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Office of the Vice President
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REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AT THE
U. S. NAVAL ACADEMY GRADUATION EXERCISES
U. S. NAVAL ACADEMY
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

June 4, 1975

There is something that sets apart this graduation ceremony from those of your civilian classmates all across the Country. Your initial decision to come here to Annapolis, your decision to remain here through four demanding years, was a decision to link your destiny with the destiny of your Country.

You embark on your naval careers in what is, in one sense, the best of times and in another, the toughest of times. It is a good time in that the dissension and divisions that plagued the Country in the recent past can be put behind us. Our Nation can now begin anew with a revived sense of national purpose and a restored sense of national unity.

But it is a trying time for military men because of America's historic tendency to lower its guard during periods of relative stability and in the absence of visible threats to our national security. The need for your readiness, your vigilance and your sacrifice remain undiminished. Yet, under the circumstances, people are less likely to recognize that fact.

In short, we are in an era of detente which is well for the world, but which makes our understanding of the military role and our need for invincible strength infinitely more important. Detente offers great opportunities for maintaining peace in the world. I applaud the President and the Secretary of State as well as General Secretary Brezhnev and the Soviet leaders for pursuing this course which can benefit both our peoples.

I. Detente and Military Strength

And so I would like to address my remarks today to the critical relationship between detente and our Nation's strength. An often unrecognized essential element in detente is the element of strength. This is something that the President and the Secretary of State understand full well. Detente can only be meaningful if we deal from strength, from a profound understanding of the realities of today's world and a clear sense of national purpose and determination. And we are highly fortunate, indeed, to have, at this moment in history, a President who has such deep faith and belief in America and absolute courage and determination--together with a Secretary of State who shares the President's understanding of America's role in the world today.

From the beginning of our history, we have had to learn and relearn the lesson that strength reduces the likelihood of war and that weakness is an irresistible temptation to aggressors. George Washington counseled the Country long ago that, "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace." That is even more true today. Yet, after the Revolution we did not even maintain a Navy. In the early 1790's an economy-minded Congress preferred paying ransom to building ships to protect American seamen.

We can be deeply grateful and proud that only recently when the new Communist government of Cambodia captured the United States merchant ship, the Mayaguez, we had a strong Navy; and we had a President who had the courage, when diplomatic efforts failed, to order decisive military action which resulted in the immediate release of the crew and the ship. Nevertheless, there are some today who would still return us to isolationism --to the Fortress America mentality that was fashionable right up to World War II.

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Yes, we must continue to work and to hope that negotiations with the Soviet Union will eventually reduce the need for huge increases in defense spending. The Strategic Arms Limitation talks and the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction Negotiations offer such opportunities. But to disarm ourselves unilaterally, because of an impatience, a frustration with the burden of bearing the cost of vigilance will not provide any incentive for our adversaries to disarm.

Disarmament must be worked out step by step, concession by concession, by all parties involved under satisfactory guarantees that all parties abide by the agreement. If anybody still believes that unpreparedness and good intentions stave off war, I urge them to reread the history leading up to World War II.

Our strength provides an incentive for potential adversaries to seek the alternative of a peaceful resolution when problems arise. And our strength leads them to think twice about the risk of pursuing global temptations.

II. Declining U. S. Defense

Yet, the call is continually heard that we have to reorder our priorities -- to spend more on urgent human needs and less on defense. I remain steadfast in my life-long commitment to government actions that seek a better life of greater opportunity for the American people. The fact is that during the past decade we have already reversed our priorities between domestic and defense expenditures. In terms of constant dollars, defense spending today is the lowest in 25 years.

In 1964, prior to the Vietnam build-up, less than one-third of Federal spending went for human resource programs -- and half the budget went for national defense. During the past decade, that situation has been completely reversed. The budget submitted for Fiscal 1976 shows about one-quarter for defense and over half going for domestic social programs.

Now we find ourselves in a period of inflation and recession with a \$60 billion deficit and unemployment at well over eight per cent. What is becoming increasingly clear is that our social progress, military strength and our ability to help build a more stable world all depend on rebuilding the vitality and economic strength of the United States. It is becoming increasingly clear that we must face up to the devastating vulnerability of our economy to another oil boycott and the possibility of similar action in relation to other raw materials at some later time.

III. Growing Strength of the Soviets

Yes, we recognize the peacemaking and peacekeeping potential of detente. But cold realism requires that we must not ignore the growing strength of potential adversaries in setting our own defenses both economic and military.

For example, let us examine openly and honestly where we stand with respect to the Soviets, first in terms of strategic weapons. During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the United States had a huge strategic advantage. By 1973, during the Middle East War, that extra margin of security had vanished. We no longer refer to American predominance in strategic weapons but, rather, to parity with the Soviets.

The Polaris submarines deployed during the Cuban crisis are no longer a uniquely American weapon. Our last missile submarine was launched nearly a decade ago. The Soviet Union is presently building a large fleet of modern ballistic missile firing submarines. And Soviet missile submarines now patrol the American coast.

