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USA: NUCLEAR DEFENCE STRATEGY: AUG 80

SECRET

FROM: THE WHITE HOUSE
TO: THE CABINET OFFICE

REF ID: A66544
SERIAL NO. T37A/83

Dear Margaret,

For some time you and I have borne the responsibility to provide for our peoples security against the most awesome threat in history. This requires difficult decisions which even now, you and I are trying to sustain against considerable opposition. We must succeed in this for it is clear to me that there is no near-term alternative to the maintenance of strong ready forces to deter the Soviet Union.

As I have engaged in the debate in the United States, it has been clear that much of the emotional criticism is based upon fear which itself, rises from the perception that we apparently have no alternative to the perpetual building of more and more offensive weapons. As I have pondered the realities and unknowns of weapons technology it seems unlikely to me that there is any near-term alternative. Yet I am convinced that we must ensure that every possible way to reduce the level of offensive systems must be pursued. Recently my advisors - including the joint Chiefs of Staff - have recommended that we make a more vigorous examination of the potential of defensive technologies, thus holding out the long-term hope for our people - all those under NATO's nuclear umbrella - that some day we might be able to secure ourselves without threatening anyone or their territory.

Needless to say, I am extremely conscious of the questions raised by any focussed effort upon strategic defence. Are we going to a fortress America? Do we intend to violate the ABM Treaty in any way or depart from our commitments to allies? Are we going for a first strike capability? All of these notions are of course utter nonsense.

/ Because

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Because they are nonsense and because I believe we must explore every avenue which offers our people hope for a more stable future, I have decided to examine defensive technologies in a more vigorous way. No-one expects that we will see the benefit of this in material terms until the turn of the century. Surely the benefits which accrue will be shared with our friends and allies. In the meantime and beyond we must surely maintain the balance and stick together as we always have. Tonight I will address the American people in this vein. In doing so I wanted you to be aware of my thinking which as always, is motivated by a deep concern for our common security.

Sincerely,

Ron

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Begin text of Presidential remarks:

A CALL FOR A BOLD DEFENCE

Thus far tonight I have shared with you my thoughts on the problems of national security we must face together. My predecessors in the oval office have appeared before you on other occasions to describe the threat posed by Soviet power and have proposed steps to address that threat. But since the advent of nuclear weapons, those steps have been directed toward deterrence of aggression through the promise of retaliation - the notion that no rational nation would launch an attack that would inevitably result in unacceptable losses to themselves. This approach to stability through offensive threat has worked. We and our allies have succeeded in preventing nuclear war for three decades. In recent months, however, my advisors, including in particular the joint Chiefs of Staff, have underscored the bleakness of the future before us.

Over the course of those discussions, I have become more and more deeply convinced that the human spirit must be capable of rising above dealing with other nations and human beings by threatening their existence. Feeling this way, I believe we must thoroughly examine every opportunity for reducing tensions and for introducing greater stability into the strategic calculus on both sides. One of the most important contributions we can make is, of course, to lower the level of all arms, and particularly nuclear arms. We are engaged right now in several negotiations with the Soviet Union to bring about a mutual reduction of weapons. I will report to you a week from tomorrow my thoughts on that score. But let me just say I am totally committed to this course.

If the Soviet Union will join with us in our effort to achieve major arms reduction we will have succeeded in stabilizing the nuclear balance. Nevertheless it will still be necessary to rely on the spectre of retaliation - on mutual threat, and that is a sad commentary on the human condition.

/ Would it not

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- 4 -

Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them?
Are we not capable of demonstrating our peaceful intentions by
applying all our abilities and our ingenuity to achieving a truly
lasting stability? I think we are. -- Indeed we must.

/ After careful

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After careful consultation with my advisers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I believe there is a way. Let me share with you a vision of the future which offers hope. It is that we embark on a programme to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive. Let us turn to the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base and that have given us the quality of life we enjoy today.

Up until now we have increasingly based our strategy of deterrence upon the threat of retaliation to deter Soviet aggression. But what if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant U.S. retaliation to deter a Soviet attack. That we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?

I know this is a formidable technical task, one that may not be accomplished before the end of this century. Yet, current technology has attained a level of sophistication where it is reasonable for us to begin this effort. It will take years, probably decades, of effort on many fronts. There will be failures and setbacks just as there will be successes and breakthroughs. And as we proceed we must remain constant in preserving the nuclear deterrent and maintaining a solid capability for flexible response. But is it not worth every investment necessary to free the world from the threat of a nuclear war? We know it is.

In the meantime, we will continue to pursue real reductions in nuclear arms, negotiating from a position of strength that can be ensured only by modernising our strategic forces. At the same time, we must take steps to reduce the risk of a conventional military conflict escalating to nuclear war by improving our non-nuclear capabilities. America does possess - now - the technologies to attain very significant improvements in the effectiveness of our conventional, non-nuclear forces.

