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Address of Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC) to Association of United States Army in Columbia, S.C., 1959 November 18

Strom Thurmond

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Problems and troubles of the moment, whether national or personal, always seem to us of greater complexity and severity than either those of the past or the future. And beyond any doubt, the worse problems we have are those that hang around unsolved and unresolved for extended periods. If they remain long enough, however, we become accustomed to them, and it is human nature for each of us to reach a point where we delude ourselves into believing that if we just drift along, the problem will resolve itself. This, unfortunately, is the stage at which a problem or trouble becomes most dangerous.

Our problem of national defense has been plaguing us for a considerable time--in fact, since the beginning of our Nation. Almost from the start we have been trying to ignore it in the hope that it will go away or resolve itself. The late General George C. Marshall once said, "We have tried since the birth of our Nation to promote our love of peace by a display of weakness." The truth of these words were acknowledged by all Americans during World War II, and we assured ourselves that we would never allow the United States to be caught unprepared again.

A brief review of our defense efforts in the post war decade indicates that we have not been completely successful in breaking with tradition in this respect.

In 1945 and '46, we followed our unbroken historical post-war practice of rapid demobilization of our Armed Forces. Thus we began our out-in-the-open struggle with the forces of Communism/
from a position of weakness. By 1947, we were beginning to realize the error of our ways, and a rather slow, almost half-hearted, build-up of conventional forces was commenced. The creation of the Department of Defense and the reorganization of the Armed Forces were the most notable advances of this rebuilding effort.

In 1948, communist capabilities had been underrated to the extent that we reversed our course and again began over-economizing our defense. These defense cut-backs continued until we were rudely shocked into an almost awakened state by the outbreak of the Korean conflict in 1950. It was here that we became initiated into the concept of "limited war." Even during this period of armed conflict, we limited our efforts largely to those required by that conflict itself.

Only after the end of the Korean war did we seriously concern ourselves with what we then thought of as weapons of the future--missiles.

We approached the development of missiles with a measured pace, comfortable in the imagined safety of our superiority in nuclear devices and the potency of our Strategic Air Command Forces. It was not until the fall of 1957 that we came face to face with the hard facts of life—that Russian Communists were a foe worthy of our best efforts. It took Sputnik to bring us to a realization of our peril, if indeed we have yet truly faced that reality.

Our errors in the decade following World War II are easy to detect from the vantage point of hindsight. In view of the history of the American people, our commission of errors should not be surprising to us. We are truly a peace-loving peoples, most reluctant to concern ourselves with war until we are backed to the
wall. Our strength, and even our survival, has traditionally resided in our ability to unify and concentrate our efforts in extreme emergency.

While there is nothing to be gained from hurling blame for the errors of defense policy in the post-war period, our mistakes should remain fresh in our minds. Unless we profit from the experience of our mistakes, we may well have no further chance to overcome those mistakes.

During the past two years, two conclusions have been, or should have been, crystal clear. First, we stand second best in development of new weaponry; and second, our survival, at some future date, depends on our moving from second best to first, and staying ahead when we get there.

Our present defense policy is framed around the maintenance of a deterrent force with sufficient capability to make it obviously unwise for any aggressor nation to chance its unleashing. Today, and possibly for some time yet to come, insofar as an all-out nuclear war is concerned, we have such a deterrent force. It is comprised principally of the Strategic Air Force and its long-range nuclear capabilities. Supplementing the Strategic Air Force are intermediate range ballistic missiles ringing our potential enemy at widely dispersed sites, and carrier-based aircraft with nuclear capabilities. There can be little question that the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile will soon be available in sufficient operational numbers to complement and eventually replace, with its successor ICBM's, the Strategic Air Command.

As long as our potential enemies must rely principally on
ICBM's for offensive efforts, our retaliatory capabilities should be sufficient as a deterrent force to prevent all-out war.

Grave danger now lies in our self-satisfaction at the fact that our present retaliatory forces are a sufficient deterrent, despite our failure to decrease the Soviet's scientific lead demonstrated by Sputnik, and reproven by the recent Russian Lunar probe. I fear we are once again in danger of planning our retaliatory defense forces around weapons of today. The intercontinental ballistic missile, with its nuclear war-head, is no more an ultimate weapon than was the Maginot Line or the Atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima. There has never been an ultimate weapon, nor is there any sound reason to believe there ever will be one.

Let us be more specific. If one nation now develops a space platform relatively impregnable to attack by its enemies' present state of weapon development, the stalemate is broken. An attack could not be stopped by any amount of retaliation on the aggressor's homeland. This is where the lead in scientific development, now obviously enjoyed by the Soviet Union in the field of thrust and rocketry, must be overcome. It is no answer to rely on our presently sufficient retaliatory force. A bare minimum may suffice for the present, but at some future state, it will prove woefully inadequate.

Let me interject at this point—the national defense is not, and must not be, a partisan matter. With this thought in mind, however, it must be said by way of constructive criticism, that the present administration's defense policy is and has been dangerously close to maintenance of the bare minimum. Two years have now passed since the launching of the first Russian satellite,
which led to the widely accepted belief that we trailed the Russians by about five years in rocket propulsion development. In these two years there have been no indications that we have substantially reduced the margin between their level of progress in this field and our own.

