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What America is Fighting For Address to the Nation

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The conflict now raging throughout the earth is not a war of nation against nation. It is not a local or regional war, or even a series of such wars. On the side of our enemies, led and driven by the most ambitious, depraved, and cruel leaders in history, it is an attempt to conquer and enslave this country -- and every country.

On our side, the side of the United Nations, it is, for each of us, a life-and-death struggle for the preservation of our freedom, our homes, our very existence. We're united in our determination to destroy the worldwide forces of ruthless conquest and brutal enslavement. Their defeat will restore freedom, or the opportunity for freedom, alike to all countries and all peoples.

From Berlin and Tokyo, the assault on human freedom has spread in ever-widening circles. In some cases the victim nations were lulled into inaction by promises or by protestations of peaceful intention. In other cases, they were so intimidated that no preparation for resistance was made. In all cases, the invaders, before armed attack, set into motion every conceivable device of deceit, subversion, treachery, and corruption within the borders of the intended victim.



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As country after country, in Europe and in Asia, was attacked in this way, it became clear that no nation anywhere was immune, that for none was safety to be found in mere desire for peace, in avoidance of provocation, in neutrality, or in distance from the centers of assault. Nation after nation learned too late that safety against such an attack lay only in more effective force; in superior will; in concerted action of all free nations directed toward resisting and defeating the common enemies; in applying the law of self-defense and self-preservation rather than in relying upon professions of neutrality, which, in the face of a world-wide movement to subjugate all nations and all peoples, are as absurd and as suicidal as are such professions on the part of a citizen of a peaceful community attacked by a band of confessed outlaws.

Today, 28 United Nations are fighting against the would-be conquerors and enslavers of the human race. We know what is at stake. By the barbarian invaders of today nothing is spared: neither life, nor morals, nor honor, nor virtue, nor pledges, nor the customs, the national institution(s), even the religion of any people. Their aim is to sweep away every vestige of individual and national rights; to substitute, the world over, their unmistakable tyranny for the ways of life developed, each by it -- for itself by the various nations; to make all mankind subservient to their will; to convert the two billions of the earth's inhabitants into abject victims and tools of their insatiable lust for power and dominion.

We have seen their work in the countries they have invaded: murder of defenseless men, women, and children; rape, torture, and pillage; mass terrorization; the black system of hostages; starvation and deprivations that beggar description; the most thoroughgoing bondage the world has ever seen. This is the so-called "New Order" of Hitler and the Japanese warlords, an order as old as slavery -- new only in the calculated thoroughness of its cruelty; in the depths of the degradation to which it subjects -- to which it subjects its victims; in the degree to which it has revived the worst practices of the darkest ages in history.

From time immemorial, attempts at conquest and enslavement have checked and harried the great onward march of men and women towards greater freedom and higher levels of civilized existence. The methods employed have been the same as those which we witness today. Ruthless, ambitious men would succeed in corrupting, coercing, or deceiving into blind obedience enough servile followers to attack or terrify peaceful and law-abiding peoples, too often unprepared to resist. In a few instances, whole civilizations collapsed under the impact, and darkness descended on large portions of the world. More often, the attacks were at great cost defeated, and mankind resumed its onward march.

Yet, throughout the ages two lessons have remained unlearned.

The first is that man's innate striving for freedom cannot be extinguished. Since the world began too many men have fought, suffered, and died for freedom -- and not in vain -- for doubt to remain on that score. And yet, over and over again would-be conquerors and enslavers of mankind have sought to translate their mad dreams of barbarous domination into reality.



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The second lesson is that liberty is truly won only when it is guarded by the same watchfulness, the same courage, the same willingness to fight for it which first secured it. Repeatedly throughout history, free men, having won the fight, having acquired precious rights and privileges which freedom brings, have dropped their guard, relaxed their vigilance, taken their freedom for granted. They have busied themselves with many things and have not noticed the beginnings of new tyrannies, the rise of new threats to liberty. They have become so abhorrent of force and cruelty that they have believed the bully and the gangster could be reformed by reason and justice, or be defeated by passive resistance. And so, they have been surprised and unprepared when the attacks have come again.