The Soviet Union has more land-based missiles with larger warheads than we do and is now challenging our lead in sophisticated warheads. The Soviets are currently testing five types of missiles with a NRV capability. U. S. bombers, built mostly in the 1950's, help make up for numerical inferiorities in other strategic categories. In short, the Soviets are now spending much more than we are in the strategic area.

Secondly, let us compare strength with the Soviet Union particularly in your area of concern -- naval power. The growth of Soviet naval capability has been a most significant development during this decade. America's post World War II naval preeminence no longer goes unchallenged.

During the 1973 Middle East War, the nearly 100 Soviet ships in the Mediterranean clearly outnumbered our own. Our surface ships are down to 1939 levels. The Soviets now possess the ability to interdict the vital sealanes on which we depend to supply our allies and to obtain vital resources such as oil and other raw materials on which we are increasingly dependent.

The Soviet submarine force is three times the size of ours. Although we maintain a certain comparative advantage in submarine technology, that gap, too, is closing. Soviet submarines, surface ships, and their air force are equipped with a variety of missiles which present a real challenge.

We have maintained a clear edge in naval air power, which has proved its value repeatedly -- for example, in crises in the Mediterranean in 1958, 1967 and 1973. However, the number of our carriers is decreasing, while the Soviets, on the other hand, have decided to make an investment in aircraft carriers. Let me quote how the Commander of the Soviet Navy evaluates their fleet, which he has so brilliantly developed and led for about the last 20 years. "The Soviet Navy," Admiral Gorshkov says, "has been converted in the full sense of the word into an offensive type of long-range armed force."

And finally, as for land and air forces, our Army is about half the size of the Soviet Army and ranks fourth in size in the world. While the Soviets increase the size of their forces, our Army and Air Force -- which are indispensable to the defense of NATO, our allies and our own national security -- are at their lowest levels since before the Korean War.

What we have lacked in numbers in most areas of defense, we have made up for in the technological superiority of our equipment. We have allowed numerical deficiencies in strategic weapons and submarines, for example, partly because of a confidence in our ability to maintain technically superior systems. Such technological advantage, however, is not static. An increased investment in continuing research and the updating of our equipment is required.

While we are committed to pursuing the peaceful potentials of detente, we must remain aware that the Soviets are increasing their military presence throughout the world. This is a hard fact that we have to face. From Somalia to Singapore, from Guinea to Cuba there is evidence of an enlarged Soviet view of its interests. We are witnessing today a Soviet surge in every component of military power, from strategic through conventional forces and in research and development. And there is no indication at what levels they will be satisfied. The trend for Soviet forces is up. The trend for ours is static at best. At this rate, if we do not make the necessary investment, we might find ourselves on a path that could lead to unilateral disengagement from the world without compensating safeguards.

IV. Retaining our Strength and Leadership

Thus, we approach our 200th Anniversary at a crossroads of critical choices relating to our own long-term national security and freedom in the world. The basic values of individual freedom, respect for human dignity and equal opportunity which our Founding Fathers achieved at such great sacrifice could well be threatened now more than ever before. If we are to continue to lead in the cause of freedom and peace, we must be willing to make the sacrifices required to sustain our own security and meet our responsibilities in the world. This means that we must not only have the necessary economic and military strength and vitality, but a strong foreign intelligence service as well. And most importantly, we must make democracy felt as a dynamic force directed to the best interest and well being of people throughout the world.

V. Human Values Still Paramount

I have tremendous faith in the American people -- in the capacity, the will and the determination of free people to make the necessary sacrifices. As I said when I took the Oath of Office as Vice President -- there is nothing wrong with America that Americans can not right. And my confidence is strengthened by the calibre of Americans who continue to be drawn to the Nation's service.

The defense of human freedom depends in no small measure on men like you. The arms with which we defend this Country are, by themselves, only cold hardware. It is the human qualities of the people behind those arms which determine the quality of this Nation's defense.

Not long from this day you will be supervising undersea nuclear power plants; running complex combat systems on surface ships; flying sophisticated aircraft off the decks of carriers at sea; and leading troops in amphibious exercises.

Here at the Academy you have received the academic foundation to meet these challenges. But you have achieved much more. You brought the best American qualities to this academy -- qualities that have been developed from raw ore into fine steel; courage -- the coolness and judgment under fire that inspire confidence among your men; dedication -- that devotion to a higher calling than self and the willingness to make the highest sacrifice, if necessary; determination -- the staying power, the refusal to be defeated that separates winners from losers in battle as in life; integrity -- the quality the American people seek and rightfully demand in their leaders. As it says in that inspiring verse you have sung so often: "Faith, courage, service true and honor over honor over all."

Looking out over this Annapolis class today, I am -- along with your families and friends -- filled with pride. You enter your navel careers as America moves toward its third century. And you are the officers who will lead the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps into the 21st Century. This should be a source of great pride to all of you. And it is a source of great confidence to all of us.

Out of this coming period of change, and challenge, I am confident that a better nation and a better world will emerge. And in moving toward that world, you will be in the vanguard. Good luck. Good sailing. And God bless you all.

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