

# **Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the National Defense Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1989**

**August 3, 1988**

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning without my approval H.R. 4264, the National Defense Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1989.

The bill's provisions on strategic defense and arms control undercut the very foundation of our Nation's security and our successful arms reduction efforts -- to negotiate with the Soviets, we must do so from strength. On the basis of strength alone, we concluded the historic INF Treaty to eliminate an entire class of U.S. and Soviet nuclear missiles. Only on the basis of strength can we continue to pursue our negotiations in Geneva for further arms reductions, including deep cuts in strategic forces.

This bill would drastically curtail our Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program, make unilateral concessions on arms control, limit our strategic forces and their modernization, and sacrifice national defense requirements to the demands of parochial interests. It would needlessly concede military advantage to the Soviets, whose military programs are not similarly restricted. The bill would signal a basic change in the future direction of our national defense -- away from strength and proven success and back toward weakness and accommodation. It would reward the Soviets for their words and not their deeds. This I shall not do.

The bill would restrict, reorient, and limit funding for our Strategic Defense Initiative. Together, these restrictions and funding cuts would cripple our ability to fulfill the promise of effective strategic defense. The bill would hand the Soviet Union restrictions on our Strategic Defense Initiative program they have long sought. It would limit critical funding for the space-based interceptor program, altering long-established priorities for the SDI and delaying unacceptably the development of technology to defend against missiles in the boost-phase, where defensive leverage is greatest. The Strategic Defense Initiative challenges our best scientists to find a way to deter war and protect what we value while threatening no one. The use of advanced technologies to defend -- rather than destroy -- offers the brightest hope for a more secure future. Most importantly, we owe our children an alternative to the current policy of deterrence based solely on the threat of nuclear retaliation.

The Congress must fully fund our vital Strategic Defense Initiative program without restricting research into promising technologies.

The bill would return us to the practice of rushing to give away our negotiating leverage without receiving a single thing in return from the Soviets.

Two such actions in this bill:

**Depressed Trajectory Missile Testing** -- The bill would prohibit depressed trajectory missile testing. Yet, the Congress admits that depressed trajectory testing is something it cannot define. So, the bill asks the Department of Defense to define the action, after which the Department will be banned from conducting such tests unless such tests are undertaken by the Soviet Union. This hastily written provision usurps the President's treaty negotiating authority and erodes the Senate's treaty ratification responsibility.

**POSEIDON Retirements** -- The bill would require the United States to remove two of our POSEIDON ballistic missile submarines from active duty earlier than we had planned. The action is a vestige of thinly disguised congressional efforts to force the United States to comply unilaterally with numerical limits in the fatally flawed and unratified SALT II treaty. In its current form, it would arbitrarily restrict U.S. strategic force levels by prematurely retiring POSEIDON submarines. There is no similar requirement for the Soviet Union. This would undermine both our strategic deterrent and our position in the START negotiations.

The bill would cut 25 percent of the funds requested to continue modernization of our strategic forces at the same time we are pursuing strategic arms reductions. It does not assure our rail-mobile PEACEKEEPER program -- a program critical to ensuring the continued effectiveness of the land-based leg of the triad of forces we have relied upon for several decades. The Soviet Union continues, without letup, its own strategic modernization program which includes both new rail- and road-mobile ICBM's.

Part of the success we have experienced in the last several years rests squarely upon the modernization of our strategic forces, which had witnessed a decade of neglect during the 1970's.

Our negotiators in Geneva have told us that the Strategic Defense Initiative and the strategic modernization program brought the Soviets back to the table in 1985. This helped us attain the first real cuts and begin to move even further toward more historic 50-percent reductions in Soviet and American strategic nuclear forces. Bolder agreements and deeper, stabilizing cuts are only possible if we maintain our resolve. The Congress must fully fund the modernization of our strategic forces. The Congress must stop tying the hands of our negotiators in Geneva.

Finally, the bill would authorize a number of procurements that are clearly in the special interest of a few. Although the bill is within the overall levels of defense spending outlined in the bipartisan budget agreement, the Congress stayed within the agreement only by reducing vital programs and inserting billions of dollars for items not needed to defend our Nation. In short, the bill trades vitally needed defense muscle for the parochial interests of those in the Congress.

There are a number of desirable provisions in this bill. In fact, the version passed by the Senate was one of the better defense bills in several years. The provisions for the readiness and modernization of our forces needed for a strong conventional deterrent, the authorized personnel levels, the needed pay raise for our men and women in uniform, the support for multi-year procurement, and the responsible involvement of the Department of Defense in our war on drugs are all positive aspects of the bill. Unfortunately, the House version contained many

unacceptable provisions, and the conference agreed on a bill more like the House version than the Senate version.

In conclusion, I cannot accept H.R. 4264 because it would undercut current U.S. arms control and negotiating efforts and redirect funds from critical defense programs. I look forward to receiving from the Congress a responsible defense bill.

Ronald Reagan

The White House,

August 3, 1988.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/080388b.htm>