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DECLASSIFIED IN FULL
 Authority: EO 13526
 Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
 Date: OCT 05 2015

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

FL - 79
 DOC# (34) HB Veto
 address

August 16, 1978

~~PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL~~

Office of the Secretary of Defense 5 U.S.C. § 552
 Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS +
 Date: 05 OCT 2015 Authority: EO 13526
 Declassify: X Deny in Full: _____
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 Reason: _____
 MDR: 15 -M- 1607

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Defense Authorization Bill

I have given further thought to the question whether the defense authorization bill should be signed or vetoed. In terms of its effect on our defense posture, directly and through the reductions it forces in funds for procurement, readiness, sustainability, and research and development, the bill has a debilitating effect on our defense posture as compared with the budget that you submitted for Fiscal Year 1979.

In particular, addition of a nuclear carrier in the bill has two very serious effects. First, it caused the Appropriations Committees, in order to stay within the Congressionally approved budget limits for defense, to displace a number of more important and urgent needs mentioned above. Second, it continues the trend toward larger and more expensive ships -- which inevitably means fewer ships -- in the Navy; this is true both of the CVN itself and of the (nuclear) escorts for it that the Congress will presumably feel impelled to insert into future budgets. Thus, on substance, a veto is in order.

If we are to sustain the coherence of the defense program in support of the Administration's priorities and the defense needs of our country, the Congress must be encouraged to produce a better final outcome than now looms in its defense authorization and appropriation. A veto offers some chance of that, depending on how well we are able to articulate our objections. It does not offer a certainty, and there is a real possibility that the result will be worse. There is also the likelihood of inflaming our relations with the Congress; one must set against this the need to restrain the Congress from even more erosion of defense needs to meet their own more immediate political pressures. There is also the question of how confident we are that a veto can be sustained. Major adverse consequences to our ability to manage the defense program will follow if a veto is overridden.

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A serious concern is that a veto could be seen as an Administration move toward a weaker defense posture. Our public statements, and particularly your veto message, would be a key in countering such a misapprehension. I believe that we probably can show that a veto is not intended to weaken defense, by including in the veto message a number of points, including all of the following:

- a. concentrating on the nuclear carrier, about whose wastefulness we have laid a substantial predicate over a period of six months;
- b. making it clear that we urgently want to restore the more important items that were deleted in the Congressional authorization and appropriation process to make room for the CVN within the budget;
- c. including in our proposed restoral Navy ships -- some deleted by the Congress and some that we had anticipated funding in future years -- to show that we can indeed get more ships if we avoid spending too much on a few ships.
- d. making it clear that we want the Congress to appropriate funds in the full amount of \$126 billion, which was your budget proposal.

We would all, of course, work hard to persuade the Congress to return to the \$126 billion level through the bill which would replace one vetoed. But if the Congress did not, a supplemental request would be essential, and the intention of seeking one in the event the \$126 billion level is not reached in the basic bill would be a necessary part of a veto strategy. It is also important that this not be the only authorization or appropriation bill vetoed.

A clear Congressional, media and public understanding of our reasons for a veto would be absolutely essential. The public and the Congress would need to understand that you are firmly committed to a \$126 billion level for defense for FY 79. The nature of the veto message is an essential element in establishing such a position. I believe that with the message whose text is attached, a veto would be appropriate.

Harold Brown

Attachment

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