



# Address Delivered by the Secretary of State

***Cordell Hull, Secretary of State***

**Washington**

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In the course of the daily press conferences at the Department of State, I have occasion to see many of you and to touch upon day-to-day developments in our foreign relations. Such information as I am able to give you in these conferences must, of necessity, relate to specific questions and, oftentimes, to isolated events. Yet upon you, representatives of the press, rests a heavy responsibility in keeping our people currently and accurately informed on the vital issues which arise in our country's relations with other nations. I welcome, therefore, this opportunity to meet with the members of the National Press Club in the calmer atmosphere of an occasion like the present one, and to discuss with you some of the fundamental conditions and problems presented by our international relations and our foreign policy. The primary objectives of our foreign policy are the maintenance of the peace of our country and the promotion of the economic, the social, and the moral welfare of our people. Unfortunately, the means of attaining these objectives involve today so many factors of great complexity that their real significance is frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted.

By instinct and tradition our country has been, throughout its history, sincerely devoted to the cause of peace. Within the limitations imposed by time and circumstance we have earnestly sought to discharge our responsibilities as a member of the family of nations in promoting conditions essential to the maintenance of peace. We have consistently believed in the sanctity of treaty obligations and have endeavored to apply this belief in the actual practice of our foreign relations. In common with all other nations we have, since the end of the World War, assumed a solemn obligation not to resort to force as an instrument of national policy. All this gives us a moral right to express our deep concern

over the rising tide of lawlessness, the growing disregard of treaties, the increasing reversion to the use of force, and the numerous other ominous tendencies which are emerging in the sphere of international relations.

On July 16, 1937, I issued a public statement setting forth the fundamental principles to which our Government adheres in the formulation of its foreign policy. On behalf of our Government I transmitted a copy of this statement to every government of the world, requesting such comment as each might see fit to offer. To our profound gratification an overwhelming majority of those governments joined in affirming their faith in these vital principles.

The most important of these principles, which are indispensable to a satisfactory international order, are as follows:

Maintenance of peace should be constantly advocated and practiced. All nations should, through voluntary self-restraint, abstain from use of force in pursuit of policy and from interference in the internal affairs of other nations. All nations should seek to adjust problems arising in their international relations by processes of peaceful negotiation and agreement. All nations should uphold the principle of the sanctity of treaties and of faithful observance of international agreements.

Modification of provisions of treaties, when need therefor arises, should be by orderly processes carried out in a spirit of mutual helpfulness and accommodation.

Each nation should respect the rights of others and perform scrupulously its own established obligations; in brief, international law and the spirit which underlies it must be revitalized and strengthened.

Steps should be taken toward promotion of economic security and stability the world over through lowering or removal of barriers to international trade according of effective equality of commercial opportunity, and application of the principle of equality of commercial treatment.

National armaments should be limited and be progressively reduced; at the same time, realizing the necessity for maintaining armed forces adequate for national security, each nation should to that end be prepared to reduce or increase its own armed forces in proportion as reductions or increases are made by other nations.

Apart from the question of alliances with others, each nation should be prepared to engage in cooperative effort, by peaceful and practicable means, in support of these principles.

The peace and progress of every nation are just as dependent on international law and order, based upon the foregoing principles, as the welfare, stability, and progress of a community are dependent upon domestic law and order, based upon legal, moral, and other recognized standards of conduct. No government faithful to the sacred trust involved in the task of providing for the safety and well-being of its people can disregard these universal principles. Every nation, whatever its form of government, can support them. Every nation must support them, if civilization is to survive. The longer the nations

delay acceptance and observance of these fundamental tenets of constructive statesmanship, the graver will be the jeopardy into which all worth-while international relationships will be plunged, and with them the welfare, the happiness, and the civilized existence of all nations.

The crucial issue today is whether these principles will be vitalized and be firmly established as the foundation of an international order or whether international anarchy based on brute force will inundate the world and ultimately sweep away the very bases of civilization and progress. That issue is universal. No more than a community or a nation, can the world base its existence in part on law and in part on lawlessness, in part on order and in part on chaos, in part on processes of peace and in part on methods of violence.

