

The Committee for National Security

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December 16, 1980

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
President
Rockefeller University
New York, NY 10021

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

America faces a deadly paradox: "national security policy" is making Americans less secure.

Over the past several months, I have been working with a group of forward-looking Americans; they are listed in the enclosed flyer. I am sure many of them are well known to you, by name if not personally. Our goal is to shape new national policies that will not only secure us from military attack but also protect every American from poverty, from disease, from economic upheavals, and from erosion of our basic liberties.

Though I know your interest in these vital questions, I hesitated to ask for your help in the early, tentative stages of this work. Now, however, I can come to you with a plan, with confidence, and with a genuine need for your financial support.

The election has reminded us all most forcefully how campaign rhetoric trades on myths and oversimplifications about national security. The most dangerous of these is the myth that our security can be measured in military spending.

I know you recognize that the opposite is often true: new weapons can heat up the arms race, thereby undermining what little stability we do enjoy. You also know that reckless military spending detracts from our ability to meet basic human needs here and abroad, unbalances our economy, and diverts resources from the pursuit of people's well-being.

This recognition, however, leaves many questions:

- How much military strength is needed for our security?
- What kind of weaponry and personnel will increase security without spurring an endless spiral of escalation?
- What means can we use to reduce the worldwide momentum toward war?
- How can we assure that domestic needs are adequately met?

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To answer these questions, we have formed the Committee for National Security, pulling together a number of the nation's best minds in diplomacy, military strategy, electoral politics, the sciences and the humanities.

Working with such experts has been an exhilarating and enlightening experience for me. Now I must ask you to give your financial support to this work, so that the promising approaches conceived in the past several months can grow to influence our nation's policies.

Two ideas reverberate through all our deliberations: security from military attack, if it can be achieved in the nuclear age, will depend not only on requisite military power, but also on our ability to negotiate differences, to raise the living standard of the world's poor, and to truly represent the quest for liberty and justice. And security from attack must be achieved while we give every citizen the opportunity to live with liberty and dignity.

You understand this, as your support for arms limitations shows.

But do you believe that policy based on this understanding can win out over policy based on the seductive myth of military invulnerability?

As we began the discussions that led to the Committee for National Security, I will tell you frankly, this was my principal doubt -- not whether more promising routes to national security could be described, but whether a more promising policy could win the support of a broad cross-section of American citizens.

After months of preliminary discussions, I am now convinced that the Committee for National Security can build a consensus for policies that may save us from nuclear war and build a stronger and better society.

And I am convinced that your support is crucial to doing that.

Here is the plan, in outline, of the Committee's work:

- The Committee will convene leading scholars, statesmen, military strategists and citizens to hammer out new national security proposals. These proposals will unflinchingly recognize the realities of nuclear destructive power, of global economic imperatives, and of America's strategic and economic vulnerability -- of which we have been so bluntly reminded by the Middle East boiloovers.
- We will use the most sophisticated polling techniques to read the attitudes of the American electorate. We will not be imprisoned by the "left wing, right wing" dichotomy that deludes so many people; we will form a realistic view of "who supports what." From the results we will see where we can build support.
- We will use the power of the media to attack the myths and oversimplifications that keep America locked into a massive defense budget and a self-defeating arms race. Our polling will allow us to direct our message where it will carry the most weight.

I expect you have by now seized on an important feature of this plan that I have not yet mentioned: its cost.

The sophisticated polling and broad public education required to redirect America's national security policy are very expensive. In fact, it is the cost of these techniques that has limited them to commercial selling and major election campaigns.

Precisely because you understand the scope and the expense of this venture, I ask you to join our National Finance Council

As a member of the National Finance Council, you would help launch the Committee's work with a contribution of \$500 or more. Your generosity will be matched by foundations, far-sighted corporations, and other members of the National Finance Council.

The National Finance Council will not be large. Experience shows that there are relatively few Americans with the means, the perception of public affairs, and the spirit of self-sacrifice to make the kind of gift I am asking from you. I believe you are one of those unusual citizens; I hope I am not mistaken.

Ultimately, tens of thousands of citizens will follow your leadership with gifts of all sizes. Such a membership, however, will have to be built over a period of years. Your generosity now is essential to meeting the cost of the Committee's arduous growth.

The United States and perhaps the entire human species is competing in a race: our blossoming technology of annihilation against the painfully cultivated science of peace. The technology of destruction has won the first lap of this race; we have invented the weapons that make war unsurvivable before we have devised the skills that can avoid war.

I believe the fear of nuclear war runs so deep in America that many Americans refuse to face it. You and I must face it because panic and an unreasoning trust in destructive military power inevitably brings us closer to war.

Surely this merits the most generous commitment you are in a position to make.

The only road to national security is the road to peace. The road to peace is complex; it will require our utmost commitment, intelligence and humanity. But it is the only road that leads us anywhere.

Please join us with the most generous gift you are able to make today.

Sincerely,



Marjorie Benton
Co-Chair Finance Committee