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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE AMERICAN LEGION

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
August 19, 1975

I commend the American Legion for its constant patriotism in peace as in war. You give life and meaning to our motto "For God and Country." As President, I salute you and say for all Americans: Hang in there! I am glad to have this opportunity to talk with my fellow Legionnaires about two things which the American Legion has always held dear: freedom and peace -- for our country and for the world.

Freedom always comes first. Let there be no doubt about that. Patrick Henry answered that question for us two hundred years ago. The Marines, Seamen and Airmen who rescued the Mayaguez gave the same clear answer -- which was heard 'round the world. All Americans are proud of their success.

But in today's world of technological terror, with weapons of awesome sophistication and destructiveness, it is difficult to see how freedom as we know it could survive another all-out war. It is even questionable whether a free society such as ours could survive an all-out, unrestricted arms race.

We are, therefore, confronted with the dilemma that has faced the American people and their government since the post-war Administrations of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. How do we preserve, protect and defend our own freedom and that of our allies? How do we advance the cause of freedom worldwide? And how do we, at the same time, preserve the general peace and create conditions that reduce the chances of major war? How do we control the tremendous costs of maintaining the capabilities required for a potential major war? These are exceedingly difficult questions to answer. At times, we have come perilously close to a major military confrontation. We have suffered serious setbacks. And we are still unable to resolve some dangerous conflicts festering on nearly every continent in the world. But we have prevented World War Three. We have preserved civilization. Few who remember the immediate period after World War Two would say that the world is not calmer and better off today than it was.

The Free World, as we define it, is essentially intact after 30 years of an uneasy peace between the super powers, instability in former Colonial areas, and sporadic outbreaks of local and regional violence. And three decades of this imperfect peace have permitted unprecedented gains in productivity and economic progress for much of mankind, including the United States.

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Some fundamental lessons were learned in this period. They must not be forgotten.

First, the military might, material strength and moral purpose of the United States were absolutely essential to achieve the present level of international stability. They remain absolutely essential. We are still the principal defender of freedom in the world.

Second, our enormous defense capability and its economic base have been reinforced by the growing resources of our allies in Europe and the Pacific -- and by the increasing interdependence of the industrial democracies in both military and economic areas. This must continue.

Third, the policies of five American Presidents before me for strong national defense, for reduction of East-West tensions and the threat of thermo-nuclear war, and for the bolstering of our essential allies have had the unswerving and nonpartisan support of the Congress and the American people. I will continue to seek that support. Today, I ask you, my fellow Legionnaires, to help me achieve that objective.

We share a deep concern over the cracks now appearing in the foundations of essential national unity on defense and foreign policy.

Without a clear consensus among 214 million Americans, the role of the United States as the champion of freedom and peace in the world would be crippled seriously if not fatally. The ability of a President to carry out his constitutional duties would be dangerously diminished. The temptation to potential adversaries to take advantage of any apparent weakness, disunity and indecision could become irresistable. With your support and that of other Americans, my Administration will give them no such temptation.

George Washington said the best way to preserve peace is to be prepared for war. In one way or another, each of President Washington's successors has repeated that truth. Unfortunately, we have historically ignored it. We have abruptly demobilized after every war -- and the next generation of Americans paid dearly for this folly. I see some danger signs of our doing it again -- with the stakes infinitely higher than ever before.

That is why I say to you today -- I am determined to resist unilateral disarmament.

I am committed to keeping America's defenses second to none.

Now that Americans are no longer fighting on any front, there are many sincere but short-sighted Americans who believe that the billions for defense could be better spent for social programs to help the poor and disadvantaged. But I am convinced that adequate spending for national defense is an insurance policy for peace we cannot afford to be without.

It is most valuable if we never need to use it. But -- without it -- we could be wiped out.

Certainly the most important social obligation of Government is to guarantee all citizens -- including the disadvantaged -- sufficient protection of their lives and freedoms against outside attack. Today, that protection is our principal hope of peace. What expense item in our Federal budget is more essential?