On August 23 I made another public statement reaffirming the principles which should underlie international order, peace, and justice, if the world is to avoid a relapse into another dark night of international anarchy and general retrogression. I called attention again to the fact that if these principles are to be effective they must be universal in their application. This statement was prompted by the fact that the progress and possibilities of armed conflict were becoming more alarming both in the European and the Far Eastern areas and that the basic principles to which I have just referred were being challenged and the doctrine of armed force was gaining supremacy in important regions of the world.

During the early months of the conflict in the Far East I appealed on several occasions, in the name of our Government, to both Japan and China to desist from using armed force and to resort to the well-recognized processes of peaceful settlement for the adjustment of whatever differences existed between them. I said that we would be glad to be of assistance toward facilitating, in any manner that might be practicable and mutually agreeable, resort by them to such processes.

On August 17, and with frequent reiteration thereafter, I stated that we did not intend to abandon our nationals and our interests in China.

From time immemorial it has been the practice of civilized nations to afford protection, by appropriate means and under the rule of reason, to their nationals and their rights and interests abroad. This policy has been pursued by the Government of the United States throughout the existence of our country. Methods and means of affording protection abroad vary according to the places in which and the circumstances under which protection is called for. In the case of China, where unusual local conditions were such that the protection afforded by local authorities did not suffice to give security against excited and lawless elements, there have occasionally been sent—not by this country alone but by a number of countries—armed forces, to contribute to the affording of such protection as is due under the rules of international law and the provisions of treaties. American forces thus sent to China have at no time had any mission of aggression, and it has been the practice of the American Government to withdraw such forces whenever and as soon as the local situation so develops as to warrant the view that their withdrawal can be effected without detriment to American interests and obligations in general.

In announcing our intention to afford appropriate and reasonable protection to our rights and interests in the Far East, I stated clearly that we are fully determined to avoid the extremes either of internationalism or of isolationism. Internationalism would mean undesirable political involvements; isolationism would either compel us to confine all activities of our people within our own frontiers, with incalculable injury to the standard of living and the general welfare of our people, or else expose our nationals and our legitimate interests abroad to injustice or outrage wherever lawless conditions arise. Steering a sound middle course between these two extremes, we are convinced that a policy of affording appropriate protection—under the rule of reason, in such form as may be best suited to the particular circumstances, and in accordance with the principles we advocate—is imperatively needed to serve our national interest.

Our decision in this matter is based not only on what we firmly believe to be a specific and elementary duty of a government toward its citizens, but also on other and broader considerations. Respect by a country for the rights and interests of others is a visible test of the fulfillment of obligations assumed by virtue of acceptance of international law and of undertakings embodied in negotiated international instruments. It is, therefore, a test of the observance of those fundamental principles of civilized relations among nations, which, if firmly established, provide in themselves the best means of protection against violation and abuse of the legitimate rights and interests of every nation.

To waive rights and to permit interests to lapse in the face of their actual or threatened violation—and thereby to abandon obligations—in any important area of the world, can serve only to encourage disregard of law and of the basic principles of international order, and thus contribute to the inevitable spread of international anarchy throughout the world. For this country, as for any country, to act in such manner anywhere would be to invite disregard and violation of its rights and interests everywhere, by every nation so inclined, large or small.

To respect the rights of others and to insist that others respect our rights has been the traditional policy of our country. This policy was admirably expressed by James Monroe when, in his message to Congress on December 2, 1823, he said:

“Our policy . . . remains the same: . . . to cultivate friendly relations . . . and to preserve those relations by frank, firm, and manly policy, meeting in all instances the just claims of every power, submitting to injuries from none.”

In a world in which the rule of force has not as yet been firmly and surely supplanted by the rule of law, it is the manifest duty of a great nation to maintain armed forces adequate for its national defense. Writing on this subject, which was as vital to our national life 150 years ago as it is today, James Madison said:

“The means of security can only be regulated by the means and the danger of attack. They will, in fact, be ever determined by these rules, and by no others.”

It is the duty of the Federal Government to insure the safety of our country and to determine what “means of security” are, at any given moment, needed to provide against “the means and the danger of attack.” The responsible heads of our naval establishment

offer convincing reasons in support of the program, now before the Congress, to render adequate the means of our national defense. No policy would prove more disastrous than for an important nation to fail to arm adequately when international lawlessness is on the rampage. It is my considered judgment that, in the present state of world affairs, to do less than is now proposed would lay our country open to unpredictable hazards. It would, moreover, seriously restrict our Nation's ability to command, without purpose or occasion for resorting to arms, proper respect for its legitimate rights and interests, the surrender of which would constitute abandonment of the fundamental principles of justice and morality and peace among nations.

