

REBUTTAL TO PRESIDENT REAGAN'S SATURDAY ADDRESS

by

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As we enter the holiday season, we naturally turn to cherished themes of peace on earth and goodwill. The President spoke of those ideas earlier this week when he delivered a televised address on our defense efforts and the cause of peace. Most of his comments, however, focused on our nuclear forces and how they compare with what the Soviets have in their arsenal.

It was a chilling speech - the Soviet Union has built up its nuclear arsenal and the President is right to remind us of that .

But when the President asserts that "in virtually every measure of military power, the Soviet Union enjoys a decided advantage", he departs from reality and enters his own fantasy world. No one should dispute, very few do, that the Soviet Union and the United States are roughly equal in nuclear armaments.

There are many measures of nuclear might and on Monday night, you saw some of them in the President's address. Others were left out - such as the clear cut American superiority in strategic bombers and cruise missiles; such as our great advantage at sea, where our submarines carry over twice as many nuclear weapons as the Russian submarines.

I think it is dangerous to downplay America's defense capabilities. We face a powerful and determined adversary in the Soviets. Just as we do, they seek advantage and exploit weakness. At this very moment, our negotiators in Geneva are trying to reach agreement with the Soviets on reductions of nuclear arms. But how can our diplomats negotiate effectively when the President says our forces are inferior to the Soviets'? Our

opponents in Geneva will be far less inclined to negotiate seriously with us if they have little to fear from "inferior" U.S. forces.

Let us emphasize instead that our total number of nuclear weapons actually exceeds the Soviet total. Let us repeat what our military leadership has said over and over - "I would not trade our strategic forces for Soviet strategic forces - it would be a bad deal for us."

Americans deserve more than doctored bomb counts and fancy graphics. The issue is war or peace; survival or destruction. This, the ultimate issue, must receive our most detached judgement, our most careful analysis, our full intellect and commitment.

And Americans are speaking out on what they want from their government. In eight states and five major cities, voters strongly called for a worldwide nuclear weapons freeze. They want the arms race brought under control. They want successful negotiations with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms. They are tired of the hemorrhage of our national treasure into super weapons with super price tags. They, you, want to live in security, not fear.

I agree. Our priorities must be reordered. Our defense budget should not grow so fast that ^{it} fuels inflation, widens the federal deficit, and erodes our economic base. Nuclear weapons production should give way to negotiated weapons reductions. Cold war style confrontation should be replaced by realistic dialogue and communication.

That is the road to stability and peace.