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MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH BY REPRESENTATIVE GERALD R. FORD, JR.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 30, 1951 —

*Essex, Michigan
Michigan Veterans Facility*

How fitting and appropriate that on this occasion, throughout the

United States, a patriotic and grateful American people gather to pay their homage and respect to those of the Nation's sons who have fought their country's battles.

In all our splendid cities, in every town, village, and hamlet, Americans pause at this hour to observe another Memorial Day. It is reassuring for the future of our country to know that in the busy strife for existence, and the terrible stress of the times, we as one people can lay aside the material things of life to pause in reverence to honor those magnificent veterans of our armed forces who have answered the last call by making the supreme sacrifice.

In instituting the great tradition of Memorial Day in 1868 General Logan said, "It is our purpose to inaugurate this observance with the hope that it will be kept from year to year while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of the departed." How faithfully the veterans of the Civil War have honored this request and kept this trust will be freely attested by the past generations of Americans who have lived during the lifetime of the veterans of that great struggle. As the very last of the old comrades muster out and fall in with the ranks of that silent army, and when the roll of the drum beats its last tattoo and shall fall upon no familiar ears, we shall still remember, observe and commemorate this day. We by our presence and participation in these ceremonies commemorate not alone the memory of those who have died; but in addition on this day rededicate ourselves anew to the living spirit of those who have died that this great Nation might live.



✓ The Revolutionary War won us our existence as a nation; the Civil War ratified and confirmed it in blood; the Spanish-American War proved that we were willing to fight for the extension of the principles of freedom to the oppressed peoples of the American Hemisphere; the two world wars emphasized the purity of these motives, and evidenced to the world that Americans were willing to die that our ideals and principles in Government based on the doctrine of human dignity might be disseminated throughout the globe.

It is to the credit and glory of this country that we have never willingly sought war. We have never entered war for the purpose of commercial advantage nor of national expansion. Neither greed nor selfishness has ever motivated America's entrance into war. Always this Nation was impelled to enter war for the sake of preserving the freedom of our people and the freedom of others. As a result of this unselfish American spirit our Nation is at the very pinnacle in world affairs.

Although we have fought and won two wars in the last 35 years and are now involved in another, in the long view war at best does not help civilization. Every war sets civilization back for generations. The toll of war is inestimable. Fundamentally money which is spent for weapons to slaughter the people of other nations is money ill spent. Money which is spent to build ships to wage battles on the seven seas could better be used to foster the commercial and the cultural growth of our people. Money spent to teach the youth of our land to kill the youth of other lands is money squandered. I do not deny that military action for defense of our way of life has been essential in the past. It may be necessary in the future despite our hopes and plans for peace. Nevertheless we must continue to set our ultimate goal as peace, not war, for only through peace can civilization march forward.



In this crucial hour of the World's history it is important to remind ourselves that we are not resisting merely a century-old concept labeled Communism, or a revolutionary state dating from 1917. What we are really combating both at home and overseas are forces of military aggression and tyranny, evil under whatever banner. We are struggling against the police state which would deny free inquiry, free religion, free art, free music, free thinking - all the liberties and rights of man. What we are opposing in America and elsewhere throughout the world is not just Communism, but treason and subversion and sabotage. For the future well being of mankind our best efforts must be dedicated to the destruction of these diabolical evils.

To destroy these insidious forces and for the preservation of our freedoms, the citizens of this great Republic must act collectively at home. Abroad we must act collectively with our allies if the treacherous forces of totalitarianism are to be contained and eventually destroyed.

To be successful at home or abroad our policies must be based on sound and righteous principles. We cannot and must not sacrifice principle for expediency. If the United States and its allies are to have the respect and support of the 800 million people of Asia and others behind the Iron Curtain, we must convince them by our actions that our intentions are above reproach.

Korea is a case in point. At the end of World War II, Russia and the United States without the prior approval of the 30 million people of Korea or their representatives determined that this Nation should be divided at the 38th parallel. The north was placed under the heel of Soviet domination; the southern area was left to our jurisdiction. History records no logical explanation for this arbitrary division of the Korean people. It was simply expedient with no relationship to principle.