The maintenance of these principles that are of concern to all nations alike cannot and should not be undertaken by any one nation alone. Prudence and common sense dictate that, where this and other nations have common interests and common objectives, we should not hesitate to exchange information and to confer with the governments of such other nations and, in dealing with the problems confronting each alike, to proceed along parallel lines—this Government retaining at all times its independence of judgment and freedom of action. For nations which seek peace to assume with respect to each other attitudes of complete aloofness would serve only to encourage, and virtually invite, on the part of other nations lawlessly inclined, policies and actions most likely to endanger peace.

In the present Far Eastern emergency, we have consistently collaborated with other peace-seeking nations in the manner I have just described. I have said often, and I repeat again, that in this collaboration there is not a trace of alliance or involvement of any sort. We have scrupulously followed and we intend to follow the traditional policy of our country not to enter into entangling alliances or involvements with other countries.

When the Brussels Conference was called, this country, as one of the original signatories of the Nine Power Treaty and in accordance with its treaty obligations thus assumed, promptly accepted the invitation to the Conference. Our delegation cooperated fully with the representatives of the other Conference powers in examining the situation in the Far East and exploring methods of bringing about peace by processes of agreement. The Conference made a substantial contribution toward keeping alive principles of world order and of respect for the pledged word. Its declarations placed a new emphasis upon the deep concern of peaceful nations over any developments that threaten the preservation of peace.

In connection with the Far Eastern situation, this Government was confronted with the question of applying the existing neutrality legislation, which was designed primarily to keep our Nation out of war. After mature deliberation the conclusion was reached that in the circumstances attending the controversy in the Far East—a type of circumstances which the authors of the legislation could scarcely have visualized—application of the law would be most likely to endanger the very objectives which the law was designed to promote. Accordingly, exercising the discretion vested in him by the law itself, the President has refrained from putting the provisions of that law into operation. At the same time, in pursuance of our general policy of avoiding unnecessary risks, the President announced, on September 14, 1937, that “Merchant vessels owned by the Government of the United States will not hereafter, until further notice, be permitted to

transport to China or Japan any of the arms, ammunition, or implements of war which were listed in the President's proclamation of May 1, 1937," and that "Any other merchant vessels, flying the American flag, which attempt to transport any of the listed articles to China or Japan will, until further notice, do so at their own risk."

Our Government pursues, in relation to every world area alike, a policy of noninterference, with ill will toward no nation and a sincere desire to be friendly with all. At the same time, we endeavor to afford appropriate protection to American citizens and American interests everywhere. During recent months, as throughout the past 100 years, the Government of the United States has sought to exercise moral influence and to cooperate in every practicable way with all peace-seeking nations in support of those basic principles which are indispensable to the promotion and maintenance of stable conditions of peace.

We have affirmed on every possible occasion and have urged upon all nations the supreme need for keeping alive and for practicing sound fundamental principles of relations among civilized nations. We have never entertained and we have not the slightest intention to entertain any such notion as the use of American armed forces for "policing the world." But we equally have not the slightest intention of reversing a tradition of a century and a half by abandoning our deep concern for, and our advocacy of, the establishment everywhere; of international order under law, based upon the well-recognized principles to which I have referred. It is our profound conviction that the most effective contribution which we, as a nation sincerely devoted to the cause of peace, can make—in the tragic conditions with which our people, in common with the rest of mankind, are confronted today—is to have this country respected throughout the world for integrity, justice, good will, strength, and unswerving loyalty to principles.

The foregoing is the essence of our foreign policy. The record is an open book. We spare no effort to make known the facts regarding our attitude, our objectives, and our acts. We are always ready to furnish to the members of the Congress essential information. You, gentlemen, have first-hand knowledge of our constant effort to keep the press and the public informed.

There is one thing that we cannot do; and that is, to prepare and to place before every government of the world a detailed chart of the course of policy and action which this country will or will not pursue under any particular set of circumstances. No man, no nation, can possibly foresee all the circumstances that may arise. Moreover, to attempt to make such a detailed chart of future action would merely result in impairing our effectiveness in working for the one objective toward which we constantly strive and on which, I am certain, there is not a vestige of disagreement among the people of our country—the establishment of durable peace.