/ Proceeding

Proceeding boldly with these new technologies, we can significantly reduce any incentive that the Soviet Union may have to threaten attack against the United States or its allies.

As we pursue our goal of defensive technologies, we recognise that our allies rely upon our strategic offensive power to deter attacks against them. Their vital interests and ours are inextricably linked - their safety and ours are one and no change in technology can or will alter that reality. We must and shall continue to honour our commitments.

I clearly recognise that defensive systems have limitations and raise certain problems and ambiguities. If paired with offensive systems, they can be viewed as fostering an aggressive policy and no one wants that.

But with these considerations firmly in mind, I call upon the scientific community who gave us nuclear weapons to turn their great talents to the cause of mankind and world peace - to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.

Tonight, consistent with our obligations under the A.B.M. Treaty and in recognising the need for close consultation with our allies, I am directing a comprehensive and intensive effort to define a long-term research and development programme that will move us a long step toward our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles. This could pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate the weapons themselves. We seek neither military superiority nor political advantage. Our only purpose - one all people share - is to search for ways to reduce the danger of nuclear war.

My fellow Americans, tonight we are launching an effort which holds the promise of changing the course of human history. There will be risks, and results take time. But with your effort, I believe we can do it. As we cross this threshold, I ask for your support. Good night and God bless you.

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TO CABINET OFFICE
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S I C R E T VIA CABINET OFFICE CHANNELS VHO1962
MARCH 22, 1982

DEAR PARCADET:

FOR SOME TIME YOU AND I HAVE BORNE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE FOR OUR PEOPLES SECURITY AGAINST THE MOST AWESOME THREAT IN HISTORY. THIS REQUIRES DIFFICULT DECISIONS WHICH EVEN NOW, YOU AND I ARE TRYING TO SUSTAIN AGAINST CONSIDERABLE OPPOSITION. WE MUST SUCCEED IN THIS FOR IT IS CLEAR TO ME THAT THERE IS NO NEAR-TERM ALTERNATIVE TO THE MAINTENANCE OF STRONG READY FORCES TO DETER THE SOVIET UNION.

AS I HAVE ENGAGED IN THE DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES, IT HAS BEEN CLEAR THAT MUCH OF THE EMOTIONAL CRITICISM IS BASED UPON FEAR WHICH ITSELF, RISES FROM THE PERCEPTION THAT WE APPARENTLY HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE PERPETUAL BUILDING OF MORE AND MORE OFFENSIVE WEAPONS. AS I HAVE PONDERED THE REALITIES AND UNKNOWN OF WEAPONS TECHNOLOGY IT SEEMS UNLIKELY TO ME THAT THERE IS ANY NEAR-TERM ALTERNATIVE. YET I AM CONVINCED THAT WE MUST INSURE THAT EVERY POSSIBLE WAY TO REDUCE THE LEVEL OF OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS MUST BE PURSUED. RECENTLY MY ADVISORS -- INCLUDING THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF -- HAVE RECOMMENDED THAT WE MAKE A MORE VIGOROUS EXAMINATION OF THE POTENTIAL OF DEFENSIVE TECHNOLOGIES, THUS HOLDING OUT THE LONG-TERM HOPE FOR OUR PEOPLE -- ALL THOSE UNDER THAT NUCLEAR UMBRELLA -- THAT SOMEDAY WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SECURE OURSELVES WITHOUT THREATENING ANYONE OR THEIR TERRITORY.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, I AM EXTREMELY CONSCIOUS OF THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY ANY FOCUSED EFFORT UPON STRATEGIC DEFENSE. ARE WE GOING TO A FORTRESS AMERICA? DO WE INTEND TO VIOLATE THE ARM TREATY IN ANY WAY OR DEPART FROM OUR COMMITMENTS TO ALLIES? ARE WE GOING FOR A FIRST STRIKE CAPABILITY? ALL OF THESE NOTIONS ARE OF COURSE UTTER NONSENSE.