It is perhaps too much to expect that tyrants will ever learn that man's longing for liberty cannot be destroyed. Dreams of conquest have their roots in diseased mentality; and that malady may well be ineradicable. But it is not too much to expect that free men may learn, and never forget, that lack of vigilance is the greatest danger to liberty; that enjoyment of liberty is the fruit of willingness to fight, suffer, and die for it; that the right to freedom cannot be divorced from the duty of defending it.

This latest assault on human freedom is, in a profound sense, a searching test for nations and for individuals. There is no surer way for men and for nations to show themselves unworthy of liberty than, by supine submission and refusal to fight, to render more difficult the task of those who are fighting for the preservation of human freedom -- unless it be to align themselves, freely and voluntarily, with the destroyers of liberty. There is no surer way for men and for nations to show themselves worthy of liberty than to fight for its preservation, in any way that is open to them, against those who would destroy it for all.

In the plans of the new tyrants of the East and of the West, there is no freedom or hope for anyone. If there be some people who believe that they can expect from Hitler or the Japanese warlords greater measure of freedom or of opportunity for freedom than they now possess, they need only look at the firing squads in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, France, Yugoslavia, at the concentration camps in Germany and Austria. They need only see the degradation of the forced laborers torn from every occupied country. They can learn the fraudulent quality of that brand of "freedom" from the Chinese in Nanking, from the Filipinos in Manila, from the inhabitants of the East Indies.

There is no chance for liberty for any people anywhere save through the victory of the free peoples. Never did the plainer duty to fight against its foes devolve upon all peoples who prize liberty and all who aspire to it. Never was there such an opportunity for every people, as have the people of the Philippines, to demonstrate its fitness both for the rights and the responsibilities of freedom; and, through proof given of its fitness, to create an overwhelming sentiment in every country of the world in support of its striving for liberty.



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We Americans are fighting today because we have been attacked. We are fighting, as I have said, to preserve our very existence. We and the other free peoples are forced into a desperate fight because we did not learn the lessons of which I have spoken. We are forced to fight because we ignored the simple but fundamental fact that the price of peace and of the preservation of right and freedom among nations is the acceptance of international responsibility.

After the last war, too many nations, including our own, tolerated, or participated in, attempts to advance their own interests at the expense of any system of collective security and of opportunity for all. Too many of us were blind to the evils which, thus loosed, created growing cancers within and among nations; political suspicions and hatreds; the race of armaments, first stealthy and then the subject of flagrant boasts; economic nationalism and its train of depression and misery; and finally, the emergence from their dark places of the looters and thugs who found their opportunity in disorder and disaster. The shadow of a new war fell across the world. War began in 1931 when Japan invaded China.

From the time when the first signs of menace to the peace of the world appeared on the horizon, the Government of the United States strove increasingly to promote peace on the solid foundation of law, justice, non-intervention, non-aggression, and international collaborations. With growing insistence we advocated the principles of a broad and constructive world order in political, economic, social, moral, and intellectual relations among nations -- principles which must constitute the foundation of any satisfactory future world order. We practiced these principles in our good-neighbor policy, which was applicable to every part of the earth and which we sought to apply not alone in the Western Hemisphere, but in the Pacific area, in Europe, and everywhere else as well.

When hostilities broke out and wars were declared, our Government made every honorable and feasible effort to prevent spread of the conflicts and to safeguard this country against being drawn into war. But danger increased all around us. Peaceful, unoffending countries, one after another, were brought under the heel of the invader, both in Europe and in Asia. Hitler and the Japanese warlords, by their acts and their official declarations, have made it plain that the purpose of the Japanese is to conquer and dominate virtually one half of the world with one half of its population; while Hitler's purpose is, first to conquer continental Europe, and then to seize the British Isles, and through control of the British fleet to dominate the seven seas.

