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FY 80 budget

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D C 20301

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

A number of events this week suggest that public attitudes toward our defense situation, as well as our foreign policy, are changing. It also seems to me that these issues may play a larger part than usual in an off-year Congressional election, although I continue to believe that domestic economic issues, particularly inflation, will be the most important.

Three votes on the budget resolution in the House on Wednesday are worth considering. A proposal to shift \$4.8B from Defense to other purposes lost by more than 3 to 1 (313-98). A proposal to add \$2.4B to the budget, earmarked for Defense, lost by slightly under 2 to 1 (262-142). Most significant, Congresswoman Holt's proposal to cut all the budget except Defense by 2% came within 6 votes of carrying (202-197). These votes are consistent with my conclusion that (1) because of inflation there is an overriding concern in the House about the size of the budget deficit, and therefore a reluctance to add to the overall budget; (2) there is greater support than ever in recent years for shifting more expenditures within the budget total toward Defense.

I note also that Joe Kraft in his column yesterday said that although he has long supported detente, he now is deeply concerned about Soviet military and political gains. Such a change of position is consistent with the Congressional indications. Both suggest to me that while public sentiment will still support your decisions about the level of the Defense budget over a substantial range around our level, there is now much less leeway on the down side of that level than there was a year ago.

A group of Republican Senators, after an Easton, Maryland conference, has issued a lengthy "Declaration" critical of Administration national security and foreign policy. They announced that all thirty-eight of the Senate Republicans support it, though several have not yet signed it. This looks to me like an opening gun of a major campaign. I have said to Zbig that (whether we use it now or pieces of it later) he, Cy, and I need to put together for our use and yours a response to the major points raised.

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I also see a confluence of questioning and some loss of confidence among our allies which compounds and feeds back into the domestic concern about these issues.

I report these attitudes rather than analyzing their causes or suggesting detailed solutions at this point. We have had successes -- the Panama Canal Treaties, the B-1 decision, the beginning of programs to revitalize NATO -- and are likely to have more. I believe that most of our foreign policy and defense decisions, taken singly, have been correct and that all have been justifiable. Taken together, however, they have been distorted by some into signals of a weakening in our strength and resolve.

Part of the problem is, as we have all noted before, that the public and the Congress do not have a clear picture what we consider the relative proportions of the competitive and cooperative aspects of our relations with the Soviet Union, or of precisely where we propose to cooperate and where to compete. We should, and I will, place more emphasis on the new things we are doing in the defense area, to counter the charges that we merely kill programs. I urge that we try to present a uniform policy along the lines of your Wake Forest speech, and that our actions on foreign policy issues as well as on Defense program and budget issues be as consistent with that approach as we can make them. Visits by you to U.S. forces in Germany, and to Ft. Bragg or to Ft. Hood and Nellis Air Force Base, which I am proposing in detail in a separate memo, can reinforce this approach.

I believe it would be extremely useful for us to talk about these observations, which I take very seriously, along with Zbig, Cy, Ham Jordan, Frank Moore, or anyone else you think should be present.

Harold Brown

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