It is true the United Nations including our government solemnly promised the Koreans their country would be united and freed. For several years after World War II American troops in sizeable force were garrisoned in Korea to make certain the Communists from the north would not take over while the diplomats endlessly negotiated. Then in June 1949 those in control of our foreign policy deliberately withdrew our forces from South Korea leaving 20 million Koreans helpless against the Russian trained North Korean troops. It was inevitable that the Reds from the north would fill this vacuum by aggression.

The United States and some of our allies are now making a valiant effort to recover from these blunders and to re-establish a free and United Korea as a bulwark against Communism. There is no point in reminding you that this great military effort has taken a terrific toll in combat casualties.

This horrible destruction in human life and property might well have been avoided if our foreign policy makers in 1945 had not sacrificed "principle for expediency". The decision to split Korea in the first instance was not based on sound long range considerations. Certainly the decision to withdraw our troops in 1949 was short sighted for our leaders knew the South Koreans were ill prepared to defend themselves against the ruthless Communist aggressors from the north. The whole free world is suffering today because principle was forgotten and expediency prevailed in this instance.

It seems appropriate on this occasion to call your attention to a letter from a retired Army Captain who recently lost his son in the battlefields of Korea. This father well expresses what many of our citizens have felt over the past months. It reads as follows:



"I have just buried my son at Arlington, a boy who in dying earned the award next in rank to the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross. . .

"My son was killed by a piece of metal; a piece of metal shipped to the enemy in all likelihood by our so-called allies whose continuing recognition and support of our enemy will long live in infamy.

"He was killed by a piece of metal brought down over supply lines we were forbidden to bomb, and made into ammunition by power from Korean dams we were forbidden to destroy; a piece of metal whose transportation was protected by Red planes we were forbidden to pursue and shoot down.

"The name for the reason this and other bits of metal were transported and protected until they could kill this boy and other thousands of American boys is a justly hated and dishonorable one - it is appeasement.

"Our leaders prefer to call it by another name and they excuse it on the grounds of expediency. It has, they say, given us more time - which is but a paraphrase of, 'peace in our time.' It has, they say, kept us out of a big war. Those excuses are but echoes of the words of the man with the umbrella at Munich.

"This boy, these boys, fought and died without hope or chance for victory. When before in our history has America ever committed such a crime against its fighting sons? Appeasement tied one of their hands; the Reds tied the other, and so shackled they died.

"The reasons for paying blackmail are always compelling, and the alternative to paying it is always horrible. Pay or have your



house burned down; pay or have your child murdered. The reasons today are no less compelling - pay or have World War III, pay or have Washington atomic-bombed. . . .

"Nevertheless appeasement or paying blackmail is wrong and does not work. The child held for ransom has already been killed; the decision to burn your house down has been made no matter how much blackmail you pay. Today the Russian decision as to whether and when to attack will not be altered by our hand-tying appeasement.

"We are paying with beloved human lives to buy time that we might have for nothing. Our blackmail payments in American blood purchase neither time nor security."

The words of that fine father seem to express the long pent up feeling of many of our citizens, particularly those who have loved ones on the battlefields in far off lands. It has seemed paradoxical that American G.I.s and a limited number of fighting men from our allies should be valiantly battling the enemy in Korea while less than all out opposition to the Chinese Reds and their objectives has prevailed in high diplomatic and commercial circles.

Until very recently United Nations policy in reference to Korea and related matters was indecisive to say the least. The United Nations and our own diplomats were unfortunately straddling the fence. On the one hand our G.I.s were fighting an all-out war against Communism on the Korean peninsula. On the other hand many of our allies were freely shipping strategic and critical war materiel to the enemy. In addition, American policy makers in the Department of State were not forthrightly dedicated to the total exclusion of Red China from a seat in the United Nations. Still further there was no clear and unequivocal policy in reference to Formosa. Some policy makers



in influential diplomatic circles in the United Nations and the United States seemed willing and almost anxious to turn this military stronghold over to the Communists.

Such unworthy fence straddling on basic policy matters has confused and disheartened our boys on the front lines and bewildered our citizens at home. Not long ago a rural constituent in a letter in commenting on our Korean policy had this to say, "Fence straddling is no solution to any problem. What kind of eggs would my hens lay if I put the hens on the top edge of a fence for their daily operation".