Events have demonstrated beyond question that each of the Axis powers was bent on unlimited conquest. As time went on, it became manifest that the United States and the whole Western Hemisphere were ultimate targets. Conclusive proof was given by the international desperadoes themselves through the publication on September 27th, 1940 of the Tripartite Pact. By that treaty of alliance, Germany, Japan, and Italy in effect agreed that, if any country not then at war with one of them placed obstacles in the way of the program of conquest of any of them, the three would unite in political, military, and economic action against that country.



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This provision was aimed directly at the United States. One of the highest official spokesmen of the Axis powers openly proclaimed that the objective of the three partners was a new world order to be achieved by force.

Finally, a realization that these plans and purposes created a state of imminent and acute danger to all remaining peaceful countries, especially to those of the Western Hemisphere, forced us to face the all-important question as to when and where the peaceful nations, including ours, should begin to resist the movements of military aggression in order to make such resistance most effective. It was in these circumstances that our Government felt the compelling importance of adopting the policy of aid to Great Britain and to other nations which resisted aggression, as set forth in the Lease-Lend Act, submitted to Congress in January 1941. It is scarcely necessary to say that all subsequent utterances and acts of the leaders of Germany, Japan, and Italy have fully confirmed the wisdom and timeliness of the policy of this Government in thus proceeding to defend the country before it should be too late. In December 1941, acting in concert, moving in harmony with their world-wide objective, all three launched their assault against us, the spearhead of which was at Pearl Harbor, reasoning that to achieve victory they must conquer us, and to conquer us they must strike before we were prepared to resist successfully.

When they made this concerted attack against us, the warlords of Japan and Germany must have believed that at the root of our sincere and strong desire for peace lay a lack of will and of capacity to rise in unity of purpose and to pour all our strength and energy into the battle. They have since begun to learn better at Wake and at Midway; at Bataan and at Corregidor; in the Straits of Makassar and in the Coral Sea; from the sky over Tokyo itself; again at Midway; on and over every ocean of the world traversed by our air fleets and our naval and merchant vessels; on every battlefield of the world increasingly supplied with our war materials. They will have final and conclusive answer from our expanding armies, navies, and air forces, operating side by side with our valiant allies and backed by our nationwide industrial power and the courage, the determination, and the ingenuity of our people. That answer is being forged in the fighting spirit which now pervades the people of this country, in the will to victory of...all the United Nations. In this vast struggle, we, Americans, stand united with those who, like ourselves, are fighting for the preservation of their freedom; with those who are fighting to regain the freedom of which they have been brutally deprived; with those who are fighting for the opportunity to achieve freedom.

We have always believed -- and we believe today -- that all peoples, without distinction of race, color, or religion, who are prepared and willing to accept the responsibilities of liberty, are entitled to its enjoyment. We have always sought -- and we seek today -- to encourage and aid all who aspire to freedom to establish their right to it by preparing themselves to assume its obligations. We have striven to meet squarely our own responsibility in this respect in Cuba, in the Philippines, and wherever else it has devolved upon us. It has been our purpose in the past -- and will remain our purpose in the future -- to use the full measure of our influence to support attainment of freedom by all peoples who, by their acts, show themselves worthy of it and ready for it.



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We, who have received from the preceding generations the priceless fruits of the centuries-old struggle for liberty, freely accept today the sacrifices which may be needed to pass on to our children an even greater heritage. Our enemies confront us with armed might in every part of the globe. We cannot win this war by standing at our borders and limiting ourselves to beating off attacks. Air, submarine, and other forms of assault can be effectively defeated only if those attacked seek out and destroy the sources of attack. We shall send all the aid that we can to our gallant allies. And we shall seek out our enemies and attack them at any and every point of the globe at which the destruction of the Axis forces can be accomplished most effectively, most speedily, and most certainly.

