

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE  
 UNTIL 6:00 A. M. (EDT)  
 SEPTEMBER 1, 1976

AUGUST 31, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

-----

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
 TO BE DELIVERED TO THE NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION  
 WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

I am honored to be in the company of the "citizen-soldiers" of the National Guard. I am proud to have every one of you on America's national security team. I can report to you today that this team has never been stronger nor better prepared to meet any challenge to this nation's safety and freedom. I intend to keep it that way. Clear and painful lessons of history have taught Americans to demand nothing less.

America is a nation that cherishes peace. But we have learned in this century that the best insurance of peace is a military capacity that commands respect throughout the world. When I took office as President, defense expenditures claimed a smaller percentage of the Federal Budget than at any time since Pearl Harbor. A decade of Congresses had chopped away at America's defense budgets, cutting more than 50 billion dollars from Defense appropriations in the last ten years. I knew that dangerous trend had to be reversed--and I reversed it. Cutting the muscle out of America's defenses is not the best way to ensure peace. It is the best way to destroy it.

The world is still a dangerous place. We cannot lay down our arms in the simple hope that others will follow our lead. We cannot retreat from the front lines of freedom if we are to preserve our freedom here at home. There are those in this political year who want to withdraw our troops from their positions overseas. The voices of retreat talk about a phased withdrawal. They talk as if our defenses won't be weakened if we only dismantle them one brick at a time. They are wrong. Preparedness preserves peace--weakness invites war.

Our "total force" defense policy, in which the National Guard plays a crucial part, is vital to this preparedness. Our active all-volunteer armed forces are no bigger than they have to be, because of the outstanding contributions of our capable reserve and National Guard forces. My policy in this area is clear. Since we are giving the Army National Guard and Air National Guard ever greater responsibility--we have to give you the best training and combat ready equipment as well. We can never again afford to treat our National Guard as the poor relations of our regular forces. Hand-me-down weapons are not enough for the National Guard.

My Administration has made every effort to upgrade your equipment and training. Our guard forces are being equipped and trained to fight on the first team against any potential enemy. You are now being assigned some of the world's most modern combat equipment. In the future, I will recommend that you get even more of the best. Every member of the National Guard has made a commitment to our country. It is summed up in the National Guard Association motto: We serve.

You made that commitment because you know there comes a point when you have to make tough decisions--there comes a point when you have to take a stand. I reaffirm my promise to face up to those same tough decisions--to take a stand for the country we love, for the freedom we cherish, for peace among nations. Like all of you, I cherish the peace that America enjoys in 1976. The peace that finds no Americans in combat anywhere in the world today.

We possess--and we must maintain--the diplomatic skill and the military might which can keep the peace and protect our national security. I will not lead the American people down the road to needless danger or senseless destruction. We will march ahead on the path of peace through strength, and give freedom a new dimension in the United States of America.

# # #