BECAUSE THEY ARE NONSENSE AND BECAUSE I BELIEVE WE MUST EXPLORE EVERY AVENUE WHICH OFFERS OUR PEOPLE HOPE FOR A MORE STABLE FUTURE, I HAVE DECIDED TO EXAMINE DEFENSIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN A MORE VIGOROUS WAY. NO ONE EXPECTS THAT WE WILL SEE THE BENEFIT OF THIS IN MATERIAL TERMS UNTIL THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. SURELY THE BENEFITS WHICH ACCRUE WILL BE SHARED WITH OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES. IN THE MEANTIME AND BEYOND WE MUST SURELY MAINTAIN THE BALANCE AND STICK TOGETHER AS WE ALWAYS HAVE. TONIGHT I WILL ADDRESS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IN THIS VEIN. IN DOING SO I WANTED YOU TO BE AWARE OF MY THINKING WHICH,

END OF PAGE 01

AS ALWAYS, IS MOTIVATED BY A DEEP CONCERN FOR OUR COMMON SECURITY.
SINCERELY,

FOR

RECIPIENT TEXT OF PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS:

A CALL FOR A TOLD DEFENSE

THIS FAR TONIGHT I HAVE SHARED WITH YOU MY THOUGHTS ON THE PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL SECURITY WE MUST FACE TOGETHER. MY PREDECESSORS IN THE OVAL OFFICE HAVE APPREARED BEFORE YOU ON OTHER OCCASIONS TO DESCRIBE THE THREAT POSED BY SOVIET POWER AND HAVE PROPOSED STEPS TO ADDRESS THAT THREAT. BUT SINCE THE ADVENT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, THOSE STEPS HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TOWARD DETERRENCE OF AGGRESSION THROUGH THE PROMISE OF RETALIATION -- THE NOTION THAT NO RATIONAL NATION WOULD LAUNCH AN ATTACK THAT WOULD INEVITABLY RESULT IN UNACCEPTABLE LOSSES TO THEMSELVES. THIS APPROACH TO STABILITY THROUGH OFFENSIVE THREAT HAS WORKED. WE AND OUR ALLIES HAVE SUCCEEDED IN PREVENTING NUCLEAR WAR FOR THREE DECADES. IN RECENT MONTHS, HOWEVER, MY ADVISORS, INCLUDING IN PARTICULAR THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, HAVE UNDERScoreD THE FLEAKNESS OF THE FUTURE BEFORE US.

OVER THE COURSE OF THOSE DISCUSSIONS, I HAVE BECOME MORE AND MORE DEEPLY CONVINCED THAT THE HUMAN SPIRIT MUST BE CAPABLE OF RISING ABOVE DEALING WITH OTHER NATIONS AND HUMAN BEINGS BY THREATENING THEIR EXISTENCE. FEELING THIS WAY, I BELIEVE WE MUST THOROUGHLY EXAMINE EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR REDUCING TENSIONS AND FOR INTRODUCING GREATER STABILITY INTO THE STRATEGIC CALCULUS ON BOTH SIDES. ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS WE CAN MAKE IS, OF COURSE TO LOWER THE LEVEL OF ALL ARMS, AND PARTICULARLY NUCLEAR ARMS. WE ARE ENGAGED RIGHT NOW IN SEVERAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION TO BRING ABOUT A MUTUAL REDUCTION OF WEAPONS. I WILL REPORT TO YOU A WEEK FROM TOMORROW MY THOUGHTS ON THAT SCORE. BUT LET ME JUST SAY I AM TOTALLY COMMITTED TO THIS COURSE.

IF THE SOVIET UNION WILL JOIN WITH US IN OUR EFFORT TO ACHIEVE MAJOR ARMS REDUCTION WE WILL HAVE SUCCEEDED IN STABILIZING THE NUCLEAR BALANCE. NEVERTHELESS IT WILL STILL BE NECESSARY TO RELY ON THE SPECTER OF RETALIATION -- ON MUTUAL THREAT, AND THAT IS A SAD COMMENTARY ON THE HUMAN CONDITION.

WOULD IT NOT BE BETTER TO SAVE LIVES THAN TO AVENGE THEM? ARE WE NOT CAPABLE OF DEMONSTRATING OUR PEACEFUL INTENTIONS BY APPLYING ALL OUR ABILITIES AND OUR INCENNUITY TO ACHIEVING A TRULY LASTING STABILITY? I THINK WE ARE --

indeed we must.

INTEREST, WE MUST

AFTER CAREFUL CONSULTATION WITH MY ADVISORS, INCLUDING THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, I BELIEVE THERE IS A WAY. LET ME SHARE WITH YOU A VISION OF THE FUTURE WHICH OFFERS HOPE. IT IS THAT WE ENBARK ON A PROGRAM TO COUNTER THE AWESOME SOVIET MISSILE THREAT WITH MEASURES THAT ARE DEFENSIVE. LET US TURN TO THE VERY STRENGTHS IN TECHNOLOGY THAT SPANNED OUR GREAT INDUSTRIAL BASE AND THAT HAVE GIVEN US THE QUALITY OF LIFE WE ENJOY TODAY.

