

**Harry S. Truman**  
**Speech on the Fundamentals of U.S. Foreign Policy**  
**New York City, NY**  
**October 27, 1945**

Mayor La Guardia, ladies and gentlemen:

I am grateful for the magnificent reception which you have given me today in this great city of New York. I know that it is given me only as the representative of the gallant men and women of our naval forces, and on their behalf, as well as my own, I thank you.

New York joins the rest of the Nation in paying honor and tribute to the four million fighting Americans of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard—and to the ships which carried them to victory.

On opposite sides of the world, across two oceans, our Navy opened a highway for the armies and air forces of the United States. They landed our gallant men, millions of them, on the beachheads of final triumph. Fighting from Murmansk, the English Channel and the Tyrrhenian Sea, to Midway, Guadalcanal, Leyte Gulf and Okinawa—they won the greatest naval victories in history. Together with their brothers in arms in the Army and Air Force, and with the men of the Merchant Marine, they have helped to win for mankind all over the world a new opportunity to live in peace and dignity—and we hope, in security.

In the harbor and rivers of New York City and in other ports along the coasts and rivers of the country, ships of that mighty United States Navy are at anchor. I hope that you and the people everywhere will visit them and their crews, seeing for yourselves what your sons and daughters, your labor and your money, have fashioned into an invincible weapon of liberty.

The fleet, on V-J Day, consisted of 1200 warships, more than 50,000 supporting and landing craft, and over 40,000 navy planes. By that day, ours was a sea power never before equalled in the history of the world. There were great carrier task forces capable of tracking down and sinking the enemy's fleets, beating down his air power, and pouring destruction on his war-making industries. There were submarines which roamed the seas, invading the enemy's own ports, and destroying his shipping in all the oceans. There were amphibious forces capable of landing soldiers on beaches from Normandy to the Philippines. There were great battleships and cruisers which swept the enemy ships from the seas and bombarded his shore defense almost at will.

And history will never forget that great leader who, from his first day in office, fought to reestablish a strong American Navy—who watched that Navy and all the other might of this Nation grow into an invincible force for victory—who sought to make that force an instrument for a just and lasting peace—and who gave his life in the effort—Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The roll call of the battles of this fleet reads like a sign post around the globe—on the road to final victory: North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, and Southern France; the Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, and the Solomons; Tarawa, Saipan, Guam, the Philippine Sea, Leyte

Gulf; Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Nothing which the enemy held on any coast was safe from its attack.

Now we are in the process of demobilizing our naval force. We are laying up ships. We are breaking up aircraft squadrons. We are rolling up bases, and releasing officers and men. But when our demobilization is all finished as planned, the United States will still be the greatest naval power on earth.

In addition to that naval power, we shall still have one of the most powerful air forces in the world. And just the other day, so that on short notice we could mobilize a powerful and well-equipped land, sea, and air force, I asked the Congress to adopt universal training.

Why do we seek to preserve this powerful Naval and Air Force, and establish this strong Army reserve? Why do we need to do that?

We have assured the world time and again—and I repeat it now—that we do not seek for ourselves one inch of territory in any place in the world. Outside of the right to establish necessary bases for our own protection, we look for nothing which belongs to any other power.

We do need this kind of armed might, however, for four principal tasks:

First, our Army, Navy, and Air Force, in collaboration with our allies, must enforce the terms of peace imposed upon our defeated enemies.

Second, we must fulfill the military obligations which we are undertaking as a member of the United Nations Organization—to support a lasting peace, by force if necessary.

Third, we must cooperate with other American nations to preserve the territorial integrity and the political independence of the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

Fourth, in this troubled and uncertain world, our military forces must be adequate to discharge the fundamental mission laid upon them by the Constitution of the United States—to "provide for the common defense" of the United States.

These four military tasks are directed not toward war—not toward conquest—but toward peace.

We seek to use our military strength solely to preserve the peace of the world. For we now know that this is the only sure way to make our own freedom secure.

That is the basis of the foreign policy of the people of the United States.

The foreign policy of the United States is based firmly on fundamental principles of righteousness and justice. In carrying out those principles we shall firmly adhere to what we believe to be right; and we shall not give our approval to any compromise with evil.

But we know that we cannot attain perfection in this world overnight. We shall not let our search

for perfection obstruct our steady progress toward international cooperation. We must be prepared to fulfill our responsibilities as best we can, within the framework of our fundamental principles, even though we recognize that we have to operate in an imperfect world.

Let me restate the fundamentals of that foreign policy of the United States:

1. We seek no territorial expansion or selfish advantage. We have no plans for aggression against any other state, large or small. We have no objective which need clash with the peaceful aims of any other nation.
2. We believe in the eventual return of sovereign rights and self-government to all peoples who have been deprived of them by force.
3. We shall approve no territorial changes in any friendly part of the world unless they accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned.
4. We believe that all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice, without interference from any foreign source. That is true in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, as well as in the Western Hemisphere.
5. By the combined and cooperative action of our war allies, we shall help the defeated enemy states establish peaceful democratic governments of their own free choice. And we shall try to attain a world in which Nazism, Fascism, and military aggression cannot exist.
6. We shall refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power. In some cases it may be impossible to prevent forceful imposition of such a government. But the United States will not recognize any such government.
7. We believe that all nations should have the freedom of the seas and equal rights to the navigation of boundary rivers and waterways and of rivers and waterways which pass through more than one country.
8. We believe that all states which are accepted in the society of nations should have access on equal terms to the trade and the raw materials of the world.
9. We believe that the sovereign states of the Western Hemisphere, without interference from outside the Western Hemisphere, must work together as good neighbors in the solution of their common problems.
10. We believe that full economic collaboration between all nations, great and small, is essential to the improvement of living conditions all over the world, and to the establishment of freedom from fear and freedom from want.
11. We shall continue to strive to promote freedom of expression and freedom of religion throughout the peace-loving areas of the world.

