Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945
Series 2: “You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR and the New Deal

File No. 1177

1938 October 26

New York City, NY –
Radio Message to the Herald Tribune Forum
No one who lived through the grave hours of last month can doubt the longing of most of the peoples of the world for an enduring peace. Our business now is to utilize the desire for peace to build principles which are the only basis of permanent peace.

It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword.

There can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the threat of war.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the dispersion all over the world of millions of helpless and persecuted wanderers with no place to lay their heads.
There can be no peace if humble men and women are not free to think their own thoughts, to express their own feelings, to worship God.

There can be no peace if economic resources that ought to be devoted to social and economic reconstruction are to be diverted to an intensified competition in armaments which will merely heighten the suspicions and fears and threaten the economic prosperity of each and every nation.

At no time in modern history has the responsibility which rests upon governments been more obvious or more profound.

I speak for a United States which has no interest in war. We covet nothing save good relations with our neighbors; and we recognize that the world today has become our neighbor.
But in the principle of the good neighbor certain fundamental reciprocal obligations are involved. There must be a deliberate and conscious will that such political changes as changing needs require shall be made peacefully.

That means a due regard for the sanctity of treaties. It means deliberate avoidance of policies which arouse fear and distress. It means the self-restraint to refuse strident ambitions which are sure to breed insecurity and intolerance and thereby weaken the prospect of that economic and moral recovery the world so sadly needs.

You cannot organize civilization around the core of militarism and at the same time expect reason to control human destinies.

For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.
Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared.

We still insist that an armament race among nations is absurd unless new territories or new controls are coveted. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it as an ideal of life, we must be prepared to meet with success any application of force against us.
We in the United States do not seek to impose on any other people either our way of life or our internal form of government. But we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves. And we are determined to use every endeavor in order that the Western Hemisphere may work out its own interrelated salvation in the light of its own interrelated experience.

And we affirm our faith that, whatever choice of way of life a people makes, that choice must not threaten the world with the disaster of war. The impact of such a disaster cannot be confined. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living. That statement applies not to the Western Hemisphere alone but to the whole of Europe and Asia and Africa and the islands of the seas.
In all that I have said to you I have reaffirmed the faith of the American people in democracy. The way of democracy is free discussion — as exemplified by the objectives of the Forum to which I am speaking. Free discussion is most greatly useful when it is restrained and relates to facts. It is not useful to suggest either to the American people or to the peoples of other nations that the American Government, its policies, its practices and its servants are actuated by motives of dishonor or corruption. To do so is, of necessity, an attack on the American system of constitutional representative government itself.

Let us work with greater unity for peace among the nations of the world, for restraint, for negotiation and for community of effort. Let us work for the same ideals within our own borders in our relations with each other, so that we may, (if the test ever comes) have that unity of will with which alone a democracy can successfully meet its enemies.

* * * * * * * *

By radio — Original reading copy.
CAUTION: This address of the President, to be broadcast by him from the White House, MUST BE HELD IN
CONFIDENCE until released.

NOTE: Release to editions of all newspapers
appearing on the streets NOT EARLIER than 10:30 P. M.,
Indianapolis, Eastern Standard Time, Wednesday, October 26,
1938.

Care must be exercised to prevent premature
publication.

STEPHEN EARLY
Secretary to the President

No one who lived through the grave hours of last
month can doubt the longing of most of the peoples of the
world for an enduring peace. Our business now is to utilise
the desire for peace to build principles which are the only
basis of permanent peace.

It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by
fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by
the sword.

There can be no peace if the reign of law is to
be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as
a deliberate instrument the threat of war.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as
a deliberate instrument the dispersion all over the world of
millions of helpless and persecuted wanderers with no place to
lay their heads.

There can be no peace if humble men and women are
not free to think their own thoughts, to express their own
feelings, to worship God.

There can be no peace if economic resources that
ought to be devoted to social and economic reconstruction
are to be diverted to an intensified competition in armaments
which will more than heighten the suspicions and fears and threaten
the economic prosperity of each and every nation.