Admittedly, research and development are time-consuming, and concrete results are seldom immediately apparent. We have seen repeated proof in the past, however, that we have the potentialities for immense surges, such as that shown in the development of the Atom bomb during World War II. Now is the time for the exercise of our maximum potentialities, for our peril is even greater than that which inspired our A-bomb development.

If we are to prevent the outbreak of an all-out nuclear war, we must regain and maintain first place in all fields of weapon development. This should be and remain our first and foremost objective.

There are those who are of the honest opinion that if we achieve a lead in missiles and their successor weapons of the future, our defense problems are solved. Not only do they picture "massive retaliation" as a deterrent to all-out war, but also as a deterrent to limited wars, such as that in Korea and Indo-China. I do not believe that such an opinion is sound.

One of the basic ingredients in any effective deterrent is the enemy's conviction that our power will be unleashed should he take the action we would deter.

Now the Communists are quite aware that should they commence a nuclear exchange, every destructive weapon at our command would be unleashed against them. Quite frankly, we would have no
alternative, and the Communist leaders know this as well as we do.

But what about a localized aggression against a small country with satellite troops? Is the Communist leader convinced that we would commence a nuclear exchange to prevent it? I seriously doubt we as a people have convinced ourselves that we would go so far. We had nuclear weapons at the time of the Korean war, and at the time of the Indo-Chinese war, but we refrained from using them. We decided it the wiser course to limit the conflict. Why should the enemy conclude that we would react differently in the future? For that matter, why should we assume that we would react differently now? We as a people have no less distaste for a nuclear exchange than we had earlier.

Our "massive retaliation" power is an effective deterrent to all-out war, but not to limited wars. We must have an additional deterrent if we would prevent them.

The additional deterrent lies in conventional forces. These forces must be in sufficient numbers and adequately equipped, supported by the capability of rapid transport to any part of the world. Our present conventional forces are not sufficient in numbers, equipment nor transport to constitute a sufficient deterrent to limited wars. This weakness must be recognized and corrected.

Defense is an expensive matter. A complete and well-rounded deterrent force will cost even more than we are now spending on military forces, and in fiscal 1959 we reached an all-time high for peacetime defense expenditures. We may as well face the fact now, however, that we have no alternative to spending whatever is necessary to be first in armed might, regardless of the cost.
Just as important, we must build our armed strength within the framework of a balanced budget.

Let me say here and now that economy and adequate national defense are not alternatives. If they are, we are doomed. It is only by the practice of the strictest economy that we can maintain the strength of our economic system essential to support a strong defensive force. We must refrain from entering new fields of Federal spending except under the most compelling circumstances; and we must continuously examine all Federal programs with a view toward reducing their costs—and indeed, eliminating some of them altogether. We must insure that full value is received for every taxpayer's dollar spent, and this applies particularly to the defense expenditures, since they comprise the major part of the Federal budget.

Money alone, however, is not the answer to our defense any more than it is the sole answer to any of our other problems. If we have one weak national characteristic, it is overconfidence in the power of the almighty dollar. Without wise and far-sighted planning, without efficient organization, and without a strong moral determination by our people to succeed, we can treble our expenditures to no avail. Sufficient funds are an absolute necessity, but funds do not constitute our principal deficiency.

If we are to recapture preeminence in the field of weaponry development, we must first provide efficiency and singleness of purpose into the organization which administers the program.

In 1947, we took a step toward unification of our defense forces by creation of the Department of Defense. Several relatively minor reorganizations have been attempted since that time—the last
being in 1958. The time has now come, if it has not already passed, when unification of the Armed Forces must be obtained in fact. We can no longer afford the agonizing arguments that spring from the understandable loyalties to the various services. No longer can we tolerate the existence of red-tape studded with limited authority to make negative decisions or recommend action to another level. There is no time left for delayed decisions which postpone the beginning of progress in specific fields of research and development.

The very fact that our national policy toward communism is built around a deterrent force presupposes that our defense problem is here to stay. It will not go away or disappear. Our "deterrent" policy is also premised on the supposition that we will no longer try to promote peace by a display of weakness. If we are to succeed with this policy, and there is no other choice, we must get down to business by the following steps:

1. Achieve the necessary degree of unification of our Armed Forces that will insure elimination of service bickering and delays in decision making.

2. Provide the necessary funds and emphasis to our weapons research and development program to insure a realization of our maximum potential.

3. Increase the number of our conventional forces and begin immediately on a stepped-up program of modernization of equipment and provision of transport for those forces.

4. Economize on all non-defense expenditures in order to provide for the national defense adequately within a balanced budget.

These are not easy goals to achieve. They will be most difficult to accomplish. In them, however, lies the only road to
preservation of our freedom, perhaps our existence, and victory over Communism.

Whether or not we are successful in achieving these essential goals depends on the American people. The people are the final authority in the formation of the policies of the Government. No fact has better illustrated this truth than the successful demand by the public for a labor reform bill earlier this year.

If the American public will demand of Congress and the Executive Branch that the United States be made first in defense, these goals can and will be attained. Let us hope that the traditional love of peace by Americans will be matched with equal determination to secure the peace through a defense establishment second to none.