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James V. Forrestal Papers (MC #051)

Box 131 Folder 5

Navy, 1942-1946

NAVY DEPARTMENT

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JANUARY 26, 1946

SPEECH BY
FLEET ADMIRAL CHESTER W. NIMITZ, U.S.N.
CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
BEFORE
THE WOMEN'S PATRIOTIC CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL DEFENSE
AT
THE HOTEL STATLER
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JANUARY 26, 1946

It is a great pleasure to be here with you this morning. In the first place, it is a privilege to represent the Navy at this Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense. Yours is a vital objective. It is heartening to reflect that more than a million and a half women are represented in your membership. If we are to achieve our goal of true national defense, our programs must be based on a solid foundation of popular understanding of our goals and consistent popular support of our efforts to attain them.

However, I must also mention one other reason why I am glad to represent the Navy here. During the war, our young men were scattered pretty widely over the world. Their ships and stations were lonely. The sight of an American woman was so rare an event that the customary proportion was about one thousand men and a girl. It is gratifying to note that here the ratio is pretty well reversed, which can only mean, to any sea-going man, that the war is really over.

Although our sailors might not believe it, we did have 125,000 women in the various Naval auxiliaries--the WAVES, SPARS, Marine Corps, and Nurses Corps. Their service was of the highest order. It is a record of which the nation, as well as the Navy, may be proud.

When you add to these women the thousands upon thousands who served in civilian capacities at our shore establishments and in the plants and yards from which came our sinews of war, it is abundantly clear that the women of America played a vital part in our march to victory. No words of praise are warm enough for the magnificent record they made.

And we are always aware of yet another contribution made by all the women of America--the women who gave their sons, husbands, and brothers to the service of our country. Theirs were the hours and years of anxious waiting; theirs the task of holding family ties intact; theirs the keeping alive of those memories of home and loved ones that meant so much to men overseas.

For all these reasons, it seems to me most fitting to discuss with you the fundamentals of true national defense. Your interest in lasting peace is rooted in your knowledge that everything which makes life worth living is in danger if we must ever go to war again. You have paid a heavy price for the victory we have won--a price so heavy that it can be justified only if it has taught us how we can live in peace.

Let us, then, as calmly and carefully as possible, consider the elements of true national defense. It seems to me essential to review events leading up to this past war. Clearly, something was wrong with our program. We were not able to avoid war. It is important that we know why.

I believe everyone will agree that merely to be a peace-loving nation is not enough. No nation on earth desired war less than we did through the 1930's; none coveted less the lands and treasures of others. Our national voice and vote were always cast for peace. Yet, war came to us and to nearly all the civilized world.

It was also our policy, in the decades between the World Wars to limit strictly the size of our military and naval forces. It is a sobering thought that at the time of Pearl Harbor, the Navy's total first-line combat air strength consisted of 475 planes. In April and May of 1945, the carriers of Task Force 58 alone could put more than 1,600 planes in the air, and in those months our Fleet destroyed 3,594 Japanese planes.

Evidently, the road to lasting peace cannot be built by merely desiring peace, nor on a foundation of weakness in our armed forces. We gave those methods so good a chance that we were all but overwhelmed before we could marshal the strength to beat back our enemies.

We thus arrive inescapably at the conclusion that the only way to be sure of peace is to be strong enough not to have to fight. If we are strong enough to fight, the penalties of conflict with us will be so obvious, so certain, and so severe that any would-be aggressor will not dare risk the decision. If we are strong, our voice in international affairs will be strong. Our influence for peace will be enormously greater if our words are given force and meaning by our known ability to implement them with deeds. World events have given us, with or without our desire, a position of leadership in world affairs. There is no such thing as a weak and helpless leader. If we are to lead the world toward lasting peace, we must be strong enough to discharge the responsibilities of leadership.

Let us consider now the kind of strength we need to make our desire for peace truly effective. National strength cannot be bought by dollars alone, nor by the plans of a small group at the top. Our strength must be shaped to meet the requirements of our over-all national and international policies. As such, it becomes a matter of the gravest concern to every American.

Our foreign policy has two broad general aims. One is the creation of, and direct participation in, an international body capable of adjusting affairs between nations--affairs that, if not so adjusted, may set in motion the forces that culminate in war. The second is to safeguard the proper and vital interests of the United States.

What is the form and nature of the strength that we require to implement and underwrite those objectives? Our experience in the war just won gives us abundant evidence. It is the best evidence we have today. Planning, research, development of new weapons are all vital, and may ultimately revise the nature of our defense needs. But nothing could be more dangerous than to throw overboard the facts we have in anticipation of methods or weapons that are untried, untested, and even unknown today.

It is undeniably clear that we must be able to use the seas for ourselves. That is one of the prime pillars which support our strength. We must be able to bring to our factories the materials they need to keep going. Without tungsten and antimony from China; tin from Bolivia; manganese and platinum from Russia; chrome ore from Rhodesia; jute, shellac, hemp and rubber from the Far East; without these and a hundred other essential materials, our mills and shops and factories would one by one come to a grinding stop. You missed your morning coffee from time to time during the war. Coffee comes from Brazil. We were short of sugar. Cuba and the Philippines are mighty contributors to our national sugar bowl. Ships and the sea lanes they travel are the blood and arteries of our economic system.