At no time in modern history has the responsibility
which rests upon governments been more obvious or more profound.

I speak for a United States which has no interest in
war. We covet nothing; save good relations with our neighbors;
and we recognize that the world today has become our neighbor.

But in the principle of the good neighbor certain
fundamental reciprocal obligations are involved. There must
be a deliberate and conscious will that such political changes
as changing needs require shall be made peaceably.

That means a due regard for the sanctity of treaties.
It means deliberate avoidance of policies which arouse fear and
distrust. It means the self-restraint to refuse strident ambitions
which are sure to breed insecurity and intolerance and thereby
weaken the prospect of that economic and moral recovery the world
so sadly needs.
You cannot organize civilization around the core of militarism and at the same time expect reason to control human destinies.

For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared.

We still insist that an armament race among nations is absurd unless new territories or new controls are coveted. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. But otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it as an ideal of life, we must be prepared to meet with success any application of force against us.

We in the United States do not seek to impose on any other people either our way of life or our internal form of government. But we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves. And we are determined to use every endeavor in order that the Western Hemisphere may work out its own interrelated salvation in the light of its own interrelated experience.

And we affirm our faith that, whatever choice of way of life a people makes, that choice must not threaten the world with the disaster of war. The impact of such a disaster cannot be confined. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living. That statement applies not to the Western Hemisphere alone but to the whole of Europe and Asia and Africa and the islands of the seas.

In all that I have said to you I have reaffirmed the faith of the American people in democracy. The way of democracy is free discussion -- as exemplified by the objectives of the Forum to which I am speaking. Free discussion is most greatly useful when it is restrained and related to facts. It is not useful to suggest either to the American people or to the peoples of other nations that the American Government, its policies, its practices and its servants are actuated by motives of dishonor or corruption. To do so is, of necessity, an attack on the American system of constitutional representative government itself.

Let us work with greater unity for peace among the nations of the world, for restraint, for negotiation and for community of effort. Let us work for the same ideals within our own borders in our relations with each other, so that we may, if the test ever comes, have that unity of will with which alone a democracy can successfully meet its enemies.
No one who lived through the grave hours of last month can doubt the longing of the peoples of the world for an enduring peace. In no country was there a sign of any will to war among the masses. But they had a profound sense of their impotence to determine the issue of war or the nature of peace.

Our business now is to utilize that sense of danger to build principles which are the only basis of the real peace that comes from the heart. For peace by fear has no higher merit or enduring quality than peace by the sword.

There can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of force.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the threat of war.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the dispersion all over the world of millions of helpless and persecuted wanderers with no place
to lay their heads.

There can be no peace if humble men and women are not free to think their own thoughts, to express their own feelings, to worship their God.

There can be no peace if economic resources that ought to be devoted to social and economic reconstruction are to be diverted to an intensified competition in armaments which will merely heighten the suspicions and fears threatening the security of international relations and the economic prosperity of each and every nation.

At no time in modern history has the responsibility which rests upon governments been more obvious or more profound.

I speak for a United States which has no interest in war. We covet nothing save good relations with our neighbors; and we recognize that the world today has become our neighbor.

But in the principle of the good neighbor certain fundamental reciprocal obligations are involved. There must be a deliberate
and conscious will that such political changes as changing weights and changing needs require shall be made peacefully.

That means a due regard for the sanctity of treaties. It means deliberate avoidance of policies which arouse fear and distress. It means the self-restraint to refuse strident ambitions which are sure to breed insecurity and intolerance and thereby weaken the prospect of that economic and moral recovery the world so sadly needs.

The organization of human living around the autocracy of military strength alone is simply no longer compatible with the plain necessities of human living. You cannot have civilization around the core of militarism and at the same time expect control and refuse to let reason control human destinies. You cannot replace reason by the power of inflamed passions to drag men into conflicts which in its turn transforms vicious persecutors -- men who would prefer to be decent and humane.
Not the least of the causes which have led the American people to their faith in democracy -- a faith we cannot too constantly reaffirm -- is the understanding that the way of democracy is the way of free discussion, and the way of free discussion is the way of creative peace. Free discussion means the sole possibility of settling wisely by negotiation differences which, however profound, will **never** be rightly settled if the alternative to agreement so achieved is conflict.

