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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
50TH ANNUAL ARMED FORCES DAY DINNER
GALT HOUSE HOTEL

7:33 P.M. EDT

General Van Stockum, Ambassador Cooper, Congressman Tim Lee Carter, Congressman Mazzoli, Congressman Gene Snyder, members of the Armed Services, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am extremely proud to be here in Louisville this evening to address the Armed Forces Committee and their many, many friends. It is a tremendous privilege and great honor to address this very distinguished group of outstanding Americans, citizens who are vitally interested, as I am, in the defense of this country.

I was happy to see that even in the midst of all the excitement of the Kentucky Derby, one of our National Guardsmen, Sergeant Gary Wald, who was here tonight, I understand, was on the alert. I salute Gary for his quick thinking and quick action in smothering that smoke bomb thrown on to the race track, and good luck to you, Gary.

You know, we could sure use a few more like Sergeant Wald to smother some of the smoke that is clouding the real issues before the American people in 1976

But I am not here to talk about races, horses or political. I came here to tell you my deep concern and feeling about defense and military preparedness.

The first person to address this very distinguished organization at its first Armed Services banquet in 1919, was the great General John J. Pershing. Pershing spoke after the end of World War I -- a war that had found America unprepared. Pershing knew what it meant to go to war unprepared. He had seen for himself the terrible price it had cost in American blood, spilled in the trenches of France.

Like any other military commander, Pershing wanted his fighting forces held together as a single American unit, but, at first, he was forced to split off some of his divisions to fight alongside the British and French forces.

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The question is legitimate: Why was that? One very important reason, the American expeditionary force had no tanks, and in 1917 tanks were rapidly changing the nature of the battlefield, tanks were the decisive punch in any attack in World War I.

Our fighting forces have come a long, long way since those days. Speaking here tonight, not 30 miles from the armor center of the United States Army at Fort Knox, let me say tanks today are a critical element of the American ground combat capability. As we saw, vividly saw in the 1973 Middle East War, the tanks played a central role in ground combat.

And as part of our budget for fiscal year 1977, which I submitted to the Congress in January of this year, we are going to make sure that American soldiers have nothing but the best in this very crucial area. That budget calls for the purchase of better than 30 percent more tanks in the budget for fiscal year 1975.

We have gone from a single line of production to a second line, and, if necessary to meet the requirements, we will go to a third line, and we are now testing advanced tanks to select the very, very best that can be provided to the American soldier.

We can also look with great confidence to our substantial arsenal of the world's most effective anti-tank systems, both air as well as ground. American technology and American skills have made us the foundation of the free world's military might, but we must use that great resource to stay ahead.

Research and development is an important, very crucial element, and in my fiscal year 1977 budget, I recommended a billion dollars more, or an 11 percent increase in Defense Department research and development. With this kind of money, we can do the job.

If you look at the record, you will find that 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 new fighters and new Inter-continental Ballistic Missiles for the 1980s, and a cruise missile for our air and naval forces.

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The B-1 is approaching its final testing, and every test so far is on the plus side, and I have recommended the procurement funds for the 200-plus aircraft which will be phased-in to replace our B-52s.

I want to say this to all of you: We owe our soldiers, every one of us -- those in civilian life or those in military life -- we owe our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines the finest tools, the finest equipment, the finest leadership that this country can provide, and we are going to provide it.

That goes for all members of the total force that protects America, both active and reserve components. The National Guard and reserve forces are a great part of America's fighting team and I intend to continue improving the combat power and the readiness of that force.

Within the last two hours, as some of you may know, I signed a law, a bill making our National Guard and reserve units an even more significant part of our total forces. Until today, it took a national emergency or an act of Congress to put the reserves into action.

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Under this new law, the President will be able to mobilize up to 50,000 of selected reserves for a period of 190 days. Of course, we all hope and we all trust that such an order will never have to be given, but if it is, we can now count on the effective deployment of a significant number of reservists to participate with our active duty personnel on the defense of this great country.

This means that our reserve and National Guard are being given an increased responsibility, a greater importance in our total force complex, so it is more important than ever that they be equipped and treated as first-class units. Secretary Rumsfeld and I are going to see that this advanced equipment is available to your units throughout the country.

I was glad to find that the Kentucky Air National Guard has just replaced their outmoded R-F 101s with one of our most modern reconnaissance fighters, the R-F-4-C. This is the type of improvement that we are aiming to achieve across the board and we will achieve with the support of Congress.

