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A Reply to "The National Security Question" Oct 11/5/72

Your editorial, "Nixon or McGovern; The National Security Question," is below the usual standard of The Washington Post.

It says, "Mr. McGovern . . . seems to begin with domestic priorities, rather than with an estimate of overseas security requirements, assigns what's left over to the military, and tailors his foreign policy to fit."

This is incorrect. Given the magnitude of our current budgetary deficit and unmet domestic needs, the approach you attribute to Senator McGovern would result in a military appropriation of zero, rather than the McGovern proposal of \$54.8 billion.

The planning assumptions of the McGovern national security program are explained in the introduction to his alternative defense budget, first published in January: "It (the McGovern program) starts by assuming that the major Communist powers, China and the Soviet Union, will remain actively hostile to U.S. interests, and that there is a real risk of confrontation if one or the other can expect military advantage as a result. Hence, the proposed budget retains more nuclear weapons than necessary for deterrence . . . General purpose forces are maintained against dangers which are both slight and exceedingly remote, given the expected military balance and political outlook."

You refer admiringly to Mr. Nixon's "record of achievement" in national security. But his is a record of escalating military budgets with no increase in national security. He pressed ahead with MIRV while the SALT negotiations were in progress, thus eliminating any chance of bringing MIRV under an arms-limitation agreement. When the agreement was finally concluded, Mr.

Nixon used it not as an opportunity to reduce military spending, but as an excuse for wasting an additional \$5 billion on a 2-site ABM—the futility of which was compounded by the SALT treaty—and perhaps \$20 billion on the B-1 bomber, which has no greater ability to penetrate the Soviet defense than does the existing FB-111. In addition, he has announced his intention to develop hard-target warheads—a move that will severely weaken the potential of the second round of SALT talks and may provoke the Soviet Union to escalate in response.

But the most disappointing aspect of your editorial is its failure to discuss the specific differences between the McGovern and Nixon defense programs.

A defense budget is not an undifferentiated mass of money. It is made up of specific components, each of which must be justified in terms of whether it does or does not contribute to national security. In addition to ABM, B-1, and hard-target warheads, some of the major Nixon items McGovern believes do not contribute to national security are:

1. The F-14 naval fighter—A large, heavy, \$20-million-per-copy aircraft laden with expensive electronic equipment. Its high cost could force our pilots to face the \$1.5-million-per-copy Soviet MIG-21s at a numerical disadvantage far outweighing the F-14s small performance advantage. By eliminating frills in favor of performance, McGovern would build a lightweight super-fighter, now under development, that could fly rings around the F-14 for only \$3-million-per-copy.

2. Top-heavy grade structure—We now have more 3- and 4-star generals and admiral

als commanding 2.5 million men than we had in World War II commanding 12 million men.

3. Massive bomber, aircraft carrier, and manpower forces—Useful only if we plan to involve ourselves in future Vietnam-type wars. The Nixon defense budget, by providing forces for wars we do not need and should not fight, would decrease rather than increase true national security.

4. The Trident submarine—A large \$1.3-billion-per-copy missile submarine to replace our present Polaris/Poseidon ships, even though the latter can serve as invulnerable nuclear deterrents for decades. The SALT agreement limits us to two Tridents for every three Polaris/Poseidons we retire. Thus the Nixon program will reduce the number of American missile submarines, simplify the task of the Soviet anti-submarine force, and thereby weaken our deterrent and decrease security.

In national security planning, there is no substitute for discussion of specifics. Senator McGovern has offered to debate Mr. Nixon, on any of these specific points, but unfortunately the offer has not been accepted. If it had been, both the American people and The Washington Post would have had a better opportunity to appreciate how indefensible is the Nixon defense budget, and how, by 1975, we can save perhaps \$30 billion annually without diminishing military security.

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