

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION

11:00 A.M. EDT

General Corning, Jim Lynn, distinguished platform guests, members of the National Guard Association.

I am deeply honored to be in the company of the United States National Guard, individuals who follow in the great tradition of the citizen soldiers who responded to the call for freedom 200 years ago -- congratulations.

As Commander-in-Chief, I am proud to have every single one of you on America's national security team. This team has never been stronger nor better prepared to meet any challenge to this nation's safety or freedom and we will keep it that way.

Clear and painful lessons -- lessons of history -- have taught us, we, all Americans, to demand nothing less. America is a nation that does cherish 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 from defense appropriations over the last ten years.

I knew from my 12 years' experience as a member of the Defense Subcommittee on Appropriations in the House of Representatives, that dangerous trend had to be reversed and I reversed it.

Cutting the muscle out of America's defense is not the best way to insure 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, and we cannot retreat from the front lines of freedom if we are to preserve freedom here at home.

There are those in this political year who want to withdraw our troops from positions overseas. The voices of retreat who 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 very, very wrong. Preparedness preserves peace, weakness invites war.

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Our "total force" defense policy in which the National Guard plays a very 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 reserves and National Guard forces. I congratulate each and every one of you and your associates back home.

My policy in this area is clear. Since we are giving the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard ever greater responsibility, we have to give you the best training and the best combat equipment available, and we will. 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 your 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 fight to make certain that you get even more of the best.

Every member of the National Guard has made a very special commitment to our country. It is best said 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 make a stand. I reaffirm my promise to face up to those same tough decisions. With God's help, we will stand up for the country we love, for the freedom we cherish and for peace among nations.

Like all of you, I value 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 America and our freedom a new dimension in the United States of America.

Thank you very much.

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(AT 11:07 A.M. EDT)