Organizations such as those represented here in this room tonight--the 100th Army Reserve Division, the Kentucky Air National Guard, the Retired Officers' Association and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps--are a very integral part of the fighting team that deserves America's support.

Throughout our history America has shown its ability to raise great fighting forces on very short notice. In World War I, for example, within 18 months General Pershing was able to produce an army of some two million strong that decisively defeated troops hardened by four years of war in Europe.

In fact, the speed at which America has been mobilized has been matched only by the speed with which America dismantled much of its military establishment time and time again, and tragically leaving us ill-prepared for the next threat to our priceless freedom.

Today, America can no longer afford to rely on the roller coaster approach, the peak and valley way we have done it in the past in handling our national defense capabilities. The awesome speed, the technology of modern warfare mean we would not have 18 months in the decade of the seventies or the eighties or the nineties.

We wouldn't have 18 months. I think the record is clear we wouldn't have 18 days to prepare our own defenses. If we are forced to fight again, the next war is likely to be come-as-you-are. Instant readiness is another term. We are strong today. We are well-prepared to deter war as we have, but if deterrents should fail, we are well-prepared to control the conflict and to avoid nuclear confrontation.

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Our job now is to make sure that America remains strong, and I promise you as Commander-in-Chief and as President that we will remain strong in the future, as we have in the past.

In my budgets for fiscal year 1976 and 1977, I took the necessary steps to stop the downward trend in American military spending for which the Congress must bear the exclusive responsibility. That trend in Congress has reduced the defense share of our Federal budget to its lowest level since fiscal year 1940, and the lowest share of our Gross National Product since before the Korean War.

This has come to pass for one very specific reason -- because the Congress over the last ten years has reduced defense budget proposals of three Presidents by some \$45 to \$50 billion.

When I was in the Congress, I fought that trend for some 25 years. For 14 of those years, I had the privilege to serve on the House Appropriations Subcommittee that reviewed the total defense budget submitted by Presidents from 1953 to 1965.

For 14 years, for five months a year, for five days a week, five hours a day, I listened, along with the other Members of the subcommittee, to Secretaries of Defense, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, as well as the top Generals and Admirals in all of the services.

It was a great experience and gave me a foundation and a background I think unmatched by anybody in the Congress. What I learned at that time confirmed the lesson of my wartime experiences in the Navy -- the lesson that peace demands preparedness and that weakness invites war.

In my two years as your President I assure you that I have fully utilized all of this background and experience in putting together as your Commander in Chief programs for national defense which produce two of the largest peacetime defense budgets in the history of the United States.

This year, with that budget that I submitted of \$112 point some billion and \$101 billion in spending, we must not let the Congress do as they have done in the last ten years, slash the Defense Department budget for fiscal year 1977, and I call on your help to prevent this from happening in 1976.

Several weeks ago, just to make the point with many of my former colleagues in the Congress, I bluntly warned the House as well as the Senate, if the defense budget is weakened, it will be vetoed, and I will go to the American people to make sure that the blame is put where it belongs -- in the House as well as in the Senate.

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Now, with a budget of this capability, we all recognize that the United States, if we get the budget from the Congress, we will have a national defense program that will meet all of the missions, all of the challenges, all of the problems that we would expect, anticipate or put on our doorstep in the future.

We must stay prepared. We must keep our forces strong to keep the peace. What does that mean? That means having the best soldiers, the best sailors, the best airmen, the best Marines, and giving them the finest training and the most effective equipment and the most outstanding leadership that we have in this great country.

That means setting a firm course for the Federal Government, not just in the defense budget but in all the areas where we can help to keep America the greatest nation in the history of mankind. President Eisenhower, when he was General of the Army, once remarked that our fighting forces are just the cutting edge of a great machine.

The inspiration and power for that machine, he said, are found in the hearts of our many citizens. The spiritual powers of a nation -- its religious faith, its self-reliance, its capacity for intelligent sacrifice -- Ike called these the most important stones in any defense structure.

Our defenses are strong, not just because their fighting or cutting edge is sharp but because America's spirit is unbeatable. America is prosperous, peaceful and proud on its 200th birthday. All of us must do our part to see that America remains strong in every respect.

We will do our part. America will stand ready to meet the challenges and the responsibilities of our third century, not just for us, but more importantly for our children and our children's children. It is our obligation. We will do it.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 7:50 P.M. EDT)