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This is one place where second-best is worth nothing. The proportion of Federal spending for national security and the proportion of our Gross National Product going for defense requirements have declined in recent years. The dollar figures in the Federal Budget go up because of inflation. But the weapons we can purchase and the personnel we can afford have declined.

During the Vietnam War, defense spending concentrated on current combat requirements, short-changing our long-range research and development efforts. If our technological lead is not rapidly recovered, this could be fatal to our qualitative superiority in the future. Scientific progress in the Pentagon must be an equal partner with the best in personnel and weapons in maintaining peace and deterrring war.

Our potential adversaries are certainly not reducing the levels of their military power. The United States must be alert and strong. The defense budget which I submitted for fiscal year 1976 represents under these circumstances the bare minimum required for our safety. I will vigorously resist all major cuts in every way I can.

For the next fiscal year -- 1977 -- I hope to hold down our spending on nuclear forces. This tentative judgement is conditioned on real progress in SALT II. But the Congress and the American people must realize that, unless agreement is achieved, I will have no choice but to recommend to the Congress an additional two to three billion dollars for strategic weapons programs in the current and coming fiscal years.

In recent weeks, there has been a great deal said about the subject of detente. Today, let me tell you what I think about detente. First of all, the word is confusing. Its meaning is not clear to everybody. French is a beautiful language -- the classic language of diplomacy. But I wish there were one simple English word to substitute for detente. Unfortunately, there isn't. Relations between the world's two strongest nuclear powers can't be summed up in a catch phrase. Detente literally means "easing" or "relaxing" -- but definitely not the relaxing of diligence or easing of effort. Rather, it means movement away from the constant crisis and dangerous confrontation that have characterized relations with the Soviet Union. The process of detente -- and it is a process -- looks toward a saner and safer relationship between us and the Soviet Union. It represents our best effort to cool the cold war which on occasion became much too hot for comfort. To me, detente means a fervent desire for peace -- but not peace at any price. It means the preservation of fundamental American principles -- not their sacrifice.

It means maintaining the strength to command respect from our adversaries and to provide leadership to our friends -- not letting down our guard or dismantling our defenses or neglecting our allies.

It means peaceful rivalry between political and economic systems -- not the curbing of our competitive efforts. Since the American system depends on freedom, we are confident that our philosophy will prevail. Freedom is still the wave of the future. Detente means moderate and restrained behavior between two super powers -- not a license to fish in troubled waters.

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It means mutual respect and reciprocity -- not unilateral concessions or one-sided agreements.

With this attitude I shall work with determination for relaxation of tensions. The U.S. has nothing to fear from progress toward peace.

Although we still have a long way to go, we have made progress: a defusing of the Berlin time-bomb, the ABM Treaty, the first SALT agreements and progress on SALT II, the start of mutual and balanced force reduction negotiations in Europe, and other arms control agreements regarding space, the seabeds and germ warfare.

We have also established the basis for progress towards detente and cooperation in Europe as a result of the summit meeting of 35 nations in Helsinki. But the principles we adopted there now must be put into practice. We cannot raise the hopes of our people and shatter them by unkept promises.

We are now carefully watching some serious situations for indications of the Soviet attitude towards detente and cooperation in European security. The situation in Portugal is one of them. We are deeply concerned about the future of freedom in Portugal -- as we have always been concerned about the freedom of people throughout the world.

The reality of the Portuguese situation is apparent to all. The wishes of a moderate majority have been subverted by forces more determined than representative. We are hopeful that the sheer weight of numbers -- the 80 percent of the Portuguese people who support the democratic process -- will prevail in this conflict of ideologies. But they must find the solution in an atmosphere that is free from the pressures of outside interests.

So far, my meetings with General Secretary Brezhnev in Vladivostok and Helsinki have been constructive and helpful. Future success will depend on concrete developments.

Peace is the primary objective of the foreign and defense policies of the United States. It is easy to be a cold warrior in peacetime. But it would be irresponsible for a President to engage in confrontations when consultations would advance the cause of peace. So I say to you -- as I said to Mr. Brezhnev and the leaders of other European nations and Canada in Helsinki -- peace is crucial but freedom must come first.

