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From the Archives

Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" Speech

On 16 April 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower delivered an extraordinary speech titled "The Chance for Peace." Weighing the tensions of the time, Ike spoke of a dark future and enumerated the real costs of expenditures on arms:

In this spring of 1953 the free world weighs one question above all others: the chance for a just peace for all peoples. . . . To weigh this chance is to summon instantly to mind another recent moment of great decision. It came with that yet more hopeful spring of 1945, bright with the promise of victory and of freedom. The hope . . . in that moment too was a just and lasting peace. . . . This common purpose lasted an instant and perished. The nations of the world divided

What can the world, or any nation in it, hope for if no turning is found on this dread road? The worst to be feared and the best to be expected can be simply stated. The worst is atomic war. The best would be this: a life of perpetual fear and tension; a burden of arms draining the wealth and the labor of all peoples

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.

The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some 50 miles of concrete highway.

We pay for a single fighter with a half million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.

This, I repeat, is the best way of life to be found on the road the world has been taking. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.

These plain and cruel truths define the peril and point the hope that come with this spring of 1953. . . . It is a moment that calls upon the governments of the world to . . . answer the question that stirs the hearts of all sane men: is there no other way the world may live? . . .

The President spoke of the free world's resolve, then challenged the Soviet Union and pledged our own country to pursue a more peaceful course, to settle regional hostilities and then to pursue agreements on disarmament. He continued:

The fruit of success in all these tasks would present the world with the greatest task, and the greatest opportunity, of all. It is this: the dedication of the energies, the resources, and the imaginations of all peaceful nations to a new kind of war. This would be a declared total war, not upon any human enemy but upon the brute forces of poverty and need. . . . The monuments to this new kind of war would be these: roads and schools, hospitals and homes, food and health. . . . We are ready, in short, to dedicate our strength to serving the needs, rather than the fears, of the world. . . .

Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, "Chance for Peace Speech," <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/chance.htm>.