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PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH

I suppose that no other subject has been so widely discussed and yet so little understood in recent years as that of world peace. That is why I have chosen as my topic for today--"World Peace through Strength." We are now involved in what appears to be the final stages of an armed conflict in which we have been engaged for almost the last ten years. We originally went to the defense of South Vietnam because they were a friendly nation and asked us for our help and assistance against Communist aggression from the North. So we pledged our help, and five Presidents have supported that pledge. I do not believe that it would be in the interest of either the United States or the cause of world peace to break it now.

The present policy of the United States government, a policy which I support, is to remain in South Vietnam until the time in the not too distant future when the South Vietnamese will have the chance and the capability to stand alone against those forces who would wish to conquer and subjugate them.

And yet as the President said only two days ago, it is clear that this country is withdrawing its forces from South Vietnam. It is clear that this war is winding down. It would, therefore, be senseless, and I believe extremely dangerous, to get out of Vietnam in such a way that would make futile all the sacrifices that we have made for so many years. There is no question that this has been a long war. We have been actively fighting in South Vietnam for almost all the 1960's and now into the early 1970's.

We have done so because of the belief that it was essential to our own national security. It is not true that merely because Asia is far away from us, its problems do not concern us. I should point out that twice in one generation--in both Japan and in Korea--we have had to fight aggression in the Far East. To have ignored this aggression in South Vietnam would have been to have ignored a country's right to independence, and consequently, to have ignored the danger of a larger war.

It would be very easy to bring all the troops who now remain in South Vietnam, and indeed all of Southeast Asia, home to the United States immediately. That would, no doubt, be a popular decision. But to do so, would run the serious risk of destroying all that we have gained, and

all that we have sacrificed in a decade of fighting. To completely abandon the people of South Vietnam at once, after we have made them almost totally dependent on American military support, would be a severely cruel act. There is no question but what such a decision would bring temporary peace to the United States. But it would not bring peace to the people of South Vietnam, and indeed to all of the people who live in Southeast Asia.

It may seem unfair to some that our country bears such a terrible burden of defending freedom in its various hours of danger. But no other country in the world has the resources to stop Communist aggression. I remember what President Wilson said many years ago--"The American Flag never means so much to me, as when it means to others, a symbol of peace and liberty." This is the tradition and the heritage of the American people.

But I am concerned today that some of us are becoming increasingly tired of upholding this constant burden. I believe this reluctance is demonstrated by those who want to get out of South Vietnam and all of Indochina now; by those who want to pull all of our forces out of western Europe; and who want to cut back on virtually every

military expenditure. But I believe this attitude to be a dangerous and defeatist one.

I know we are tired, tired of losing our boys, tired of spending so much money on a war so far away. But you can rest assured that the Communists are not tired. If we should initiate a precipitous withdrawal from South Vietnam, before those people are able and ready to defend themselves without our assistance, then all that we have fought and died for will have been in vain.

Further, it would be extremely doubtful that neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and perhaps even Thailand would be able to remain free and neutral. This is why it is so important that we persevere in our determination to assist the South Vietnamese.

I do not believe, and I do not accept, the theory of some who say that our actions in South Vietnam are those of a war-like people. I believe that the cause of world peace has demanded our presence there. History has shown us that an unwillingness to stop aggression in its initial stages ultimately leads to greater conflict.

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If we had let the Communists take over South Vietnam, without so much as a struggle on our part, it would have served notice on the entire world that the United States would not defend and protect the people of Southeast Asia who wished to remain neutral and free from Communist domination.

Now that we have fought so hard and spent so much for the people of Southeast Asia, it makes no sense to throw it all away in the haste to get out quickly. This surely is not the time to abdicate all responsibility for Southeast Asia.

It is unfortunate that we have had to witness in the past few years the paradox of having to spend huge sums of money for arms in order to promote world peace. But the evolution of world events has dictated this role to us. For we are the only nation in the free world that possesses the great national resources, the great military strength, and up to now, the strong conviction of all our people necessary for the defense of freedom here at home and around the world.

We still have those great national resources, and we still have the potential for that vast military strength should it again become necessary. The one question remaining today is whether or not the American people have lost their convictions and their will to stand up and be counted in the fight for people's freedom.

I say to you today that the moral fiber of this country is being tested as never before. Whether we successfully meet that test will determine, in large measure, whether we will finally observe the coming of true world peace in our lifetime on this planet.

I remember when President Kennedy said to the country and to the world a little more than ten years ago--"Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered that call encircle the globe." Today, this generation of Americans, both young and old, are indeed being summoned to give testimony to our national loyalty. How we respond, how we answer that call, may very well determine whether we will have to fight again on some other shore in some other land.

I believe that it is the destiny of this country to be either the cause of freedom's success or the observer of its failure. To protect that freedom, I believe we must remain strong. We must be strong, not only in terms of military support to such countries as South Vietnam, but also in our commitment to freedom both for ourselves and for all people.

For all of us here in the United States--the coming months will be a time of decision. We must decide whether we have reached our limit--whether our greatness in our dedication to freedom is past--whether we can go no

further--or whether we can retain and carry forward the mantle of freedom not only for ourselves but for all free peoples everywhere.

The goal of freedom and peace is a difficult one. We will not reach that goal today, or tomorrow. We may not reach it in our own lifetime. But the quest is the greatest adventure of our century. We sometimes chafe at the burden of our obligations, the complexity of our decisions, the agony of our choices. But there is no comfort or security for us in evasion, no solution in advocacy, no relief in irresponsibility.

Our goal must be to seek peace, not just for our time, but for all time.