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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
ARMED FORCES WEEK EXHIBIT  
THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

11:13 A.M. EDT

Secretary Rumsfeld, members of the Cabinet, Members of the Congress, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, members of the Armed Services, ladies and gentlemen:

We meet today in an America at a time of peace but we meet in the shadow of a monument to one who said: "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual ways for preserving the peace." Today our defenses are strong, and we will keep them strong. Not strong for the sake of war -- but strong for the sake of peace.

Around us this morning are stirring symbols of America's military might. They remind us of the advanced technology and industry which keeps America's defenses strong. But let us remember, in the midst of this impressive display, that our military strength does not lie in these weapons alone. It lies in the muscle and brawn, the sinew and blood and bone of those who serve in our armed forces.

And statistics like the number of missiles -- the tonnage of ships -- the firepower of weapons -- must not distract us from the quality of those who are trained to use them. Military history has demonstrated, over and over again, that the character of a nation's soldiers and their commanders determines military strength more than any other single factor.

The men and women in all branches of our defense establishment are not only well-trained and well-armed, but just as important, they are courageous and devoted to the American ideals of peace and freedom that they may be called upon to defend. Such soldiers have no price tag. How can we measure the value of an American who has suffered or died for freedom? Or how much was a Grant or a Lee, a Patton or a Nimitz or an Eisenhower worth?

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We owe these people our eternal thanks and gratitude. We owe them our admiration and our support. Our soldiers and sailors and airmen and Marines and Coast Guard are professionals, and we owe them the finest tools this country can provide, and we will give them the means to do that job. The B-1 bomber, a model of which is displayed here today, represents just one part of our commitment to this task.

We have laid the keel for the first of a series of new missile launching submarines, the Trident missile fleet, which will be the foundation for a strong and technologically superior force through the 1980s. We are developing a new main battle tank, new fighters, a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile for the 1980s.

And one excellent example of advanced capability is the new cruise missile we are developing for our air and naval forces. This is a significant technology in which we lead the world. The weapons we hold today, and those we plan for the future, give America a mighty power. But with such power comes a mighty responsibility. We must never forget the purpose for which our arsenal is intended.

That purpose is not to terrify the weak, to provoke armed confrontation nor to lay claim to that which is not ours. Our purpose is to defend freedom and to maintain a foundation of strength on which a better and more peaceful world can be built.

That thought should motivate every man and woman in our armed forces, and their determination to fulfill that purpose must also live in the hearts of every American.

We must all do our best to ensure our Nation is well-defended and we must all do our best to keep America worth defending -- peaceful, prosperous and free.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 11:17 A.M. EDT)