

Reagan National Defense Forum Speech

Thank you very much Fred, for that kind introduction.

Thank you all for joining me in this beautiful library on a beautiful fall day. Thank you to the Reagan library for hosting us.

We have an impressive group of participants here with us today. We would be here all morning if I listed them all. But I want to single out a few who made this first annual Reagan National Defense Forum possible.

Ann Korologos, who you all know as President Reagan's Secretary of Labor, worked closely with Fred and the library to host us here today. Ann, thank you for all your hard work.

Pete Wilson, former governor of California is here. Pete was an early supporter of the Reagan Library, and has helped make it what it is today. Thank you for being here.

I also have to mention two of my old staffers, who are here with us today. Roger Zakheim, our former deputy staff director on the HASC, and Bob Cochran -- my chief of staff for over 20 years.

It's a heavy lift to plan an event like this one. Without Bob and Roger working out the kinks, this forum wouldn't have been possible. Thank you both.

Sixty years ago, on another beautiful fall day, a U-2 spy plane flew over the island of Cuba and took 900 photos of a suspicious looking construction site. It was there that DIA analysts found nuclear missiles pointed at the United States.

With the click of a camera shutter, the great powers of the world snapped from a peacetime to wartime footing. Today we remember just how quickly that can happen.

But there's another lesson to be learned. Over 13 days in October, President Kennedy was in a tough spot. He was stuck between those who wanted to bomb the Soviets to kingdom come, and doves who wanted to just talk their way out of the crisis.

At the time, my father and uncle owned a grocery store. The shelves were cleaned out. Everyone expected the worst.

The White House understood the stakes. So the President took his smartest advisors, stuck them in a room, and had them work out a solution. Although they were a diverse group, they were able to help steer this country out of a dangerous crisis.

Here we have another diverse group of experts. And here we have even more problems that put our national security at risk.

In one day last week, I had high level threat briefings on Iran, Afghanistan, and the strategic rebalance to the Pacific.

Threats don't get much more diverse than that.

We have officials from all ends of the **political**spectrum, experts from all ends of the **strategic**spectrum, industry leaders, military leaders, and even a group of company grade officers from the Vandenberg and Los Angeles Air Force Bases.

These young officers are the future of our force. Please stand so we may recognize you and thank you.

That's the new generation. But this past month, we lost two of our very best from an older generation. Chairmen Ike Skelton and Bill Young both passed away last month.

Ike was a Democrat who chaired the Armed Services Committee. Bill was a Republican that chaired the Appropriations Committee.

Anyone who knows Congress knows that **authorizers** like Ike and **appropriators** like Bill are kind of like cats and dogs. The relationship isn't always cordial.

That's especially true when they sit on opposite sides of the aisle.

But those two could always be counted on to toss politics aside when it came to our military. Our troops came first: every time, all the time.

I wish they were here with us today. We could all take a page out of their book.

But what better way to kick off this forum?

This library remembers a great Republican leader whose resolve ushered in the end of the Cold War.

But Ronald Reagan did not do it alone. He worked with a Democratic Congress to put aside political differences and do what was strategically right – and what was strategically smart.

Ike and Bill lived that example. Today, I hope we follow **their** example.

Here's what we have to figure out. Here's what we have to get right.

Thanks to men like Presidents Kennedy and Reagan, we don't have to worry about thousands of Soviet missiles pointed in our direction.

But the military is stressed in a very real, and very severe way.

Strategically, the world is a mess. Old powers are reborn, new ones are rising. Advances in technology mean a small group of men with four airplanes can launch the longest war in American history.

The number of dimensions that can host conflict have grown more in the past 100 years than over the entire course of history -- underwater, in the air, in space, and in cyberspace.

All of these elements are coming to a head. Are we ready? Are we prepared?

Politics and economics have turned on us, and are stressing the military to a breaking point.

\$1 trillion in cuts are bad. But so is the way we have been spending money. So is the way we have been buying weapons.

In 1955, four naval officers gave McDonnell Aircraft requirements for a new, all-weather interceptor.

By 1961, the first F-4 Phantom squadron was active. We built over 5,000 of them, and the Phantom was flown by the Navy, Air Force, and Marines.

Everyone here is tired of spending two decades to build a ship, or a jet, or a radio.

Everyone's tired of pumping billions into gee-whiz gizmos, only to have those weapons canceled within eyesight of the finish line.

Whether it's Congress imposing too many **regulations** on the Pentagon, whether it's the Pentagon imposing too many **requirements** on industry, or whether it's industry imposing too much **cost** on Congress – this downward spiral must stop and stop now.

All the players are here. We have the smart people in the room.

My great hope for this forum is that we knock our heads together, and figure out a solution for the strategic, structural, and budgetary problems that plague us.

I hope that the work we start here is expanded on in the looming QDR and planning milestones. That's my hope, and I think this is a great start.

Thank you Fred, for the library's hospitality. Thank you all for coming. Let this forum set the tone for many more to come.