For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament **for itself** while the neighboring arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must **arm**. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons, **ordinary rules of national prudence**
and common sense require that we be prepared. We shall still insist that an armament race among nations is absurd. New territories or new controls are not to be looked for, indeed no new acquisitions are sought by nations. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: the kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it absolutely as an ideal of life, we must always be prepared to meet any application of force which threatens our liberty with even greater force.

We in the United States do not seek to impose on any other people either our way of life or our form of government. Because we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves, and for the whole
And we are determined, therefore, in order that the Western Hemisphere may recognize that these are matters upon which every other nation is entitled to work out its own salvation in the light of its own experience.

But we are compelled to affirm our faith that, whatever choice a people makes, it cannot legitimately be a choice the implications of which threaten the world with the disaster of war. The incidence of such a disaster cannot be confined. It debases the international currency of good faith. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living.

For good or ill, the interdependence of the modern world is a stark fact the recognition of which is the necessary starting point of good international relationships. We are members one of another. We have to discover the institutions and the methods appropriate to the unity our safety requires.

No doubt it is a difficult task to achieve. No doubt the road to its achievement is long and hard.
But I do not think I misinterpret the faith of the American people when I insist upon their determination to march steadily upon that road. There is no difficulty great enough to impede that determination. Those whose feet have lain so near to the abyss must find in that grim experience the call to reconstruction while there is time. They will not find America wanting if they embark wholeheartedly upon that effort.
DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

(Data for speech of October 26th. Subject: The Coming Struggle for Peace.)

I suppose that in dealing with foreign affairs the highest duty is that of complete frankness. A statesman can only serve his country well by setting forth, completely and straightforwardly, its point of view. Failure to do this can produce nothing but trouble. Peace and friendship in world affairs is promoted only when everyone knows where everyone else stands. For this reason I speak bluntly tonight.

Our first and greatest national interest is peace itself. This we share with the peoples of the entire world. When, a few days ago, a world crisis was solved without general war, there was universal celebration. Not of victory, but because nations had solved a problem without recourse to war.

This was, indeed, the objective, and the only objective, of the diplomacy of the United States during that period. Plainly we were not called upon to part in any sense upon the matter of difference, of any particular settlement. Still less did we assume
to sit in judgment on other nations. We did undertake
to say that the world would sit in judgment on all of us,
if the combined intelligence of the world could not find
a better way of solving its difficulties than through
mass slaughter.

Yet it would be wholly unreal to minimize the fact
that fear of force-politics prevails in much of the world.
We should be stupid not to recognize that this fear has
compelled a race in armament; that the race appears only
to have begun; that it is becoming increasingly intense;
and that peace by fear has much the same quality as peace
by the sword. Wars today may be waged without the exist-
ence of actual hostilities. No struggle for peace will
be successful until that condition is ended.

This is why, for more than 12 years, the United
States has been steadily seeking disarmament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither
we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament for itself
while its neighbors arm to the teeth. If there is not
general disarmament, we ourselves must promptly arm.

It
It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared. We shall still insist that an armament race among nations, becomes absurd if indeed no new acquisitions are sought by nations. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it absolutely as an ideal of life, we must always be prepared to meet any application of force to us with even greater force.