12. We are convinced that the preservation of peace between nations requires a United Nations Organization composed of all the peace-loving nations of the world who are willing jointly to use force if necessary to insure peace.

Now, that is the foreign policy which guides the United States. That is the foreign policy with which it confidently faces the future.

It may not be put into effect tomorrow or the next day. But nonetheless, it is our policy; and we shall seek to achieve it. It may take a long time, but it is worth waiting for, and it is worth striving to attain.

The Ten Commandments themselves have not yet been universally achieved over these thousands of years. Yet we struggle constantly to achieve them, and in many ways we come closer to them each year. Though we may meet setbacks from time to time, we shall not relent in our efforts to bring the Golden Rule into the international affairs of the world.

We are now passing through a difficult phase of international relations. Unfortunately it has always been true after past wars, that the unity among allies, forged by their common peril, has tended to wear out as the danger passed.

The world cannot afford any letdown in the united determination of the allies in this war to accomplish a lasting peace. The world cannot afford to let the cooperative spirit of the allies in this war disintegrate. The world simply cannot allow this to happen. The people in the United States, in Russia, and Britain, in France and China, in collaboration with all the other peace-loving people, must take the course of current history into their own hands and mold it in a new direction—the direction of continued cooperation. It was a common danger which united us before victory. Let it be a common hope which continues to draw us together in the years to come.

The atomic bombs which fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki must be made a signal, not for the old process of falling apart but for a new era—an era of ever-closer unity and ever-closer friendship among peaceful nations.

Building a peace requires as much moral stamina as waging a war. Perhaps it requires even more, because it is so laborious and painstaking and undramatic. It requires undying patience and continuous application. But it can give us, if we stay with it, the greatest reward that there is in the whole field of human effort.

Differences of the kind that exist today among nations that fought together so long and so valiantly for victory are not hopeless or irreconcilable. There are no conflicts of interest among the victorious powers so deeply rooted that they cannot be resolved. But their solution will require a combination of forbearance and firmness. It will require a steadfast adherence to the high principles which we have enunciated. It will also require a willingness to find a common ground as to the methods of applying those principles.

Our American policy is a policy of friendly partnership with all peaceful nations, and of full

support for the United Nations Organization. It is a policy that has the strong backing of the American people. It is a policy around which we can rally without fear or misgiving.

The more widely and clearly that policy is understood abroad, the better and surer will be the peace. For our own part we must seek to understand the special problems of other nations. We must seek to understand their own legitimate urge toward security as they see it.

The immediate, the greatest threat to us is the threat of disillusionment, the danger of insidious skepticism—a loss of faith in the effectiveness of international cooperation. Such a loss of faith would be dangerous at any time. In an atomic age it would be nothing short of disastrous.

There has been talk about the atomic bomb scrapping all navies, armies, and air forces. For the present, I think that such talk is 100 percent wrong. Today, control of the seas rests in the fleets of the United States and her allies. There is no substitute for them. We have learned the bitter lesson that the weakness of this great Republic invites men of ill-will to shake the very foundations of civilization all over the world. And we had two concrete lessons in that.

What the distant future of the atomic research will bring to the fleet which we honor today, no one can foretell. But the fundamental mission of the Navy has not changed. Control of our sea approaches and of the skies above them is still the key to our freedom and to our ability to help enforce the peace of the world. No enemy will ever strike us directly except across the sea. We cannot reach out to help stop and defeat an aggressor without crossing the sea. Therefore, the Navy, armed with whatever weapons science brings forth, is still dedicated to its historic task: control of the ocean approaches to our country and of the skies above them.

The atomic bomb does not alter the basic foreign policy of the United States. It makes the development and application of our policy more urgent than we could have dreamed 6 months ago. It means that we must be prepared to approach international problems with greater speed, with greater determination, with greater ingenuity, in order to meet a situation for which there is no precedent.

We must find the answer to the problems created by the release of atomic energy—we must find the answers to the many other problems of peace—in partnership with all the peoples of the United Nations. For their stake in world peace is as great as our own.

As I said in my message to the Congress, discussion of the atomic bomb with Great Britain and Canada and later with other nations cannot wait upon the formal organization of the United Nations. These discussions, looking toward a free exchange of fundamental scientific information, will be begun in the near future. But I emphasize again, as I have before, that these discussions will not be concerned with the processes of manufacturing the atomic bomb or any other instruments of war.

In our possession of this weapon, as in our possession of other new weapons, there is no threat to any nation. The world, which has seen the United States in two great recent wars, knows that full well. The possession in our hands of this new power of destruction we regard as a sacred trust. Because of our love of peace, the thoughtful people of the world know that that trust will not be

violated, that it will be faithfully executed.

Indeed, the highest hope of the American people is that world cooperation for peace will soon reach such a state of perfection that atomic methods of destruction can be definitely and effectively outlawed forever.

We have sought, and we will continue to seek, the attainment of that objective. We shall pursue that course with all the wisdom, patience, and determination that the God of Peace can bestow upon a people who are trying to follow in His path.

*“Harry S. Truman Navy Day Address.” University of Virginia Miller Center of Public Affairs. 10/24/2010. <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3342>*