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ADDRESS BY THE HONORABLE GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, AT THE COMMENCEMENT
EXERCISES OF ALBRIGHT COLLEGE, READING, PENNSYLVANIA,
ON JUNE 5, 1939, AT 10:30 A.M., DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FORMULATION OF OUR
FOREIGN POLICY AND ON THE CONDUCT OF OUR
FOREIGN RELATIONS

It is natural for us to be intolerant of, impatient with, and often critical towards what we do not fully understand. Each generation has something of this attitude towards the older generation--in fact toward all generations preceding it.

There is often heard today from the youth of America--and not only from those who are young in years--the charge that the older generation have done pretty badly in the conducting of political and economic affairs. There is frequently voiced in regard to the field of foreign relations an opinion that comparatively older men are bringing about a situation by which our country may become involved in war, and that in war, if it came, the younger generation would be sacrificed in consequence of the ineptitude of these older men.

It seems to me that there is no greater service that I could render to you young people who are today leaving this institution of quest for truth and of training in fundamentals than to point out some of the facts on the

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basis of which you can readily formulate or revise, on a sound basis, opinions of your own on that subject. Having for a quarter of a century served our country abroad at various posts on three continents, and having during the past two years had the privilege of serving in a responsible capacity in the Department of State, I believe that I am warranted in asking you to believe that I speak with a knowledge of the facts when I affirm that the foreign policy of our Government is based squarely on the principles of maintaining the peace and security of our country and using our country's influence towards the maintenance of peace and prevalence of security as world conditions.

There is one indisputable fact which we must recognize, young and old--those who are beginning and those who are approaching the end of their careers--that there are abroad in the world forces, fundamental and elemental if you wish, which are making for destruction of all that is finest in the civilization evolved through so many centuries of painful and costly experience and effort. There are nations which, for purposes of policy, have reverted to force accompanied by intimidation, coercion, perversion of truth and, in general, practices which we had believed far behind us as discredited methods of the darker ages of the history of mankind. Propaganda machines using every means of modern communication, and reaching out into every part of the world, have been set up, and fact and truth are being cleverly and subtly distorted to persuade, to convince or to compel. Under various pretexts, the sovereignty of peoples is destroyed, their political liberties suppressed, their material property sequestered, and physical indignities and mental tortures and persecution inflicted. The mailed fist is to displace well founded right at the conference table and in relationships between states. Even within their own boundaries men who have arrogated to themselves dictatorial powers aim at the enslavement of the will and the conscience as well as of the lives of their own people, proclaiming that might is greater than right, that food is less important than firearms. Such are the realities in this grim world of today, and it is in the presence of such situations that the foreign policy of our Government has to be shaped and our relations with other states conducted.

There is a noticeable tendency on the part of some people to say that our Government does not have a well defined foreign policy. The simple fact is: we have a well defined basic policy, the fundamental principle of which is the maintenance of friendly and peaceful relations with all other countries, near and far. We believe that friendly and peaceful relations can only be maintained if there is a general recognition by all states of the full sovereignty and rights of others. We believe in abstention from interference in the internal affairs of other states, in respect for international law and the pledged word, in revision of treaties and of international practices by peaceful negotiation without the use of force or the threat of force. We believe in the maintenance and the full recognition of private as well as public rights. We believe in keeping open the avenues of trade on the basis of equality and abstention from discrimination.

We believe in the fostering of the closest cultural and commercial ties with all of our neighbors, and especially with our neighbors in this hemisphere. We have not deviated and will not deviate from these principles. To their maintenance we are dedicated, and our constant endeavor in recent years has been to keep them alive in a world in which some strong states are endeavoring to suppress them. If a state chooses to deviate from these principles, we realize that its action is a threat to the peace of all peoples, not only to that of others but also to our own. I have every confidence that if you will examine the acts of this Government in its relations with other states you will find that we are proceeding well within the framework of these principles.

There has been no change in our policy--which remains that of safeguarding this country's peace and security, not only for today but for tomorrow as well. No foreign policy is sound which does not envisage both the problems of today and the problems of tomorrow. In order to maintain these principles, it has been found essential, as cardinal elements of our policy, to retain at all times this country's liberty of action, to maintain our defensive strength always at such a standard as to be able to repel attack from whatever source it might arise, and to be prepared to play our full part in cooperating with the other American republics in keeping the Western Hemisphere free from any form of aggression. Any Government which would neglect to do these things with the knowledge that we now have of developments elsewhere would be failing utterly in a primary duty to its people.