We in the western world know that peace is possible. No nation on this hemisphere lives in perpetual dread that the airplanes coming across its borders carry loads of
of explosives, or that a neighbor's troops may invade over night. We have had a spacious development, with a minimum of international fear. We like that life. We propose that it shall continue; and in this regard the interest of the 21 western republics is common. At Buenos Aires two years ago the American nations unani-
ously resolved that events threatening a breach of the peace anywhere in the hemisphere were of concern to all of them; and these events might include, not only dis-
sension within, of which happily there is little; but also threats from beyond the seas. A duty lies upon us and our colleagues in the New World to safeguard this peace. Not for the Western World the paralyzing process of armed diplomacy, of balance of power, of alliances and counter-alliances. We do not accept as necessary, the crushing psychological burden of con-
tinuous fear. Within, we are in agreement. If threatened from without, we know how to defend.
It is easy to be despondent about world affairs at the present time. We appear to be at one of those moments in history when nations think they are prisoners of uncontrollable forces; and that these lead eventually to a world catastrophe. Yet I think it is time to offer a sincere word of hope.

Within the past few weeks we have had a supreme demonstration of what the millions of plain people through the world really wanted. There was no plebiscite taken to determine the emotion of the entire world when war was avoided three short weeks ago. Every individual breathed a silent prayer of thanks that war was averted. And that common human feeling became the most powerful unifying force, perhaps, which we have seen in our time.

That were the guide for statesmen; the plain indication that the keys which can loose us from the inevitability of war lie in our own hands. If the governments of the world accurately translate into action the universal sentiment of their own peoples, the problem disappears.

We already know and have at our command peaceful methods...
by which economic problems can be solved. We are beginning
to understand how prosperity of individuals may be ap-
proached. We are coming to realize that war does not solve
any problem; and that victor and vanquished at the end are
alike destroyed. Once this is adequately realized, and
particularly where nations are articulate in their chosen
ways, it should never be impossible to solve difficulties.

Distilled from the common feeling of peoples, our war-like
organization, becomes merely

This is why, it seems to me, the struggle for peace
is primarily a struggle to permit the inherent wisdom and
kindly instincts of the plain people everywhere to guide
their governments. For while individual statesmen in
history have actually been willing to commit national suicide, peoples have rarely, if ever, shared that
strange emotion. Warfare as a method of solving anything
is today a convention only; first-rate statesmen are able to
break through and discard it, and only in doing so do they
attain the fullest measure of triumph.

Two years ago at Buenos Aires I said: "We cannot now,
especially in view of our common purpose, accept any
defeatist attitude. We have learned by hard experience that peace is not to be had for the mere asking; that peace like other great privileges can be obtained only by hard and painstaking effort. We are here to dedicate ourselves and our countries to that work."

It is the principal task in the world today. Its difficulty is a challenge; but we do not know the existence of the word "impossible".
No one who lived through the grave hours of last month

can doubt the longing of most of the peoples of the world for an
enduring peace. Our business now is to utilize the desire for peace
to build principles which are the only basis of permanent peace.

It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by fear has no higher
or more enduring quality than peace by the sword.

There can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced
by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate
instrument the threat of war.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate
instrument the dispersion all over the world of millions of helpless
and persecuted wanderers with no place to lay their heads.

There can be no peace if humble men and women are not free to
think their own thoughts, to express their own feelings, to worship
God.

There can be no peace if economic resources that ought to be
devoted to social and economic reconstruction are to be diverted to an
intensified competition in armaments which will merely heighten the
suspicions and fears and threaten the economic prosperity of each and
every nation.

At no time in modern history has the responsibility which rests
upon governments been more obvious or more profound.

I speak for a United States which has no interest in war. We
covet nothing save good relations with our neighbors; and we recognize
that the world today has become our neighbor.

But in the principle of the good neighbor certain fundamental
reciprocal obligations are involved. There must be a deliberate and
conscious will that such political changes as changing
needs require shall be made peacefully.

That means a due regard for the sanctity of treaties. It means
deliberate avoidance of policies which arouse fear and distress. It
means the self-restraint to refuse strident ambitions which are sure to
breed insecurity and intolerance and thereby weaken the prospect of that
economic and moral recovery the world so sadly needs.

You cannot organize civilization around the core of militarism and at
the same time expect reason to control human destinies.
For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared.