So strong, indeed, is the desire of this country for peace that many measures have been suggested toward our keeping out of war—some of them in complete disregard of both experience and practicability. It has been urged that we apply the neutrality law automatically in all circumstances, without adequate consideration of the possible consequences of such action for our own peace and for the safety of our citizens. It has been urged that we withdraw precipitately from any part of the world in which violators

of international decencies choose to assert themselves. It has even been urged that we change the very basis of our representative form of government in a frantic search for something which the proposers assume would make it more likely that this country avoid war.

I take it for granted that all of us alike are sincere friends of peace. This makes it all the more necessary for every one of us to scrutinize carefully every measure proposed, lest in our attempts to avoid war we imperil the chances of preserving peace.

The problem of the form of government best adapted to this country's needs was one with which the founders of our Republic came to grips in those stirring days when the structure of our independent national existence was being given form and substance. After exhaustive deliberation and discussion they decided upon the system of representative democracy in preference to that of pure democracy as the system through which the people could best safeguard their liberty and promote their national security and welfare. The wisdom of the founders of this Nation in deciding, with conspicuous unanimity, to place the conduct of foreign relations in the hands of the Federal Government has stood the test of generations as providing the most effective means that can be devised for assuring the peace, the security, and the independence of our people.

What warrant is there, in reason or in experience, for the assumption—which underlies such proposals as the plan for a popular referendum on the subject of declaring war—that the Chief Executive and the Congress will be at any time more eager and more likely to embark upon war than would be the general body of citizens to whom they are directly responsible? No President and no Congress have ever carried this country into war against the will of the people. On the other hand, there is not a vestige of doubt that the adoption of a procedure like the referendum plan would hopelessly handicap the Government in the conduct of our foreign relations in general and would thus disastrously impair its ability to safeguard the interests of the Nation, in the forefront among which is that of peace.

Likewise dangerous, from the viewpoint of the preservation of peace, is the proposal that we retire from the Far East, comprising the chief portion of the Pacific area. Unfortunately, many people in this country have wholly misunderstood the position and policy of our Government in relation to that situation. Some have visualized only our trade and investment relationships with China, or our moral and cultural interests there, symbolized by missionary, educational, medical, and similar activities. Some have concentrated their attention solely upon the incidental and exceptional facts of the existence of extraterritoriality and the maintenance of some armed forces to assist in safeguarding our nationals against possible mob violence and similar disorders—special rights which it is our policy to give up and forces which it is our policy to withdraw the moment the unusual conditions disappear.

All these are important. But the interest and concern of the United States—whether in the Far East, in any other part of the Pacific area, in Europe, or anywhere else in the world—are not measured alone by the number of American citizens residing in a particular country, or by the volume of investment and trade, or by exceptional conditions peculiar

to the particular area. There is a much broader and more fundamental interest—which is, that orderly processes in international relationships based on the principles to which I have referred be maintained.

As I have already indicated, what is most of all at stake today, throughout the world, is the future of the fundamental principles which must be the foundation of international order as opposed to international anarchy. If we and others were to abandon and surrender these principles in regard to the Pacific area, which is almost one half of the world, we would have to reconcile ourselves to their certain abandonment and surrender in regard to the other half of the world.

It would be absurd and futile for us to proclaim that we stand for international law, for the sanctity of treaty obligations, for nonintervention in internal affairs of other countries, for equality of industrial and commercial rights and opportunities, for limitation and reduction of armaments—but only in one—half of the world, and among one—half of the world's population. The catastrophic developments of recent years, the startling events of the past weeks, offer a tragic demonstration of how quickly the contagious scourge of treaty breaking and armed violence spreads from one region to another.

Those who contend that we can and should abandon and surrender principles in one—half of the world clearly show that they have little or no conception of the extent to which situations and developments in any part of the world of today inevitably affect situations and conditions in other parts of the world. The triumph of this seclusionist viewpoint would inescapably carry the whole world back to the conditions of medieval chaos, conditions toward which some parts of both the eastern and the western worlds are already moving. Such is the fate to which extreme isolationists— isolationists at any price—all those who contend that we should neither protest against abuses nor cooperate with others toward keeping principles alive, those who say that under no circumstances should we insist upon any rights beyond our own territorial waters—such is the fate to which blind extremism of this type would consign this country and the world.