There has been a tendency for some of our people to view the formulation of foreign policy and the actual conduct of our relations with other states as some mysterious if not secret procedure. As a matter of fact, in a democracy such as ours, there is nothing secret or mysterious about them,--nor has there been since the founding of our Government. There was a time--earlier--when states were ruled by absolute monarchs, and when a single individual, with a few in his confidence, could determine questions of peace or war for his own and other peoples. That was a period when the will of the people had little or no effect on the shaping of their individual or national lives. In our time, with the increasing participation of the public in Government and when the political and economic life of nations has become so interdependent that each country is sensitive and responsive to what happens in others, the nations had evolved a system of international law and practice based on an international morality that has had almost general acceptance.

In recent years, under the pretext of correcting so-called wrongs, individuals in several great countries have set themselves up as the arbiters of the fates of their peoples. These individuals arrogate to themselves the right not only to regulate the lives of their peoples to the smallest degree, but to force other peoples to accept their sovereignty and their political, social and economic ideology. It is this reversion in the last few years by a few countries to practices in internal and

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external policy which we had believed discarded which has led to the breakdown of international morality that is bringing states into a status in their relationships in which the threat of war is constantly on the horizon and more than one part of the world is becoming an armed camp. In these circumstances all states wishing to conserve their sovereignty, their political and civil liberties and their way of life are obliged to prepare for their defense. The unbounded ambitions of individuals have made armed camps out of their own countries and are obliging other countries to do the same in simple self defense. As a consequence, in this period of history, when we so much wish to believe that reason and morality control to a greater degree than before, brute force has again shown itself nakedly and has become operative--with the disastrous consequences which we have recently witnessed. Fear, distrust, force and all the miserable consequences growing out of them are factors with which we have to deal in international relationships today.

I need not tell you that under these circumstances a democracy such as ours, whose foreign policy is designed to be expressive of the will of the people, is faced with grave problems. As I have indicated, we have not found it necessary or advisable to change our foreign policy in any major or fundamental aspect. Its guiding principle remains the sincere effort to be at peace with all our neighbors but at the same time to safeguard adequately our sovereignty and security and the way of life of our people.

I do not believe that we need have any fear that in our country foreign policy will not be responsive to the will of our people. Under the Constitution and under our statutes, the President is responsible for the conducting of our foreign relations. In this task the President's principal instrument is the Department of State under the direction of the Secretary of State. Although the oldest and premier Department of our Government, the Department of State remains the smallest and the least expensive to operate of the Government departments. It is a Department which during the 150 years of its existence has concentrated upon and intensively endeavored to perform the principal function imposed upon it by law, that of assisting in the conduct of this country's foreign relations.

I would like to take this opportunity to dispel some of the concept of mystery which in the minds of so many of our people persistently clings to the Department of State, by describing to you in detail the organization and the machinery at home and abroad for the conduct of our relations with other states and peoples. This, however, would take longer than your patience will permit. I shall, however, try to give you a few of the outstanding points.

First, I assure you, out of my long experience, that there is no more secrecy about the conduct of the relations between the United States and other countries than there is in the relationships between individuals or groups in any one of the thousands of small towns in this country.

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The Secretary of State is the President's chief of staff for the conduct of our foreign relations. With the Under Secretary, the Counselor, and the Assistant Secretaries as his immediate aides, he heads the Department in Washington and the Foreign Service abroad. The Department, in Washington, is the headquarters office. It is organized into divisions carefully correlated and integrated with each other. The Foreign Service, which is the eyes and ears, the hands and feet of the Department, is composed of our ambassadors, ministers and diplomatic and consular officers, stationed in 57 capitals and in 253 strategic centers throughout all parts of the world.