UP UNTIL NOW WE HAVE INCREASINGLY BASED OUR STRATEGY OF DETERRENCE UPON THE THREAT OF RETALIATION TO DETER SOVIET AGGRESSION. BUT WHAT IF FREE PEOPLE COULD LIVE SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEIR SECURITY DID NOT REST UPON THE THREAT OF INSTANT U.S. RETALIATION TO DETER A SOVIET ATTACK-- THAT WE COULD INTERCEPT AND DESTROY STRATEGIC BALLISTIC MISSILES BEFORE THEY REACHED OUR OWN SOIL OR THAT OF OUR ALLIES?

I KNOW THIS IS A FORMIDABLE TECHNICAL TASK, ONE THAT MAY NOT BE ACCOMPLISHED BEFORE THE END OF THIS CENTURY. YET, CURRENT TECHNOLOGY HAS ATTAINED A LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATION WHERE IT IS REASONABLE FOR US TO BEGIN THIS EFFORT. IT WILL TAKE YEARS, PROBABLY DECADES, OF EFFORT ON MANY FRONTS. THERE WILL BE FAILURES AND SETBACKS JUST AS THERE WILL BE SUCCESSSES AND BREAKTHROUGHS. AND AS WE PROCEED WE MUST REMAIN CONSTANT IN PRESERVING THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT AND MAINTAINING A SOLID CAPABILITY FOR FLEXIBLE RESPONSE. BUT IS IT NOT WORTH EVERY INVESTMENT NECESSARY TO FREE THE WORLD FROM THE THREAT OF A NUCLEAR WAR? WE KNOW IT IS.

IN THE MEANTIME, WE WILL CONTINUE TO PURSUE REAL REDUCTIONS IN NUCLEAR ARMS, NEGOTIATING FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH THAT CAN BE ENSURED ONLY BY MODERNIZING OUR STRATEGIC FORCES. AT THE SAME TIME, WE MUST TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF A CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CONFLICT ESCALATING TO NUCLEAR WAR BY IMPROVING OUR NON-NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES. AMERICA DOES POSSESS -- NOW -- THE TECHNOLOGIES TO ATTAIN VERY SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR CONVENTIONAL, NON-NUCLEAR FORCES. PROCEEDING BOLDLY WITH THESE NEW TECHNOLOGIES, WE CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE ANY INCENTIVE THAT THE SOVIET UNION MAY HAVE TO THREATEN ATTACK AGAINST THE UNITED STATES OR ITS ALLIES.

AS WE PURSUE OUR GOAL OF DEFENSIVE TECHNOLOGIES, WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR ALLIES RELY UPON OUR STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE POWER TO DETER ATTACKS AGAINST THEM. THEIR VITAL INTERESTS AND OURS ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED -- THEIR SAFETY AND OURS ARE ONE AND NO CHANGE IN TECHNOLOGY CAN OR WILL ALTER THAT REALITY. WE MUST AND SHALL CONTINUE TO HONOR OUR COMMITMENTS.

END OF PAGE 03

I CLEARLY RECOGNIZE THAT DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS HAVE LIMITATIONS AND HAVE CERTAIN FLOIBLES AND ALIQUITIES. IN PAIRIT WITH OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS, THEY CAN BE VIEWED AS FOSTERING AN AGGRESSIVE POLICY AND NO ONE WANTS THAT.

BUT WITH THESE CONSIDERATIONS FIRMLY IN MIND, I CALL UPON THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY WHO GAVE US NUCLEAR WEAPONS TO TURN THEIR GREAT TALENTS TO THE CAUSE OF HANKIND AND WORLD PEACE -- TO GIVE US THE MEANS OF RENDERING THESE NUCLEAR WEAPONS IMPOTENT AND OPSOLETE.

TONIGHT, CONSISTENT WITH OUR OBLICATIONS UNDER THE A.B.M. TREATY AND IN 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 THAT WILL MOVE US A LONG STEP TOWARD OUR ULTIMATE GOAL OF ELIMINATING THE THREAT POSED BY STRATEGIC NUCLEAR MISSILES. THIS COULD PAVE THE WAY FOR ARMS CONTROL MEASURES TO ELIMINATE THE WEAPONS THEMSELVES. WE SEEK NEITHER MILITARY SUPERIORITY NOR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. OUR ONLY PURPOSE -- ONE ALL PEOPLE SHARE -- IS TO SEARCH FOR WAYS TO REDUCE THE DANGER OF NUCLEAR WAR.

MY FELLOW AMERICANS, TONIGHT WE ARE LAUNCHING AN EFFORT WHICH HOLDS THE PROMISE OF CHANGING THE COURSE OF HUMAN HISTORY. THERE WILL BE RISKS, AND RESULTS TAKE TIME. BUT WITH YOUR EFFORT, I BELIEVE WE CAN DO IT. AS WE CROSS THIS THRESHOLD, I ASK FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

GOOD NIGHT AND GOD BLESS YOU

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