We know the magnitude of the task before us. We know that its accomplishment will exact unlimited effort and unfaltering courage. However long the road, we shall press on to the final victory. Temporary reverses must not and will not be the occasion for weakness and discouragement. On the contrary, they are the signal for all true soldiers and patriots to strike back all the harder, with that superb resolution which never yields to force or threat of force.

Fighting as we are in self-defense, in self-preservation, we must make certain the defeat and destruction of the world-invading forces of Hitler and the Japanese warlords. To do this our people and the peoples of every one of the 28 United Nations must make up their minds to sacrifice time and substance and life itself to an extent unprecedented in past history. International desperadoes like individual bandits will not abandon outlawry voluntarily. They will only be stopped by force.

With victory achieved, our first concern must be for those whose sufferings have been almost beyond endurance. When the armies of our enemies are beaten, the people of many countries will be starving and without means of procuring food; homeless and without means of building shelter; their fields scorched; their cattle slaughtered; their tools gone; their factories and mines destroyed; their roads and transport wrecked. Unknown millions will be far from their homes -- prisoners of war, inmates of concentration camps, forced laborers in alien lands, refugees from battle, from cruelty, from starvation. Disease and danger of disease will lurk everywhere. In some countries, confusion and chaos will follow the cessation of hostilities. Victory must be followed by swift and effective action to meet these pressing needs.

At the same time, all countries -- those which will need relief and those more fortunate -- will be faced with the immediate problems of transition from war to peace. War production must be transformed into production for the peacetimes of mankind -- peace needs of mankind. In some countries the physical ravages of war must be repaired. In others, agriculture must be reestablished. In all countries, returning soldiers must find places in the work of peace. There will be enormous deficiencies of many kinds of goods. All countries, including ours, will need an immense volume of production. There will, therefore, exist vast opportunities for useful employment. The termination of the war effort will release, for use in peaceful pursuits the aspirations and energies of youth, technical experience, and, in many industries, ample plants and abundance of tools.



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The compelling demands of war are revealing how great a supply of goods can be produced for national defense. The needs of peace should be no less compelling, though some of the means of meeting them must be different. Toward meeting these ends, each and every nation should intensively direct its efforts to the creation of an abundance for peacetime life. This can only be achieved by a combination of the efforts of individuals, the efforts of groups, and the efforts of nations. Governments can and must help to focus the energies by encouraging, coordinating, and aiding the efforts of individuals and groups. During this period of transition, the United States must continue to act in the spirit of cooperation which now underlies their war effort -- to supplement and make more effective the action of countries individually in reestablishing public order, in providing swift relief, in meeting the manifold problems of readjustment.

Beyond these there will lie before all countries the great constructive task of building human freedom and Christian morality on firmer and broader foundations than ever before. This task, too, will of necessity call for both national and international action.

Within each nation, liberty under law is an essential requirement of progress. The spirit of liberty, when deeply imbedded in the minds and hearts of the people, is the most powerful remedy for racial animosities, religious intolerance, ignorance, and all the other evils which prevent men from uniting in a brotherhood of truly civilized existence. It inspires men to acquisition of knowledge and understanding. It is the only real foundation of political and social stability.

Liberty is more than a matter of political rights, indispensable as those rights are. In our own country we have learned from bitter experience that to be truly free, men must have, as well, economic freedom and economic security -- the assurance for all alike of an opportunity to work as free men in the company of free men; to obtain through work the material and spiritual means of life; to advance through the exercise of ability, initiative, and enterprise; to make provision against the hazards of human existence. We know that this is true of mankind everywhere. We know that in all countries there has been -- and there will be increasing[ly] in the future -- demand for a forward movement of social justice. Each of us must be resolved that, once the war is won, this demand shall be met as speedily and as fully as possible.

All these advances -- in political freedom, in economic betterment, in social justice, in spiritual values -- can be achieved by each nation primarily through its own work and effort, mainly through its own wise policies and actions. They can be made only where there is acceptance and cultivation of the concepts and the spirit of human rights and human freedom. It is impossible for any nation or group of nations to prescribe the methods or provide the means by which any other nation can accomplish or maintain its own political and economic independence, be strong, prosper, and attain high spiritual goals.