In a world filled with such insecurity as is now patent to all, I would like to say that there is one thing which should give us in this country great and deep satisfaction. It is trite to say that there never was a time in our history when our foreign relations were of such fundamental importance to every one of us, but this statement of fact now has a very real meaning. Under these circumstances, we can count ourselves fortunate that there is today no chief of state who has a broader and more exact knowledge of what is happening in every part of the world, or a greater vision of what it means for us and our people and others, than has President Roosevelt. It should give us equal satisfaction that the Secretary of State, Mr. Hull, has similar knowledge and vision. It should, I believe, give you confidence that your Department of State is manned in its responsible positions by experts who are serving our Government with skill and devotion. The organization of this Department has recently again been overhauled and improved at home and abroad in order to increase its effectiveness in the handling of the problems which it has to meet.

The Foreign Service of our Government is not excelled by that of any other country. Placed on a career basis in 1906, the diplomatic and consular services were amalgamated into one service in 1924. We are now in the process, under the Reorganization Act of 1939, of consolidating the Foreign Services of the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture with that of State, giving us for the first time a single Foreign Service for the handling of our official contacts with other states. This last step will greatly improve the service which we can render to every department and agency of our Government and to every section of our people. It should, I repeat, be a source of great satisfaction to every one of us that in these times the Department which is in a very real sense the first line of defense of our people is in the hands of competent leaders and expert collaborators.

I do not wish today to enter into controversial matters or to go into detail with respect to any particular aspect of our foreign policy. I believe, however, there are a few thoughts that I should give you.

There is a persistent tendency on the part of some very well-meaning groups of our citizens to believe that merely by so willing it we shall be able to live on a

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continental island in the middle of this disturbed world absolutely untouched by what happens elsewhere. To many, this is a very attractive idea. It has led to much wishful--if I may say so--dangerous thinking. We are living in a world in which illusions are dangerous, and we need to realize that in our political and economic thinking we need to face and deal with realities.

The United States is today perhaps the strongest country in the world by virtue of its great resources, by virtue of the character of its people, and by virtue of its geographical position. The seas are still our great bulwark and, although modern invention has lessened distance, the oceans still contribute greatly to our physical security. However, it would indeed take an unrealistic person to believe that the oceans will long remain the defensive factor that they have been. Since the first flight of Lindbergh across the Atlantic, such flights have become a matter-of-fact performance, and we are now witnessing the establishment of trans-oceanic commercial services. We know that under-sea boats are able to reach our ports from abroad and we know what ravages they are capable of inflicting. The interests of states are so inextricably bound up with each other and so interdependent upon each other that such factors cannot be disregarded. A policy of isolation for the United States would be in no sense realistic, and any policy based on the thought that such isolation could be maintained would lead us into troubled waters. It is well for us to realize that, whether or not we wish it to be so or like to have it so, the United States can speak today among the nations with a weight of authority which is perhaps not equalled by that of any other country. The responsibility which rests upon this country is great, for whether we wish it or not, and no matter how much we may endeavor to avoid it, what we say and do in these troubled times will influence to a considerable degree the policies of other nations. I would in this connection very strongly urge that you read carefully the address which the Secretary of State delivered in Chicago on May 28, 1939, as I believe that no more profound and able exposition has yet been made of the considerations which render it impossible for this country to pursue an isolationist policy.

Our founding fathers did not know how vastly they were building. They had no realization when they sought refuge from disturbed conditions in Europe that they were laying the foundations on this continent of a civilization and a power which would within a few years become a controlling influence in the family of nations. We can estimate better today what the effects of our acts and policies will be, for we are in a position to know within a few hours what occurs abroad and what are the repercussions in the most distant parts of the world to what happens in this country.

While we have not wished to assume that role, it has become a part of this country's task to be one of the principal champions of the principles of democratic government. The world is faced by a situation in which certain totalitarian states are determined to force their ideologies

on other parts of the world. They have definitely proclaimed their faith in force as an instrument of acquisition and achievement rather than of defense and security. We have seen one country after another fall under their domination through their use or threat of use of aggressive force. We know that this domination means no longer purely political domination, such as conquests so largely meant in the past, but that it means an inexorable forcing upon victimized peoples of ideas alien to their traditions. It means the forcible emigration of peoples; it means the destruction of human ties; it means confiscation of private and public property.