The momentous question—let me repeat—is whether the doctrine of force shall become enthroned once more and bring in its wake, inexorably, international anarchy and a relapse into barbarism; or whether this and other peaceful nations, fervently attached to the principles which underlie international order, shall work unceasingly—singly or in cooperation with each other, as circumstances, their traditional policies and practices, and their enlightened self-interest may dictate—to promote and preserve law, order, morality, and justice as the unshakeable bases of civilized international relations.

We might, if we could reconcile ourselves to such an attitude, turn our backs on the whole problem and decline the responsibility and labor of contributing to its solution. But let us have no illusions as to what such a course of action would involve for us as a nation.

It would mean a break with our past, both internationally and domestically. It would mean a voluntary abandonment of some of the most important things that have made us a great nation. It would mean an abject retreat before those forces which we have,

throughout our whole national history, consistently opposed.

It would mean that our security would be menaced in proportion as other nations came to believe that, either through fear or through unwillingness, we did not intend to afford protection to our legitimate national interests abroad, but, on the contrary, intended to abandon them at the first sign of danger. Under such conditions the sphere of our international relationships economic, cultural, intellectual, and other—would necessarily shrink and shrivel, until we would stand practically alone among the nations, a self-constituted hermit state.

Thrown back upon our own resources, we would find it necessary to reorganize our entire social and economic structure. The process of adaptation to a more or less self-contained existence would mean less production and at higher costs; lower living standards; regimentation in every phase of life; economic distress to wage earners and farmers, and to their families; and the dole, on an ever-increasing scale.

All this we would be doing in pursuit of the notion that by so doing we would avoid war. But would these policies, while entailing such enormous sacrifices and rendering the Nation more and more decadent, really give us any such assurance?

Reason and experience definitely point to the contrary. We may seek to withdraw from participation in world affairs, but we cannot thereby withdraw from the world itself. Isolation is not a means to security; it is a fruitful source of insecurity.

We want to live in a world which is at peace; in which the forces of militarism, of territorial aggression, and of international anarchy in general will become utterly odious, revolting, and intolerable to the conscience of mankind; in which the doctrine of order under law will be firmly established; in which there will no longer be one code of morality, honor, justice, and fair play for the individual in his relations with other individuals, and an entirely different code for governments and nations in their relations with each other. We want to live in a world in which fruitful and constructive international relationships can serve as a medium for disseminating throughout the world the benefits of the material, spiritual, and moral progress of mankind.

To that end we will continue to give full and sincere adherence to the fundamental principles which underlie international order; we will continue to urge universal acceptance and observance of these principles; we will continue, wherever necessary and in every practicable and peaceful way, to cooperate with other nations which are actuated by the same desires and are pursuing the same objectives; we will persevere in appropriate efforts to safeguard our legitimate rights and interests in every part of the world; and we will, while scrupulously respecting the rights of others, insist on their respecting our rights. To that end we will continue to strive, through our reciprocal trade program and through other economic policies, to restore the normal processes and to expand the volume of mutually beneficial trade among the nations, which is indispensable to an increase of production, employment, purchasing power, and general economic well-being here and everywhere; we will continue to promote peace through economic security and prosperity; we will continue to participate in the numerous international scientific, technical, and other conferences and collaborative efforts, which

have been such powerful influences in assisting the stream of new ideas, of new discoveries, of learning and culture, to flow throughout the world; and we will continue to urge other nations to give their support to such policies and efforts.

We believe that a world at peace, with law and justice prevailing, is possible, and that it can be achieved by methods to some of which I have referred. That is the cornerstone of our foreign policy—a policy graphically described by President Roosevelt when he said:

“There must be positive endeavors to preserve peace. America hates war. America hopes for peace. Therefore, America actively engages in the search for peace.”

The objectives of our foreign policy are as easy to grasp as they are fundamental. The means we are using to attain these objectives are the only means approved by reason and by experience. For the sake of the best interests of our people, we must maintain our strength, our courage, our moral standards, our influence in world affairs, and our participation in efforts toward world progress and peace. Only by making our reasonable contribution to a firm establishment of a world order based on law can we keep the problem of our own security in true perspective and thus discharge our responsibility to ourselves—to America of today and to America of tomorrow. No other course would be worthy of our past or of the potentialities of this great democracy of which we are all citizens and in whose affairs we all participate.

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