

MARCH 23, 1983
6:15 P.M.

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS
BLUE ROOM

GOOD EVENING. I KNOW ALL OF YOU ARE HERE ON VERY SHORT NOTICE AND AT SOME INCONVENIENCE. AND I THANK YOU. LATER TONIGHT, IN A SPEECH FROM THE OVAL OFFICE, I PLAN TO CONCENTRATE ON THE SOVIET MILITARY THREAT AND THE U.S. DEFENSE PROGRAM. I HOPE TO INCREASE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE REASONS FOR OUR DEFENSE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM AND THE NEED TO SUSTAIN A SUBSTANTIAL DEFENSE EFFORT, DESPITE THE ECONOMIC COSTS IT ENTAILS. I HOPE WE CAN RISE ABOVE A STERILE DEBATE ABOUT THIS OR THAT LEVEL OF DEFENSE SPENDING TO CONCENTRATE ON THE THREATS WE FACE AND THE STEPS NEEDED TO COUNTER THEM.

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AS A MATTER OF FACT I HOPE FOR MORE THAN THAT. I HOPE WE CAN SET THIS NATION AND THE WORLD ON A NEW COURSE FOR PEACE. CONSISTENT WITH OUR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE A.B.M. TREATY AND RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH OUR ALLIES, I AM DIRECTING A COMPREHENSIVE AND INTENSIVE EFFORT TO DEFINE A LONG-TERM RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR DEFENSE AGAINST STRATEGIC NUCLEAR MISSILES. THIS COULD MOVE US A LONG STEP TOWARD OUR ULTIMATE GOAL OF ELIMINATING THE THREAT POSED BY THESE WEAPONS AS WELL AS THE WEAPONS THEMSELVES. OUR OBJECTIVE IS A WORLD OF LASTING PEACE, ONE IN WHICH NO ONE COUNTRY COULD SHATTER THE FUTURE BY THE INSANE LAUNCH OF A NUCLEAR ATTACK ON ANOTHER.

AS MOST OF YOU KNOW ALL TOO WELL, U.S. DEFENSE POLICY OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES HAS BEEN BASED ON WHAT SOME CALL THE "BALANCE OF TERROR." DETERRENCE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE SOVIET UNION HAS BEEN ACHIEVED BY A PERCEPTION THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE SUFFICIENT NUCLEAR CAPABILITY TO INFLICT UNACCEPTABLE DAMAGE ON THE OTHER -- IN OTHER WORDS, THERE WOULD BE NO WINNERS. SO FAR THIS CONCEPT HAS SERVED US WELL, BUT I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DEEPLY DISTURBED -- AS I BELIEVE YOU MUST BE TOO -- AT THE THOUGHT THAT THIS WOULD BE A PERMANENT SOLUTION. FOR MANY REASONS, IT IS NOW TIME TO LOOK TOWARD A LONGER TERM SOLUTION. IT'S TIME TO START LOWERING THE RISK. PEOPLES OF THE WORLD ARE DEMANDING IT, AND FUTURE GENERATIONS HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO EXPECT IT.

WE NEED YOUR HELP -- AND, I HOPE, SUPPORT -- IN CARRYING OUT THIS LONG-TERM SHIFT AWAY FROM OFFENSIVE NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND TOWARD GREATER RELIANCE ON DEFENSE AGAINST ATTACK. ALTHOUGH WE NOW HAVE THE SCIENTIFIC CAPABILITY TO BEGIN THIS AMBITIOUS PROJECT, WE ALL KNOW THE TASK WE SET FOR OURSELVES IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. WE ARE TAKING ON WHAT COULD BE THE MOST DIFFICULT TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGE WE'VE EVER FACED. BUT WOULDN'T IT BE A FITTING APPLICATION OF THE TECHNOLOGY WE HAVE CREATED OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS?

NOW, I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A PROCESS THAT MAY NOT REACH FRUITION UNTIL THE TURN OF THE CENTURY OR BEYOND.

THIS WILL HAVE TO BE AN AMERICAN COMMITMENT THAT TRANSCENDS MORE THAN A FEW NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS. DURING THAT TIME, WE'LL STILL HAVE TO RELY ON HIGH-PRIORITY STRATEGIC PROGRAMS -- SUCH AS THE M.X. AND B-1 -- TO PROTECT US UNTIL WE CAN MORE FULLY DEPEND ON STRATEGIC DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS AND WE WILL CERTAINLY CONTINUE OUR STRONG ATTEMPTS TO NEGOTIATE NUCLEAR ARMS REDUCTIONS DURING THAT SAME PERIOD.

I WOULD LIKE TO THINK THIS COULD BE THE BEGINNING OF A MODERN CRUSADE FOR PEACE. IN THE DAYS AHEAD -- AND THEN IN THE YEARS AHEAD -- THE GOVERNMENT -- AND CITIZENS OF THIS CENTURY -- WILL TURN TO YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES FOR GUIDANCE.

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THIS QUEST FOR A SAFER WORLD NEEDS YOUR
EXPERTISE AND YOUR WISDOM IF IT IS TO
SUCCEED. PLEASE JOIN WITH US, HELP US
MAKE THIS HAPPEN.

BUD MCFARLANE AND JAY KEYWORTH WILL
BE ALONG IN A MOMENT TO PROVIDE YOU WITH
MORE DETAILS AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS
YOU MAY HAVE.

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