Force, I should say--in order that I be not misunderstood--is not in and of itself an evil. Rightly conceived of and appropriately employed, it may be a beneficent instrument of survival and of progress. Resorted to for purposes of self-defense and to serve the cause of justice, it contributes to human welfare. Underlying and supporting principles of law and order, it is a necessity and a legitimate instrumentality. But that which is good in one usage becomes bad in another usage. That which is acceptable and approved of in one stage of human development becomes unacceptable and disapproved of in another stage. Today the vast majority of mankind deprecate and object to use of armed force in pursuit of selfish and self-seeking national policies. The vast majority of individuals and of nations believe it right and necessary that human contacts be regulated and human conflicts be resolved by peaceful means, by processes of reason based on law, and not by processes of violence and physical compulsion. There is no need or place in the world as it is today for predatory adventuring, whether on the part of individuals or on the part of nations. The need and the desire of mankind is for peace, with security and with justice. Force should be an instrument of law, and law should govern universally. Between those who believe this way--most of the nations--and those who believe otherwise, there lies today the real, great world issue.

While the foreign policy of our Government has been marked by what we believe to be the essential emphasis on the maintenance of law and order, and the recognition of public and private right; and while we have endeavored to exercise our moral influence on every appropriate occasion to keep alive these principles which we believe must form the basis of the relationships between states, we have not confined ourselves to mere preachments. Political and economic measures undertaken by states to achieve self-sufficiency, to support an internal economy, to improve living standards, or to provide work--measures some of which previous experience has shown unsound and dangerous in this modern world in which states have to live with each other--brought world trade to record low levels and placed new and in the long run intolerable financial burdens and economic trammels on many peoples.

Recognizing that a fundamental condition to the maintenance of peace is the prevalency of decent standards of living and of an opportunity for every man to achieve for himself and his family a decent existence, our Government

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did not fail to make its concrete contribution toward the restoration of world trade. The trade agreements program conceived by Secretary Hull and actively carried forward by this Government is based on recognized sound principles, foremost among which is that of equality of treatment. Time does not permit that I give you details of the salutary effects which this program has had on our own economy and on that of other peoples. It is recognized by objective persons in all countries--and I do not exclude many in those countries which for some reason pursue a policy of autarchy and discrimination--that it is the one constructive program at work in the world today which gives promise of restoring trade to normal levels and into those sound, enduring channels necessary to the maintenance of peaceful relationships between states. It is tragic that because this program does not work miracles in a world in which miracles no longer occur, selfish interests in this country are beginning to attack it in insidious ways. The fact remains that we are making this definite, constructive contribution to the maintenance of that peace which we covet for all and to the economic stability which must be the basis of that peace.

You young people have been leading a sheltered life. It is true that the university and college student of today does not lead as secluded a life as did the student of a generation ago. This is as it should be. You have been sufficiently in touch with the affairs of your own country to realize that during the past few years our internal problems have been as important in the life of the nation as at any period of our history. We are in a period of transition with all that such periods involve. Great changes are taking place in our social structure. We are accommodating ourselves to ideas which, while not new in our philosophy of life, are coming to fruition with astonishing rapidity. This transition period is the more serious for us because changes come so fast and readjustments have to be made so rapidly. For over a century and a half we were so busy developing our new territory and developing our natural resources that we had little time to think--and not so much need to think--of some of the problems which were already distressing the older countries across the sea. We had extremes of wealth and we had some poverty, but we had a broad and substantial middle class. Everyone was so busy and it was so easy to find places that we did not concern ourselves very much with some of the problems which had been bothering older nations across the seas for years. All at once we found ourselves obliged to face in a realistic way the precarious situation of several millions of our population. At the same time with the coming upon us of these internal problems, we have had to face the new external situation in which there are such serious implications for the future. In several parts of the world we find the fundamental ideas on which we built our national life definitely threatened. We know that the threat to our own way of living is coming closer. We know that, strong as we are, we cannot hope to maintain our own way of life unchanged in a world in a large part of which other ideas prevail.

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There is no one who should doubt that we can solve our internal problems, but we should understand that these problems are definitely influenced by external factors which we must consider. In order to uphold here a way of life which is disappearing or has disappeared in some other parts of the world, we shall have to make, both in the regulating of our domestic problems and in the conducting of our foreign relations, definite efforts which will require wisdom and courage. We live in a world of which we are a part, and of which we must be a part, and from which we cannot separate ourselves. We have, therefore, tasks which call for united and intensive effort, tasks which we must make it our business to understand, tasks which we must perform--in the struggle to maintain the way of life to which our forefathers committed this country and which we all cherish.