

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 12, 1976
[12]

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Chicago, Illinois)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
AT THE
CHICAGO COUNCIL OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

THE PALMER HOUSE HOTEL

12:25 P.M. CST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Gus, John Reilley, Senator Chuck Percy, Congressman John Anderson, Governor Ogilvie, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I really welcome this opportunity to answer your questions at the conclusion of my remarks about the foreign relations of the United States.

Founded shortly after the first World War, your organization recognized earlier than many Americans the importance of the international role which had been thrust upon this country by the course of history.

For more than a half a century you have contributed significantly to greater understanding by our citizens of the foreign policy issues facing the United States.

In the crucial years of the thirties, just before World II broke out in Europe, one of your former Council Presidents, the late Governor Stevenson, pointedly stated your purpose, and I quote: "Only if we make ourselves aware of the problems that confront this tormented world of ours can the freedom and privileges which we have come to take for granted be assured to the future generations yet unborn."

Years later, when I was campaigning ardently for General Eisenhower against Governor Stevenson where I never dreamed that I would be quoting both of them here in Chicago in this capacity today. But I can do so because the record-books of public service to America clearly show that, political rivals though they were, when the chips were down and the national interests of the United States were at stake both President Eisenhower and Governor Stevenson were effective and dedicated champions of our bipartisan post-war policy of peace through strength.

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President Eisenhower clearly stated our national purpose in these words, and I quote: "We seek peace, knowing that peace is the climate of freedom. And now, as in no other age, we seek it because we have been warned, by the power of modern weapons, that peace may be the only climate possible for human life itself. We are called to meet the price of this peace. To counter the threat of those who seek to rule by force, we must pay the cost of our own needed military strength and help to build the security of others."

Our policy of peace through strength is not something that I have recently invented. It is something we first found in our history books when we read George Washington's wise counsel and again I quote: "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

Peace through strength was an issue in my first political campaign when I followed the late Senator Arthur Vandenberg, my friend and mentor from home, in supporting NATO, the Marshall Plan and aid to Greece and to Turkey.

Peace through strength is my consistent guide or was in the 535 votes I cast on defense and foreign policy issues while a member of the House of Representatives in the Congress and as ranking Republican of the Defense and Foreign Aid Appropriations Subcommittees and as Minority Leader of the House.

Peace through strength has been my constant goal as your President, and let me tell you what I mean by peace through strength -- not with election rhetoric but by the record.

Let me define our national security policy not with words but what we have actually done to advance peace in the world and to maintain strength at home. And my very first words after taking the solemn oath as President I pledged an uninterrupted and sincere search for peace. I said America will remain strong and united, but its strength will remain dedicated to the safety and to the sanity of the entire family of man as well as to our own precious freedom.

One need only remember Pearl Harbor and some in this audience do, to know that weakness invites war. But now that Americans are no longer fighting on any front, there are many sincere but, in my judgment, shortsighted who believe that billions for defense could be better spent for other programs.

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I am convinced that adequate spending for national defense is an insurance policy -- an insurance policy for peace that we cannot afford to be without in today's world. We must have this life insurance because we face a powerful adversary armed with deadly weapons whose price and whose purposes are fundamentally different from ours.

We will work to reduce confrontations and avoid nuclear catastrophe but we must also be prepared to meet challenges wherever and whenever they occur. It is no secret that the United States and the USSR have fundamental differences in political and economic ideology. We will never cease the defense of the principles for which we stand -- freedom, individual rights and our deep belief that Government exists to serve its citizens. Our task is a dual one, to defend and promote the ideals of the American people and to seek to reduce whenever possible the tensions and confrontations which could lead to nuclear holocaust.

To do this we must maintain a position of unquestioned strength. That is why a few months after becoming President I sent to the Congress the highest peace time defense budget in the Nation's history, more than \$104 billion. Regrettably, Congress cut over \$6 billion from that budget.

This year again I have gone to the Congress with another record peace time defense budget request of \$112.7 billion. My current defense budget request before the Congress at the present time reflects my determination to maintain America's defenses, both strategic and conventional, at the levels our national security requires.

They include an increase in real dollars of \$7.4 billion to buy new weapon systems, to continue to improve the readiness of our existing forces and to increase selective forces while trimming off all the fat that we can.