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It is possible, however, for all nations to give and to receive help. That which nations can and must do toward helping one another is to take, by cooperative action, steps for the elimination of impediments and obstructions which prevent the full use by each -- for the welfare of its people -- of the energy and resources which are at its command. And the nations can and must, again by cooperative action under common agreement, create such facilities as will enable each to increase the effectiveness of its own national effort.

Such cooperative action is already under way. Twenty-eight United Nations have proclaimed their adherence to a program of principles and purposes by which mankind may advance toward higher standards of national and international conduct. That program is embodied in the Declaration made on August 14th, 1941 by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, now known as the Atlantic Charter.

The pledge of the Atlantic Charter is of a system which will give every nation, large or small, a greater assurance of stable peace, greater opportunity for the realization of its aspirations to freedom, and greater facilities for material advancement. But that pledge implies an obligation for each nation to demonstrate its capacity for stable and progressive government, to fulfill scrupulously its established duties to other nations, to settle its international differences and disputes by none but peaceful methods, and to make its full contribution to the maintenance of enduring peace.

For decades all nations have lived in the shadow of threatened coercion or war. This has imposed heavy burdens of armament, which in the cases of many nations has absorbed so large a part of their production effort as to leave the remainder of their resources inadequate for maintaining, let alone improving, the economic, social, and cultural standards of their people. Closely related to this has been a burden less obvious but of immense weight: the inevitable limitation that fear of war imposes on productive activity. Many men, groups of men, and even nations have dared not plan, create, or increase the means of production, fearing lest war come and their efforts thus be rendered vain.

No nation can make satisfactory progress while its citizens are in the grip of constant fear of external attack or interference. It is plain that some international agency must be created which can by force, if necessary, keep the peace among nations in the future. There must be international cooperative action to set up the mechanisms which can thus insure peace. This must include eventual adjustment of national armaments in such a manner that the rule of law cannot be successfully challenged and that the burden of armaments may be reduced to a minimum. In the creation of such mechanisms there would be a practical and purposeful application of sovereign powers through measures of international cooperation for purposes of safeguarding the peace. Participation by all nations in such measures would be for each its contribution toward its own future security and safety from outside attack.



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Settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and indeed all processes of international cooperation, presuppose respect for law and obligations. It is plain that one of the institutions which must be established and be given vitality is an international court of justice. It is equally clear that, in the process of reestablishing international order, the United Nations must exercise surveillance over aggressor nations until such time as the latter demonstrate their willingness and ability to live at peace with other nations. How long such surveillance will need to continue must depend upon the rapidity with which the peoples of Germany, Japan, Italy, and their satellites give convincing proof that they have repudiated and abandoned the monstrous philosophy of superior race and conquest by force, and have embraced loyally the basic principles of peaceful processes. During the formative period of the world organization, interruption by these aggressors must, of course, be rendered impossible.

One of the greatest of all obstacles which in the past have impeded human progress and afforded breeding grounds for dictators has been extreme nationalism. All will agree that nationalism and its spirit are essential to the healthy and normal political and economic life of a people; but when policies of nationalism -- political, economic, social, and moral -- are carried to such extremes as to exclude and prevent necessary policies of international cooperation, they become dangerous and deadly. Nationalism, run riot between the last war and this war, defeated all attempts to carry out indispensable measures of international economic and political action, encouraged and facilitated the rise of dictators, and drove the world straight toward the present war.

During this period, narrow and short-sighted nationalism found its most virulent expression in the economic field. It prevented goods and services from flowing in volume at all adequate from nation to nation, and thus severely hampered the work of production, distribution, and consumption, and greatly retarded efforts for social betterment.

