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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
85TH CONTINENTAL CONGRESS OF THE
NATIONAL SOCIETY OF THE
DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

CONSTITUTION HALL

10:31 A.M. EST

Mrs. Smith, members and guests of the Daughters of the American Revolution:

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

I am very 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 this country which she cultivated in her children are just as important today as they were throughout her lifetime, and they will continue to be important throughout our third century of freedom in America.

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 presume this has happened because the grab-bag of other issues have tried and failed.

However, this should not be a partisan discussion. On national defense matters, some of my supporters are Democrats and 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.

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I welcome the emergency 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, 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 to clarify.

I believe the American people, as well as our friends and adversaries abroad, have too much common sense to fall for 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 -- and I will give it to you this morning.

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

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. They are virtually identical.

My knowledge, my concern, my record in support of a strong national defense does not go back merely a few days, a few weeks or even a few 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 national defense.

For 14 years I served on the House Committee on Appropriations 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 Marines, and always, in those years, my stance was on the side of strength for America.

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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 a Republican President or by a Democratic President.

For these last two years as your President, I have called upon the Congress to approve the two biggest defense budgets in our American 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 just 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 we remain today ready and able to protect our own vital security interests.

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

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

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Yet as I was sworn into office, it was also apparent that we could not afford complacency by our Armed Forces. Quite the contrary. For the past ten to fifteen years the Soviet Union has 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, Congress 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 national financial resources.

In the ten-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 in the Congress during this same period. When I became President, defense spending represented the lowest share of our GNP since 1947.

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 billion 500 million which included reductions of more than \$1 billion 500 million in operation and maintenance for our forces, more than \$3 billion in procurement of weapons and other equipment and more than \$700 million in research and development. Specifically, the Congress refused to provide the full funding 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.

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

So in January of this year, 1976 -- only three months ago -- I submitted an even bigger defense budget: \$112 billion 700 million, or a 14 percent bigger budget than the defense budget of the year before. I also made it very clear that if the Congress sent me a defense bill that short-changed the needs of this country, I would take the unprecedented step of vetoing it because Congressional action was inadequate. Furthermore, I have gone to the American people on this 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 in this very crucial matter. I hope you and literally millions of other Americans will keep the pressure on the Congress.

The defense program that I am advancing will mean that the United States of America will remain unsurpassed for years and 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 formidably technologically superior force through the 1980's.

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 1980's.

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.

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We are seeking to achieve new efficiencies across the board -- better ways to carry out our military missions that will not only save taxpayers \$2 billion 800 million for the next fiscal year, but will also improve our readiness capability of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and Marines.

This is a program designed to insure 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.

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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 of a nuclear holocaust.

We are continuing the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the Soviet Union for the simple but very 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 and years ago, there have been political pressures either to speed up or to slow down the negotiations, and those pressures continue today.

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

There are still many important issues to be resolved in the SALT talks. I do not know at this time 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 of America. If a sound agreement is reached, of course I will submit it to the United States 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.

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To charge that this Administration -- an Administration that has fought for the two biggest defense budgets in history and for the first time in 10 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 power. 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 today is the single most powerful nation on earth -- indeed, in all history -- and we are 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 6 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 on this globe, we remain the best hope of freedom and the inspiration for liberty of all 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 to resolve to uphold our values; the truth that 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 actively engage in maintaining world peace and defending freedom.

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 to defend our precious freedom. Our dedicated armed forces stand guard today in the same spirit.

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America today is unsurpassed in military capability. We have the greatest industrial capacity in the history of mankind. Our farmers out-produce 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 100 years from now our great grandchildren can look back and say they, too, are proud of America and proud to be Americans.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 10:54 A.M. EST)