Those who proclaimed American independence almost 200 years ago asserted not merely that all Americans should enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but that all men everywhere are endowed by their Creator with such inalienable rights.

I told the leaders of Europe that these principles, though still being perfected, remain the guiding lights of American policy; that the American people are still dedicated to the universal advancement of individual rights and human freedom implicit in the Helsinki declarations.

It gave me great pride as the spokesman for the United States at Helsinki to say to both East and West: my country and its principles of freedom have given hope to millions in Europe and on every continent and still does.

On the other hand, I emphasized that we are tired of having our hopes raised and then shattered by empty words and unkept promises.

I reminded all that detente must be a two-way street because tensions cannot be eased with safety and security by one side alone.

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Through detente, I hope that we are on a two-way street with the Soviet Union. But until I am certain of real progress, I must reserve final judgments about the defense budget and particularly our plans for strategic nuclear forces.

We will, therefore, continue to seek meaningful arms agreements. But this will be possible only with sufficient and credible strength of our own and in concert with our allies. Moreover, any agreements we reach must be verifiable for our security. That is, we must possess the means of making sure that they are being honored. The time is not yet come when we can entrust our hopes for peace to a piece of paper.

Thus, another essential element to any real arms limitation, whether of strategic systems or conventional forces, is our own intelligence capability. Sweeping attacks, overly generalized, against our intelligence activities, jeopardize vital functions necessary to our national security. Today's sensations must not be the prelude to tomorrow's Pearl Harbor.

I certainly do not condone improper activities or violations of the constitutional rights of Americans by any personnel or agency of the Federal government. On the basis of the comprehensive studies of our intelligence agencies by the Rockefeller Commission and by the Murphy Commission on the conduct of foreign policy, I will take administrative action and recommend legislation to the Congress for whatever must be done to prevent future abuses.

Intelligence in today's world is absolutely essential to our Nation's security -- even our survival. It may be even more important in peace than in war. Any reckless Congressional action to cripple the effectiveness of our intelligence services in legitimate operations would be catastrophic. Our potential adversaries and even some of our friends operate in all intelligence fields with secrecy, skill and substantial resources. I know -- and you know -- that what we need is an American intelligence capacity second to none.

Finally, and this relates both to our vital intelligence installations and to the imperative need to strengthen key alliances such as NATO, let us now consider our relations with our friend and ally of many years, Turkey. How do you explain to a friend and ally why arms previously ordered and paid for are not being delivered? How do you explain to your other allies the potential damage this may cause to the NATO Alliance? How do you justify to the American people the loss of strategic intelligence data with its attendant effect on our National security that this action has caused?

I don't know -- because I am at a loss to explain it myself. As a man of the Congress for 25 years, the last thing I seek is confrontation with my friends and colleagues on Capitol Hill. Obviously, I am troubled that the Congress has refused to permit the shipment of arms to Turkey -- but I respect the sincerity and the motives of those who support this position. However, I know that when the bottom line of any issue is the ultimate security of the United States, the Congress and the President have always found a way to close ranks and act as one.

This does not mean that one side or the other capitulates blindly. Let us put this issue on the table and once again debate it -- not in a climate of fire and fury, but in a reasoned approach based on what is right and best for America.

I am convinced from my personal talks last month with the leaders of Greece and Turkey and Cyprus that their differences can be settled peacefully.

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We can help -- the Congress, the President, and the American people. We can help cool the passions that have caused so much heartbreak in the Mediterranean.

The American political system is one of checks and balances. But it works best when the checks do not become roadblocks. As President, I need the cooperation and support of the Congress which I know is as concerned as I am about our Nation's security.

Just as important, your representatives in the Congress need to know where you stand. They have to realize that you place America's security above personal and political considerations.

This morning, I am honored to have had this opportunity to meet with you here in the heartland of America and to share some of my concerns and some of my thoughts on the future of our Nation.

But talk is only the starting point -- and so I ask you to join with me in the commitment I have made -- for the reinforcement of lasting peace and the enlargement of human freedom. I ask this not only for ourselves, but for our posterity and for all peoples who pray that the torch of liberty will continue to burn bright.

God helping us, freedom and peace will both prevail.

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