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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

DYESS AIR FORCE BASE

5:04 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. How are you? It is great to be at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, and I will be very delighted to answer any questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, apparently the U.S. is fairly far behind the Russians in terms of conventional weaponry, yet this spring we have seen the announcement by the Pentagon of a great mass of base cutbacks of conventional weapons and training bases, such as Webb Air Force Base in Big Springs.

Can you explain why a base like Webb, with a proven cost efficiency like it has, would be closed?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me talk specifically about Webb. That was a mandated cutback, actually as a result of reductions in military appropriations by the Congress. So, the Executive Branch had nothing they could do except follow the law as passed by the Congress.

I categorically deny that the United States is behind the Soviet Union in conventional weapons. We have sophisticated weapons both in tactical air. We have the finest tank in the world today, the M-60. We are developing another one. We are increasing our Army divisions from 13 to 16 and they are good, fine, outstanding combat divisions.

We are improving our capability, modernizing and upgrading it all along the line. If the Congress passes the appropriation bill that I recommended, a 14 percent increase in department expense appropriations, there won't be any question whatsoever now or in the future as to our capabilities in conventional warfare. That includes, of course, our capability as a Navy.

MORE

QUESTION: Mr. President, are we getting the B-1 bomber, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I included \$1 billion 500 million in my next year's budget for the Department of Defense for production of the B-1 bomber, and the total force we are seeking is 254 new B-1s to replace the existing B-52s. So, we are on the way. I am sure the B-1 is going to pass every test which will be concluded sometime early this spring or in the summer, and the B-1 will be on the production line and we expect to get 250 of them in a relatively short period of time.

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you think Secretary Kissinger is too much of an internationalist?

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. I think the United States of America has to be a leader in the world. The day is long gone when the United States could adopt a policy of fortress America. That was an unsuccessful policy prior to World War II and conditions have changed significantly since then.

The United States must be a leader in the world. It must be a leader militarily, economically, industrially, agriculturally, scientifically and technologically, and we are unsurpassed in all of those areas. So, the United States is a leader, it will continue to be a leader and it must be.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: It is nice to see you all.

Thank you.

END (AT 5:07 P.M. CDT)