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Funds are included for 16 new Navy ships and continued modernization of the fleet including nuclear powered submarines and guided missile frigates. I will ask for more in the way of Navy shipbuilding if a current study shows we need a faster buildup.

Work will continue on the Trident Submarine, the B-1 strategic bomber, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. A new combat fighter for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, and advance tanks, amphibious and infantry vehicles for the Army.

Just as I have persistently worked to maintain elements of America's strength, I have also diligently sought peace through strength. Three times as President, I have gone to Europe to reaffirm our NATO commitment. With our Western allies, to coordinate our economic and energy policies with the industrialized democracies and to improve our trade and contacts with the peoples of Eastern Europe, and reassure them of the bond between us.

I went to Europe to say to the leaders of the Warsaw Pact Nations, indeed to the 33 European nations as well as West, that the descendants of Europeans in America still live by the principles set here some 200 years ago. That all men, not just men, but all men and women everywhere are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights with the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

I told them plainly, and I am proud to say it here again today that we Americans still believe in those principles, that they remain the guidelines of our national policy, and they continue to give hope to millions of people who long for liberty in Europe and around the world.

Twice as President, I have traveled to Asia to strengthen our vital partnerships with postwar Japan and our other free allies, and to further improve our relations with Mainland China, which are essential to peaceful progress under our Pacific Doctrine.

I also met in Vladivostok with General Secretary Brezhnev where we reached preliminary agreement on limits to uncontrolled strategic nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States.

As you know, we are still negotiating the details of such an agreement, and I cannot say when or even whether this will be completed, but I can say that ever since the Russians set off their first nuclear explosion in 1949, every President of the United States has been trying to slow down or stop this deadly dual, and this is the closest we have ever come, and I will say also without hesitation that I will never agree to any such treaty or submit it to the United States Senate for ratification unless I am totally convinced that it is in the best interests of the United States and of the peace of the world.

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If we do get a good SALT II agreement, it will keep a lid on strategic arms for the next seven to ten years. It will compell the Russians to cut back on their current strategic military capability.

To fully verify any such agreement, and that is absolutely essential, we will have to maintain our United States intelligence capability as the finest in the world. That is why I have ordered a basic reform to strengthen and to improve our foreign intelligence operation, and at the same time stop any future abuses of the rights of all Americans.

Both these duties are the job and the responsibility of the President of the United States, but I will not let anybody wreck our worldwide intelligence capability.

I happen to believe it is time we stopped downgrading America and its priceless institutions. I have faith in this country, in the goodness of its people and the rightness of its purpose. Because we abused our great strength and our great, great abundance to help others, the United States is able to play a positive role as peacemaker in the world.

The Sinai Agreement between Israel and Egypt reached last September is working well and is a milestone toward a permanent settlement in the Middle East. We are strengthening old and new friendships with the nations of Latin America and Africa, and I have warned Castro's Cuba and its Soviet sponsors against any further armed adventurism in either continent.

We are standing up and speaking out for our principles in the United Nations, and we continue to do so. We are promoting our overseas trade and have reached or restored a favorable balance in large part through the efforts of the American farmers whose productivity is one of the Nation's greatest strengths for peace.

Peace and strength are a part of a single policy.-- two sides of the same coin. Secretary of State Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, are carrying out a single policy for the United States. A good example of this appears in this week's U. S. News and World Report, which contains extensive interviews with both of my Cabinet Members.

They were questioned separately, and neither knew that the other was being questioned, and obviously didn't know the answers the other was giving, but the policy they set forth is clearly and completely consistent.

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They have different responsibilities, but a single goal. That goal, peace through strength, is the right policy for this country in the very difficult and very dangerous times in which we live. Lincoln told troubled Americans of his time to have faith, that right makes might. He did not neglect the strengths that material might provide, nor can we. But neither must we forget the rightness of what we stand for throughout the world. We stand for freedom because freedom is right.

We stand for peace because peace is right. We stand for strength, our national strength that makes both peace and freedom secure for ourselves and for others because that kind of strength is right and will certainly prevail.

Thank you very kindly.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I will lead off with the question to be followed by questions from the audience, and the first question is, as you know, a number of your critics of American defense policy have stated that the American people are no longer prepared to pay the cost of a defense budget that is required to support our foreign policy role as we have defined it for the past two decades.

What is required, they argue, is a fundamental redefinition or cutting back of our commitments and our interests in the world. I wonder if you would respond to that question.