But the oceans are even more vital to us than as great highways of commerce. They are as yet the only means of moving our strength in numbers of men and volume of supplies from where it is to where it is needed. The millions of tons of men, weapons, supplies, machinery, food, clothing, fuel--all the elements of power--can be transported only in ships. Always remember: Ships and ship-based planes carried the men and weapons to win bases for the B-29's. Ships carried the bombs and fuel and spare parts which made possible the devastating strikes against Japan. Ships carried the unbelievable quantities of men and supplies that made England a mighty springboard from which General Eisenhower's great armies could launch their assault on Germany.

The seas which are so important to us are precisely as important to any nation bent on world conquest. We must have means to deny the seas to any enemy. Japan was even more dependent upon imports than ourselves. We concentrated on destroying her shipping, and brought her to the verge of stragulation. Japan achieved her early conquests by ship-borne forces. Those conquests became useless as she lost the shipping to support them, and the ships to bring back the raw materials which she had fought to secure.

Using the seas for ourselves; denying the seas to an enemy -- that is the purpose of sea-power. That is why sea-power must be in the forefront of our thinking. It is clear that sea-power involves the total strength of our nation. It is our ability to build so many ships and planes and other weapons. It is our ability to man them with the finest, best-trained fighting men in the world. It is our ability to bring to our factories the supplies they need to build even greater strength. Every farm, every forest, every mine and mill, everything that makes our country strong is an integral part of our sea-power. And all of it has just one meaning: to use the seas, which mean victory for us, and to deny them to the enemy, who faces certain defeat without them.

Sea-power, then, promotes peace in two exceedingly practical ways. It promotes widespread and peaceable commerce throughout the world. And it places in the hands of peace-loving nations the power to prevent war.

I know that I speak for all of you and for all my fellow-Americans when I say that ours is a peace-loving nation. We have never gone to war unless actually attacked, or when every possible peaceful measure has failed us. We have never been ready for war when we began to fight. Not one of our great factories could produce for war just a few years ago without a turmoil of change-over and frantic conversion. Right now we have before us another demonstration of our lasting hatred of war. We are doing what all our enemies could not do: we are cutting away the very bone and muscle of our armed forces. In our haste to transform our fighting men into civilians, we are tearing to pieces a tower of strength that was built by near-super-human effort. I am in full sympathy with the desire of our sailors to return to those civilian pursuits which seemed so pleasant in the weary months at sea. The point I stress, however, is that no war-minded nation would ever follow this course. It is a real assurance to the world that a sound peacetime program to keep our strength at an adequate level, holds in it no vestige of threat to any other nation.

If the world cannot look to the United States for power and influence devoted to peace, where can it look? Our record speaks for itself. That, in my judgment, is one of the two chief reasons why we find ourselves regarded as a leader by the world. The other is that we have the strength to lead. When these two factors are combined -- the incredible strength that we have demonstrated, plus our moral concept that exalts peace and abhors war -- is it not evident we have a mission and a duty? It is our duty to be strong enough not to have to fight. If we do not have to fight, I state, as my conviction, that there will be no major war.

For, let us remember: two World Wars have shown beyond dispute that the United States is the real barrier to anyone dreaming of conquest. The Kaiser learned it no less thoroughly than Mussolini and Hitler and Tojo. If ever there is a next time, the United States will be first on the list. If we can be crushed, the current of conquest may well engulf the world. But, if we have at hand the strength we need, the attempt will almost certainly not be made.

Viewed in this light, the future which now seems so dark and troubled to many, becomes much more inviting. If we show by our actions that we will actively participate with others in promoting peace; if we show by our actions that our strength is equal to the task, then we will give the world a large measure of the stability and security so sadly lacking today. With this firm bulwark against the outbreak of war, we can be certain that the energies and thoughts of all peoples will turn more and more to peaceful pursuits and the settling of difficulties by peaceful means.

All of us hope -- indeed we humbly pray -- that in the years to come all reliance on war will be erased from the hearts and minds of mankind. No objective could be nobler in concept. I believe that the strength of America can and should be dedicated to this purpose. That is why I am so concerned that we retain the strength which has done so much to save the world from slavery and sorrow. And because the seas are so vital to our safety and the safety of all the world, it is my earnest conviction that we must maintain the sea-power which alone can keep the seas for peace while denying them to aggressors.

Although your Navy stands ready to do its full part, no matter what its assignment may be, it is clear that the goals I have mentioned can be reached only by the united efforts of our country; yes, and the efforts of peace-loving people everywhere. Your Navy will work as closely as we can with all our armed forces, with other agencies of the government, with industry and labor and agriculture -- and always as fully as possible with representative groups of our citizens. Your organization is motivated by high ideals expressed through effective programs. It is a privilege to express to you these thoughts on our possible objectives and the methods to attain them. I am sure that you will be in the vanguard of those who plan and work and build for a firm and lasting peace.