No nation can make satisfactory progress when it is deprived, by its own action or by the action of others, of the immeasurable benefits of international exchange of goods and services. The Atlantic Charter declares the right of all nations to "access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity."¹ This is essential if the legitimate and growing demand for the greatest practicable measure of stable employment is to be met, accompanied by rising standards of living. If the actual and potential losses resulting from limitations on economic activity are to be eliminated, a system must be provided by which this can be assured.

In order to accomplish this, and to establish among the nations a circle of mutual benefit, excessive trade barriers of the many different kinds must be reduced, and practices which impose injuries on others and divert trade from its natural economic course must be avoided. Equally plain is the need for making national currencies once more freely exchangeable for each other at stable rates of exchange; for a system of financial relations so devised that materials can be produced and ways may be found of moving them where there are markets created by human need; for machinery through which capital may, for the development of the world's resources and for the stabilization of economic activity, move on equitable terms from



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financially stronger to financially weaker countries. There may be need for some special trade arrangement and for international agreements to handle difficult surplus problems and to meet situations in special areas.

These are only some of the things that nations can attempt to do as continuous discussion and experience instruct their judgment. There are bound to be many others. But the new policies should always be guided by cautious and sound judgment, lest we make new mistakes in place of old ones and create new conflicts.

Building for the future in the economic sphere thus means that each nation must give substance and reality to programs of social and economic progress by augmenting production and using the greater output for the increase of general welfare; but not permitting it to be diverted or checked by special interests, private or public. It also means that each nation must play its full part in a system of world relations designed to facilitate the production and movement of goods in response to human needs.

With -- With peace among nations reasonably assured, with political stability established, with economic shackles removed, a vast fund of resources will be released in each nation to meet the needs of progress, to make possible for all of its citizens an advancement toward higher living standards, to invigorate the constructive forces of initiative and enterprise. The nations of the world will then be able to move forward in the manner of their own choosing in all avenues of human betterment more completely than they ever have been able to do in the past. They will do so through their own efforts and with complete self-respect. Continuous self-development of nations and individuals in a framework of effective cooperation with others is the sound and logical road to the higher standards of life which we all crave and seek.

No nation will find this easy. Neither victory nor any form of postwar settlement will of itself create a millennium. Rather, we shall be offered an opportunity to eliminate vast obstacles and wastes, to make available additional means of advancing national and international standards, to create new facilities whereby the natural resources of the earth and the products of human hands and brains can be more effectively utilized for the promotion of human welfare. To make full use of this opportunity, we must be resolved not alone to proclaim the blessings and benefits which we all alike desire for humanity but to find the mechanisms by which they may be most fully and most speedily attained and be most effectively safeguarded.

The manifold tasks that lie ahead will not be accomplished overnight. There will be need for plans, developed with careful consideration and carried forward boldly and vigorously. The vision, the resolution, and the skill with which the conditions of peace will be established and developed after the war will be as much a measure of man's capacity for freedom and progress as the fervor and determination which men show in winning the -- the victory.



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Without impediment to the fullest prosecution of the war -- indeed, for its most effective prosecution -- the United Nations should from time to time, as they did in adopting the Atlantic Charter, formulate and proclaim their common views regarding fundamental policies which will chart for mankind a wise course based on enduring spiritual values. In support of such policies an informed public opinion must be developed. This is a task of intensive study, hard thinking, broad vision, and leadership -- not for governments alone, but especially for parents, and teachers, and clergymen, and all those, within each nation, who provide spiritual, moral, and intellectual guidance. Never did so great and so compelling a duty in this respect devolve upon those who are in positions of responsibility, public and private.

For the immediate present, the all-important issue is that of winning the war -- winning it as soon as possible and winning it decisively. Into that we must put our utmost effort -- now and every day until victory is won.

A bitter armed attack on human freedom has aroused mankind to new heights of courage, determination, and moral strength. It has evoked a spirit of work, sacrifice, and cooperative effort.

With that strength and with that spirit we shall win.

¹ Roosevelt, F.D. & Churchill, W.S. (14 August 1941). Atlantic Charter