THE PRESIDENT: I am an optimist that the American people, if they are told the facts and the logical arguments that can be given, will support an adequate defense policy. We have had, for the last 10 to 15 years, a declining trend in support for our military capability. We have been spending a lesser and lesser amount in real dollars.

I think the time has come that we must reverse that trend, and the budget that I submitted in January of this year for \$112.7 billion is the mechanism by which we can reverse that trend.

The American people went through a traumatic period during the war in Vietnam. For reasons I think we all understand, whether we agree with them or not, the American people became somewhat disillusioned with what our role and responsibilities have to be throughout the world.

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Perhaps in the days gone by, we went too far, but whether we like it or not, we have responsibility for our own security and to help others in a responsible and constructive way.

To do that, to deter aggression, to maintain peace, to protect our own security, we have to have this change in the direction of our defense programs and policies.

I am convinced, and I see a feeling coming through as I travel around the country, as I listen to people, that the American people have gotten over that traumatic experience in the last 10 or 15 years and are now beginning to have the same fine attitude that they had in the post World War II period.

That is essential for us and for what we stand for around the world, and I am an optimist the American people will support it.

QUESTION: The second question. In his Boston speech yesterday, Secretary of State Kissinger warned about communist gains in Italy and France, and the question is, what are the Administration's plans of doing something about this problem?

THE PRESIDENT: From my first visit to Brussels in May of last year, when I met for the first time with the heads of the Government of the NATO Nations, I said then, and I will reiterate now, we would have a weakened NATO if the Governments of any one of the NATO countries were controlled by the communist elements of that country. We have a very difficult decision in Italy.

The situation in Portugal has gone through a very difficult period, but if any one of the 15 countries in NATO is controlled or dominated by the communist forces in those countries, I think that NATO would be weakened.

In France, as you know, in the last election, the communists joined with the socialists and came very, very close. We see evidence of the leader of the Communist Party in France, and the Communist Party in Italy, attempting to disassociate themselves with the international communist movement. I have to be somewhat skeptical of the sincerity of those positions. I believe that NATO and the Western Alliance will be stronger without any such involvement by a communist dominated government, so I strongly support the policy that America should build the alliance on free government policies and not governments dominated by communist political parties.

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QUESTION: Another question, Mr. President, and there have been quite a number on this subject. Since your visit to China in December there has been, of course, a change in the leadership there. Could you comment on the Administration's policy both towards the mainland government in Peking and secondly about the plans for this Administration's dealings with the government on Taiwan?

THE PRESIDENT: When I was in China in December of this year of course it was the second trip that I had made in 1972. I went with the Democratic House Leader and the two of us spent almost two weeks there, and we went back in December of this year and had the opportunity of meeting with Chairman Mao and other top leaders in the People's Republic of China.

I believe that the progress we are making in our relations with the People's Republic is right on course predicated on the Shanghai Communique of 1972. It is a slow but I believe constructive process. We are developing broadening relations with 800 million people, a country that dominates the land mass in Asia, and I believe it is in our interest to continue to broaden and strengthen that relationship in a prescribed way that was laid out first at the time of the Shanghai Communique.

The relations at the present time with the Chinese Nationalist Government on Taiwan are good. We have a defense treaty with the Chinese Nationalist Government. They have had an amazing rebound in their economy and they are no longer dependent upon us for economic or military assistance. The relationship, we hope, can continue to be a beneficial one and I hope as we move toward normalization with the People's Republic that we can maintain a proper relationship with the Chinese Nationalist Government. It is difficult to write a prescription here in Chicago but I think it is possible and I think it is in our national interest.

QUESTION: We have a number of questions about the relations between the Executive Branch and Congress. Specifically, how can a President in conducting foreign policy operate efficiently if the majority of Congress is going to operate politically and places severe restrictions on the President?

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THE PRESIDENT: Let me say I give the Congress the benefit of the doubt that what they do is not politically oriented because I think whether I agree with them or not or they agree with me, they have views that I have to respect and I trust they respect mine. I have been disappointed, however, in some of the actions that were taken in the last 19 months by the Congress; I think they have been harmful in the implementation of an effective foreign policy. Let me cite several.

In the 1974 Trade Act there were certain limitations placed on what we could or could not do in trying to stimulate our trade relations with the Soviet Union. This was bound up indirectly, if not directly, with our efforts to get the Soviet Union to expand the immigration of primarily Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union to Israel.

