

A great hero who led our people in both war and in peace, Dwight Eisenhower, once said that "a true posture of defense is composed of three factors--spiritual, military and economic."

We have the economic and industrial strength it takes to keep America a first-rate power.

Spiritual strength is less tangible. It is hard to measure in an exact way. But I can tell you this: I have traveled to just about every corner of America since becoming President. And, everywhere, I found the same confidence, the same good spirit, and the same willingness to pull together to make this an even better country.

(MORE)

Yes, we have our problems, our doubts and our questions. Yet we also have the strength to ask tough questions and to seek honest answers, painful though they may be. And the American people still have the character and the vision that was tempered in the forge of the Revolution two hundred years ago.

Finally, there is our actual military establishment. I have already talked to you about some of the hardware and some of the costs. I will just add that I don't think we have ever had finer, better motivated officers and men and women serving under the American flag than we do today -- and I have met a lot of these fine young people.

They are of the stock which George Washington would have been proud to command. And we should be proud of them.

George Washington first made the point that I tried to put across today. "To be prepared for war," he said, "is one of the most effective means of preserving peace."

Peace is what we are really talking about, the building of peace and the preserving of peace. And only a strong America can build a strong and durable peace.

As children of the American Revolution, we owe this both to the patriots who came before us, and to the generations who one day will inherit from us all that we have achieved together in two centuries of struggle.

#

#

#