



DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S

October 4, 1976

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TO : The Secretary  
FROM : PA - John E. Reinhardt *JK*

Public Attitudes toward Defense Spending

Summary

Recent polls show that public support of defense spending has increased significantly during the past two years -- even though a sizable plurality of the public has continued to favor maintaining defense expenditures at then-current levels. The turnaround is a result of a sharp decline in the proportion desiring to cut defense expenditures and a sharp rise in the proportion wanting to raise them.

End Summary

A survey just released by Potomac Associates reveals that, for the first time in recent years, the proportion of Americans favoring an increase in defense spending (28 percent) is greater than those wanting to reduce it (20 percent) or end it entirely (four percent). More than two thirds of the public now support the defense budget either at the present level or think it should be even higher.

Responses to the following question from 1972 to 1976 reveal the sharp turnaround in public attitude:

"Considering the situation today at home and abroad, do you think the total amount the United States is now spending for defense and military purposes should be increased, kept at the present level, reduced, or ended altogether?"



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	<u>May 1976</u>	<u>April 1974</u>	<u>August 1972</u>
Increased	28%	17%	9%
Present Level	43%	40%	40%
Reduced	20%	33%	37%
Ended	4%	4%	5%
Don't Know	5%	6%	9%

Potomac Associates also inquired about attitudes toward government spending for twenty-two other programs in its 1974 and 1976 surveys. Support for most of them declined. Only defense spending, spending to maintain American troops and bases abroad, and aid to the unemployed showed meaningful increases in support. Defense spending registered the largest such increase.

Harris Poll questions asked in August and just released provide the latest evidence of the support that has developed for keeping the military budget at least at the present level -- and even increasing it, if that were necessary to maintain U.S. military pre-eminence. The current Harris release asks:

"In the area of foreign policy do you favor or oppose --" (various items are then listed, including):

"Cutting back defense expenditures by 5 to 7 billion dollars"

<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
41%	38%	21%

The division according to party affiliation is as follows: Republicans oppose the cut, 50 percent to 30 percent; Independents also oppose it, 41 percent to 39 percent. Democrats favor the cut, 41 percent to 37 percent.

Opposition to cutting the defense budget increases with age. Among respondents 18 to 29, 46 percent favor lower defense spending and 34 percent oppose it. But,



among those over 50, 47 percent oppose lower defense spending and 31 percent favor it. Among the college-educated as a whole, the response was evenly divided, with 41 percent both opposing and favoring such a cut. (Another 18 percent of this group describe themselves as "not sure.")

Support for defense spending proves to be far stronger when the same respondents are asked if they favor or oppose --

"Making sure our defense preparations and weapons are better than those of any other country, even if this means increasing defense spending"

<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
61%	23%	16%

Increased defense spending is supported -- if put in the context of being necessary to maintain military superiority -- by all population groups. More spending then wins the support of 69 percent of Republicans, 60 percent of Democrats, 57 percent of Independents, and 54 percent of the college-educated. The lowest level of support is found among those 18 to 29, with 47 percent supporting more spending and 36 percent opposing it.

Last February, Gallup reported that attitudes toward defense spending were not related to knowledge of how much is actually spent on defense. Seventy percent of the respondents stated they had no idea how much was spent on defense. Only seven percent came close to the actual figure.

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