In 1974, as I recall, some 35,000 Soviet Jews left the USSR and primarily went to Israel. In 1975 that dropped to about 12,000 to 15,000. Primarily because of the language which was written into the Trade Act of 1974 the Soviet Union felt that the obligations in that legislation were such that they could not continue the trade relationship with us, and I think it is perfectly obvious the net result was there was a slow down in Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel. I think that was a bad mistake that the Congress made because I was personally confident from assurances that I had that instead of keeping the immigration at 35,000 it probably would have increased if we had not had the action by the Congress.

Now you can take another issue. The limitation by the Congress on what we could do in delivering Turkish military aid was very harmful. I know the intentions were the best. The Congress, or a majority of the Congress, felt that if we put the pressure on Turkey they would withdraw 40,000 troops from Cyprus. Well, we had that limitation on for about nine months and no movement. We want to solve the problem in Cyprus, and if we had been given a free hand to do so, I am convinced we could have solved the problem of Cyprus months ago.

The action by the Congress actually delayed, hampered, hindered the negotiating capability that we had at that time to work with both the new Greek government, Caramanlis, and the Turkish government under Prime Minister Demirel. Finally, the limitation has been taken off not totally but in part and we are beginning to get some movement in the solution of the Cyprus problem, but the action of the Congress in my opinion delayed and hampered some action that I think could have solved it much, much quicker.

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What I am saying is if you go back to the debates in the Federalists papers, you will see that our forefathers who drafted the Constitution understood that for a day-to-day implementation of foreign policy you need one single person, you can't have 535 secretaries of state. Now I want to work with the Congress, and we are, but at some point responsibility has to be given to one person. I hope that in the months ahead, without political operations or motivations, we can work together. I certainly will bend over to the maximum to achieve that relationship.

QUESTION: One final question, Mr. President, related to your earlier remarks.

It is clear that the bipartisan tradition in foreign policy is once again under strain in a campaign year and that foreign policy issues have already become issues in the primary campaign.

The question is, do you expect that foreign policy issues will play a decisive role in the Presidential election campaign itself in November?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I do regret that foreign policy has been interjected into both the primary as well as potentially in the Presidential election. I think the finest implementation of foreign policy in this country came at a time when Democrats and Republicans, Congress and the President, were working together. There really should not be wide division and I would hope that we could not do away with the responsible discussion of foreign policy but I think it has to be kept in the right context if we are to maintain the assurances of support from our allies, if we are to have adversaries around the world respect the United States.

I can assure you that when there are deep divisions within our country on foreign policy, our allies begin to question what direction will America go and I think our adversaries are tempted to exploit or seek to exploit what they seem to think are weaknesses. So I would hope to the maximum degree possible that foreign policy will not be an emotional issue. I think it is an area where we can have responsible dialog but if it becomes a deep decisive influence for the next six to nine months, I think it could be harmful as we try to achieve what we all want, which is peace, and at the same time opportunities for others.

I will take one more if you want to, John.

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QUESTION: We have several on the subject of what are the prospects for continued stability in the Middle East?

THE PRESIDENT: We, of course, in September of last year, were very fortunate to get the Israelis and the Egyptians to work together for the Sinai Agreement. We have participated to the extent of providing observers in the neutral zone and we are helping both Israel and Egypt and this has been a great step forward, but obviously there are some very difficult problems to solve -- the problems of the PLO, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the rest of the Sinai, the agreements that are reached, whether it is full peace or non-belligerency.

These are very complicated and emotional issues, but I am an optimist, based on or predicated on the success that we had working with Prime Minister Rabin and President Sadat. I think that world pressure is going to be helpful in continuing the momentum that we played an active part in... and I think it would be in the best interests of the world as a whole and certainly the best interests of that volatile, complicated, controversial area if we could continue to move ahead responsibly bearing in mind that this country is dedicated to the security and survival of the Government of Israel, that this country believes that we have to work with some of the Arab nations to convince them of our good faith and they can trust us.

But if we stop and do nothing, if we don't move to help the momentum going, I think we could have another outbreak, and we have had four in 25 years and each one gets bloodier and worse with more world powers potentially involved.

So we have an obligation to work with the Israelis as well as their Arab neighbors, and this Administration will, because we have their faith, we have their trust and we have shown results by working with them.

Thank you very, very much.

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(AT 1:07 P.M. CST)