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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
 TO BE DELIVERED AT THE
 WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF OREGON

PAMPLIN FIELD HOUSE

PORTLAND, OREGON

Not surprisingly, I'd like to take this nonpartisan occasion to talk seriously about our foreign policy -- not the Truman or Eisenhower or Ford policy nor the Acheson or Dulles or Kissinger policy -- but the overall foreign policy of these United States of America.

That is one of the things we wrote the Constitution to better manage, and I am entrusted for the time being with the conduct of our relations with other countries. We cannot have 535 elected officials, and as many more candidates, making the critical foreign policy decisions that arise daily and sometimes hourly, though there is no law against anybody criticizing them, as I have discovered along with my predecessors.

Domestic political tides ebb and flow, but foreign policy is a continuous stream. Its course is affected by changes in elective officials but it is mainly formed from our geography, our ancestral ties, our natural resources and economic needs, and above all, the common principles and beliefs on which our nation was founded 200 years ago. Hard-nosed Yankee traders and persuasive Southern planters we were then, but our foreign policy was never the cynical, cold-blooded calculation of our rivals, past or present. Americans have always looked outward, as at home, with a generous measure of idealism.

American foreign policy has been shaped not only by the realities of an imperfect world order, and by events we cannot control, but also by certain truths we believe -- unalienable rights such as freedom and justice, self-determination and the duty of the strong towards the weak and the prosperous towards the poor. As we have matured and grown more mighty, we have learned some hard lessons in world affairs. That we cannot force freedom on the unwilling. That we cannot police every distant corner or fill every empty bowl.

We have made mistakes, we have been disillusioned, but we have never wholly abandoned Jefferson's decent respect for the opinions of mankind, or Lincoln's faith that right does make might, or Eisenhower's that freedom is today indivisible. Thus our foreign policy today is a mixture of the principles that unite us and make us the hope of freedom for others, and the practical counsel of George Washington that the best way to preserve peace is to be prepared for war. Peace through strength is neither a new policy nor a bad one.

Instead of taking you around the world tonight and telling you how many countries I've seen and statesmen I've met, or how many hours I've spent with the National Security Council before making the tough decisions of the past 22 months, let me tell you how I arrived at the convictions I have about America's place in the world. I graduated from the University of Michigan in 1934 torn between my lifelong dream of being a lawyer and making some money playing pro football. I didn't think much about foreign affairs or government or politics.

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My first look at the Pacific Ocean was when I went to San Francisco to play 58 minutes in the East-West Shrine New Year's Game. A few months later I got my first look at the Atlantic. Ducky Pond offered me a job as assistant coach at Yale and I hoped to study law at the same time. But Yale Law School had an ironclad rule against students holding fulltime jobs, and it took me two years before they relented and let me in. I took one summer off in 1940 to campaign for Wendell Willkie, my first involvement in our political process.

Between the law library and locker room, we knew that the war clouds over Europe and Asia were darkening our own skies, and that Willkie was right in saying America was part of One World. We felt in our hearts that the United States should stand with the forces of freedom and decency against Hitler's outrages, but we had grown up in the wake of the first World War, and maybe this time America ought to mind its own business.

I just hung up my Yale diploma in Grand Rapids when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and soon I was back to the Pacific again. For me and millions of others, that was a turning point. We returned from World War II determined to build a peace that would last for our children and their children. We were convinced this could only happen if the United States assumed its full burden of leadership in the world. We considered that a small price compared to the sacrifices our comrades had made. And we went home to convince our friends and neighbors.

We knew then as we know today that only through the strength and staying power and firm purpose of America could peace be maintained and freedom secured. I ran for Congress in 1948 on that policy of strength, responsibility and perseverance in the face of the new Communist challenge and that is still my position today. United States foreign policy must never be made by an elite establishment, nor bent to the fears of a frustrated few. It must reflect the real purposes of the American people when they follow their finest instincts.

There are issues of tremendous complexity and equally great opportunity on our international agenda for the next four years. I cannot cover all of them, but consider a few. Let's talk first about our relations with the Soviet Union, with which we are negotiating in three areas to further reduce the danger of a runaway nuclear arms race and the risk of thermonuclear holocaust.

Take SALT II, the talks on limiting strategic nuclear weapons and launching systems. Both sides have more than enough of these terrible weapons to deter any attack by the other side, but in the absence of any agreement, the requirement to avoid strategic inferiority has impelled both sides to keep on building more systems at a tremendous cost.

What are we trying to agree on? A maximum figure for strategic missile launchers and bombers that either side can have ready for use at a given time.

At Vladivostok for the first time I got General Secretary Brezhnev to agree to equal numbers for us and for them. For years previously, the Soviets had insisted that they had to have more than we. The strategic weapons of our NATO allies wouldn't be counted against our total. What's more, the numbers we agreed on require them to destroy some existing strategic systems and allow us to finish our present program. If they want to build new ones they must scrap the same number of old ones. That was a good deal for the United States and I'm proud of it.

So what are we hung up on now? The fundamental remaining issue is how to deal with certain new systems which are capable of either strategic or tactical use.