It is encouraging to report that in recent weeks there has been a stiffening determination and a straightening of our collective policies in the struggle against Communist aggression in Korea and elsewhere. The United Nations through collective action is now acting to prevent the flow of war materiel to the Communists in the Far East. The United States is now staunchly committed diplomatically and militarily to the preservation of Formosa's status quo. The Red China government is not to be admitted to the United Nations under our present policies. We are assured that the Chinese Communists cannot "shoot their way" into the United Nations. These recent developments on the diplomatic front have undoubtedly encouraged our troops on the battlefields and bolstered the morale of our citizens at home. Let us hope and pray that we will not again fall into the trap of fence straddling and the sacrifice of principles for expediency.

At this perilous hour in the history of our Nation we must



have a program for action, a plan that will maintain the strength and productivity of our domestic economy and at the same time prevent further Communist aggression against ourselves and our allies. I strongly suggest and recommend the following:

First, our military strength in combination with that of our allies must be of sufficient physical force to stop Communist aggression against the free peoples of the world. American military strength is vital and essential but it must be closely coordinated and correlated with the ability of our economy to sustain such unproductive drains on our natural resources. A point of equilibrium - not too big, not too small - is a necessity, for our Armed Forces of the requisite size may have to be mobilized for a considerable period during the struggle between freedom and totalitarianism.

Second, the soundness of our domestic economy must be preserved at all costs. The gravest danger to the United States today may well be inflation rather than communism. Upon the stability of the American economy depends the stability of the free world. We have lost much ground to inflation in the past months. Some losses can be regained if all our people are sufficiently resolute and unselfish and our leaders assume the statesmanship which the times require.

Third, there must be a higher standard of public service in executive, legislative and judicial offices throughout America. The decline in Public morals must be checked. It can be checked if there is a sufficient public awakening to the inherent danger. This can result by exposure and analysis, and a long needed resurgence of over-all morality.

Fourth, the United Nations must be strengthened and improved. In 1945 it was founded in a hope that it would solve all international



problems and be the means of achieving an everlasting world peace. The organization has been successful to a degree in the past. It is still the best hope for future international security. Obviously revisions are desirable in its basic structure. However, mere changes in the charter will not alone achieve the desired results. Substantial and certain success for the United Nations will inevitably come to pass only when all the people and the governments of the free world subdue selfish aims for the common good.

Fifth, last but not least, we must proclaim and clarify to ourselves, to all the citizens of the free world, and to those unfortunates behind the Iron Curtain the spiritual significance of the free system, as the true and liberating revolution of human history. With the highest motives this must be set forth in very practical terms; it must bring hope of relief and comfort to the suffering masses in backward nations who through all their history have not had the benefits of our system of government which is avowedly dedicated to human dignity.

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In closing, although we may be hundreds of miles away, let us bow our heads in honor of a man we never knew, yet a man known to all, the Unknown Soldier enshrined in Arlington National Cemetery. He is dead now, and he lies in a tomb of polished marble whose splendor would surprise him. People come from everywhere across this land to stand before his grave at Arlington with their heads bowed, their eyes serious, their hearts filled with mourning for this man they never knew.

Because he wore a uniform when he died, they call him the Unknown Soldier. He was a good soldier, though fighting was never his business. He was a man of peace, like all Americans.



He was born on a farm in Michigan . . . or perhaps in a miner's cottage in Pennsylvania, a tenement in the Bronx, a ranch house in Texas, a duplex apartment on Park Avenue. One can't be sure from whence he came but that is unimportant in this great land. One doesn't know his name or his business; whether his grammar was good; what books he read; what church he went to; which way he voted; how much money he had.

Was he a writer, a bookkeeper, a truck driver, a surgeon, a lumberjack, an errand boy, a student? Was he telling a joke, or cursing his sergeant, or perhaps writing to his family, when the missile came?

We don't know, it really doesn't matter. For when they picked this man, from among all our nameless dead, he was lying quiet in a closed coffin, and known only to God.

We do know that he is deserving of our unending honor and respect. For, whoever he may be, we feel certain he must have believed, as we do, in the equality of men, the promise of men, the duty of men to live justly with each other and with themselves.

That is why we stand here with our heads bowed reverently in honor of the stranger who is our brother, our father, our son, our contryman, our friend.