We still insist that an armament race among nations is absurd unless new territories or new controls are coveted. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it as an ideal of life, we must be prepared to meet with success any application of force against us.
We in the United States do not seek to impose on any other people either our way of life or our internal form of government.

But we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves. And we are determined to use every endeavor in order that the Western Hemisphere may work out its own interrelated salvation in the light of its own interrelated experience.
But we are compelled to affirm our faith that, whatever choice a people makes, that choice must not threaten the world with the disaster of war. The impact of such a disaster cannot be confined. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living. That statement applies not to the Western Hemisphere alone but to the whole of Europe and Asia and Africa and the islands of the seas.

In all that I have said to you I have reaffirmed the faith of the American people in democracy. The way of democracy is free discussion -- as exemplified by the objectives of the Forum to which I am speaking. Free discussion is most greatly useful when it is restrained and relates to facts. It is not useful to suggest either to the American people or to the peoples of other nations that the American Government, its
policies, its practices and its servants are actuated by motives of dishonor or corruption. To do so is, of necessity, an attack on the American system of constitutional representative government itself.

Let us work with greater unity for peace among the nations of the world, for restraint, for negotiation and for community of effort. Let us work for the same ideals within our own borders in our relations with each other, so that we may, if the test ever comes, have that unity of will with which alone a democracy can successfully meet its enemies.
No one who lived through the grave hours of last month can doubt the longing of most of the peoples of the world for an enduring peace. Our business now is to utilize the desire for peace to build principles which are the only basis of permanent peace.

It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword.

There can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the threat of war.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the dispersion all over the world of millions of helpless and persecuted wanderers with no place to lay their heads.
There can be no peace if humble men and women are not free to think their own thoughts, to express their own feelings, to worship God.

There can be no peace if economic resources that ought to be devoted to social and economic reconstruction are to be diverted to an intensified competition in armaments which will merely heighten the suspicions and fears and threaten the economic prosperity of each and every nation.

At no time in modern history has the responsibility which rests upon governments been more obvious or more profound.

I speak for a United States which has no interest in war. We covet nothing save good relations with our neighbors; and we recognize that the world today has become our neighbor.
But in the principle of the good neighbor certain fundamental reciprocal obligations are involved. There must be a deliberate and conscious will that much political changes as changing needs require shall be made peacefully.

That means a due regard for the sanctity of treaties. It means deliberate avoidance of policies which arouse fear and distress. It means the self-restraint to refuse strident ambitions which are sure to breed insecurity and intolerance and thereby weaken the prospect of that economic and moral recovery the world so sadly needs.

You cannot organize civilization around the core of militarism and at the same time expect reason to control human destinies.

For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.
Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared.

We still insist that an armament race among nations is absurd unless new territories or new controls are coveted. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it as an ideal of life, we must be prepared to meet with success any application of force against us.
We in the United States do not seek to impose on any other people either our way of life or our internal form of government. But we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves. And we are determined to use every endeavor in order that the Western Hemisphere may work out its own interrelated salvation in the light of its own interrelated experience.

And we affirm our faith that, whatever choice of way of life a people makes, that choice must not threaten the world with the disaster of war. The impact of such a disaster cannot be confined. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living. That statement applies not to the Western Hemisphere alone but to the whole of Europe and Asia and Africa and the islands of the seas.
In all that I have said to you I have reaffirmed the faith of the American people in democracy. The way of democracy is free discussion — as exemplified by the objectives of the Forum to which I am speaking. Free discussion is most greatly useful when it is restrained and relates to facts. It is not useful to suggest either to the American people or to the peoples of other nations that the American Government, its policies, its practices and its servants are actuated by motives of dishonor or corruption. To do so is, of necessity, an attack on the American system of constitutional representative government itself.

Let us work with greater unity for peace among the nations of the world, for restraint, for negotiation and for community of effort. Let us work for the same ideals within our own borders in our relations with each other, so that we may, if the test ever comes, have that unity of will with which alone a democracy can successfully meet its enemies.