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We are working hard right now to resolve the problem in a way which preserves the interests of both sides. If we succeed I will promptly send the negotiated treaty to the Senate for full public scrutiny and debate. The same is true of the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion Agreement which was concluded earlier this month after 18 months of highly technical negotiations. For the first time since they exploded an atomic device, the Soviets have agreed to allow Americans on their territory to inspect large-scale peaceful explosions and make sure they are not secret weapons tests. This is a historic breakthrough for more certain verification procedures to ensure that nuclear agreements are being lived up to. It is a good deal for the United States and I am proud of it. I intend to sign it soon. Finally we are continuing negotiations to reduce the NATO and Warsaw Pact forces that face each other all across Central Europe. This is the only place where American and Russian ground forces are positioned literally eyeball to eyeball, and thus involves a danger of triggering a direct confrontation. The issues are complex in these Mutual and Balanced Reduction of Forces talks which involve our allies in NATO and the members of the Warsaw Pact. Progress has been slow, but we intend to continue them because agreement would enhance military stability in Europe at lower force levels. That would permit us to bring some of our troops home from Europe as well as reduce the level of allied forces on both sides.

Any agreements we reach will require Senate debate and ratification. Any suggestion that we are doing something in secret or not taking a tough line is so much nonsense. We are as tough as anyone can be without junking the possibility of agreement. Whenever I can get a good agreement for a safer world you can be sure I won't pass it up for any political advantage or disadvantage. Turning from direct arms negotiations with the Soviets, let's look at the Middle East. We are determined to maintain the momentum of the Sinai Agreement in which the leaders of both Egypt and Israel trusted the United States sufficiently to take an historic first step towards a peace settlement after decades of distrust and costly wars. We have demonstrated our friendship and fairness toward the moderate Arab states and at the same time strongly reaffirmed our commitment to the security and survival of Israel. Only the United States can exercise such influence for peace and stability in this region, and I am proud of our progress there.

Finally, there is Africa. It contains a wealth of resources and many newly independent nations. It commands the sea lanes of the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean -- and the Soviets are interested in all these things. When we tried by a relatively small amount of military aid, without involving a single American soldier, to help the two authentic elements in Angola against the Soviet-sponsored faction, Congress said "No" -- you can't spend a penny to save Angola. Our political paralysis, the military success of Cuban mercenaries in Angola, and increased Soviet involvement in Africa accelerated the trend toward radicalism and violence in Southern Africa. So I sent Secretary Kissinger on another mission this time not to restore peace but to try to prevent a race war from breaking out. The cooperative programs he proposed for economic aid were important, but more important was the message to black Africans that America cares, that we oppose domination of that continent by any outside power, and that we support for those new nations the same principles we proclaimed 200 years ago, self-determination, majority rule and full protection of minority rights.

If anybody cautioned me that taking prompt diplomatic countermeasures to check Soviet involvement and Cuban adventurism in Southern Africa would have a political spinoff here at home, I didn't listen long. We did what was right and necessary and there was no time to lose. So far it has worked out well, and Secretary Kissinger deserves credit instead of criticism, and that's how I'm sure most Americans feel about it. I could list a lot of other foreign policy problems and the daily decisions they bring to the Oval Office. But the long and short of it is, United States foreign policy is a tough job, one that goes on all the time and can't be put on the back burner every time we have our free election debates. It isn't a job for babes and it isn't a job for bullies.

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When I first became your President 22 months ago, I pledged to all nations, friend and foe alike, an uninterrupted and sincere search for peace. I will neither retreat nor mark time nor shorten my stride in continuing that search. I promised that America would remain strong and united, but that our strength would remain dedicated to the safety and sanity of the entire family of man, as well as our own precious freedom. The modernized and reinforced military forces and weapons systems I have proposed in my two record defense budgets will remain dedicated to freedom and sanity as long as I am President. I remember President Eisenhower saying that only the brave are strong, and only the strong are free. And I also remember President Kennedy saying we must never negotiate from fear, but we must never fear to negotiate.

When the United States has serious disagreements with other sovereign nations, we have really only two choices, to fight about it or talk about it.

Threats are not only risky but rather old-fashioned in today's world. I will not hesitate to use force when it is clearly required to protect American lives and American interests but I will make no threats I cannot carry out in full comprehension of the cost. Every President has that grave responsibility to the people he serves.

I am proud of my stewardship of the foreign policy of the United States and I intend to go on trying to do what is right for America and right for all mankind. We are at peace; no Americans are dying on any battlefield tonight; there are no international wars though there are many areas of tension and danger.

We have suffered a few tragic setbacks and disappointments in the course we have taken since World War II, but we have not had World War III. We have built a solid alliance of free peoples across the North Atlantic. We have made friends and partners of former foes in Europe and Asia. We are expanding trade and cooperation with the nations washed by the Pacific. We have strengthened our traditional ties with France, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America.

Our adversaries are still determined to defeat us and bring all nations into conformity with their system in which almost any means are justified if they advance that ultimate victory. But we have no reason to fear their competition as long as we remain strong and true to our principles, and our system, which has already proven its superiority in every way.

Over the past 30 years since we came home from the Pacific and other theaters of war to make a better world, we have not blown up civilization and we have preserved our freedom. There is more contact among peoples and more communication among governments, a greater sharing of ideas, knowledge and cultural riches than ever before in the history of the world. The levels of human health, learning and economic well-being are rising almost everywhere.

Surely we must be doing something right.

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