

Remarks at a White House Meeting With the Board of Directors of the United States Institute of Peace

February 26, 1986

Well, congratulations on getting underway with work of the new U.S. Institute of Peace. This Institute, we think, will be a valuable source of scholarly research and information on ways in which we can promote peace with freedom. As Abraham Lincoln reminded us in his second inaugural address: "We must do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace with all nations." We should always remember that peace follows in freedom's path and that conflicts erupt when the democratic will of the people is denied. History shows that democratic nations are naturally peaceful and nonaggressive. Democracies take up arms only in self-defense. I have always put in a sentence that people don't start wars, governments do.

Fundamental conflicts between freedom and tyranny cannot be papered over by treaties. True peace will always demand clear-eyed, rock-hard realism and an enduring commitment to the values of political and economic freedom that have guided our great nation for more than two centuries. Thus, the surest way to strengthen the foundation of peace is to support the growth of democracy and gain full respect for human rights. Supporting a spread of democracy means providing assistance to the brave men and women who today struggle to achieve a free and democratic society and rid their homelands of foreign-supported tyrannies. It also means fighting to help overcome the poverty in underdeveloped countries that breeds violence and radicalism. Free market economic policies, policies that are proven effective in spurring growth and prosperity around the globe, can play a vital role in building democracy. But above all, it means keeping America's defenses strong and ready.

As I intend to tell the Nation tonight, a strong national defense for the United States is not only indispensable to arms control but for the security, freedom, and peace of the entire world. A real and secure peace depends on us, on our courage to build it and guard it and pass it on to future generations. George Washington's words ring just as true today: "To be prepared for war," he said, "is one of the most effective means of preserving peace." American strength is a sheltering arm for peace and freedom in an often dangerous world. And strength is the most persuasive argument we have to convince our adversaries to give up their hostile intentions, to negotiate seriously, and to stop bullying other nations. In the real world, peace through strength must be our motto.

As you begin your work for peace in the great American tradition, you have my best wishes and those of the American people. And I thank you all for what you're doing and for being here.

Note: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/13086c.htm>