

Senator Lodge, Jr's Speech

"The Drift Toward War"

All Americans are horrified at the savage news from abroad. The slaughter of innocents, the destruction of everything that makes civilization possible, the maiming of bodies and the shattering of the human spirit are terrible beyond description. Frightful as these things are, in and of themselves, they become desperate when we realize that the motive for this holocaust is to establish an order which denies the dignity of the individual man, and thereby contradicts the chief purpose and aim of the American dream.

These great changes in Europe will surely affect our economic system, causing dislocation and unemployment. Moreover, we have not the right to assume that they do not actually threaten our vital safety. We hope that they will not. But we must be ready for the worst, and then if the worst does not happen, we can return to more normal ways.

America First

What must we do to be ready for the worst? We must first, I think, have clearly in mind that our real duty, as Americans, is to America. As American citizens we can have no other duty, we must be single-mindedly devoted to that duty, and we cannot have our loyalties divided by our strong personal sympathy for those brave men and women abroad who fight for their freedom. Our duty is to keep the United States out of this terrible war insofar as this lies within our power.

The Best Way to Avoid War

Broadly speaking there are two ways in which we can get into war. One way is for a foreign nation to provoke us so that we have to fight. The other way is for us to provoke a foreign nation so that they have to fight. The best way to avoid involvement in war by the first method is to be so manifestly strong that no foreign nation will dare to molest us. Force is the only universally understood language in the world today. For this reason—and for this reason only—I favor building up our Army and Navy, and building them promptly—to a point which will make any foreign attack on the United States obviously and utterly hopeless.

Our Own Needs

Have we such an Army and Navy today? We have not. It was recently testified that we only had enough equipment to put an army of 75,000 men into the field completely equipped, and that it will not be until a year from next January that we shall have enough equipment for an army of 750,000—a figure only slightly in excess of the total of the late Belgian Army. It is stated officially that in the light of the European battle experience all of our aeroplanes were obsolete. It is not disputed that we have only one Navy, and that it will take between 6 and 7 years to develop a so-called two-ocean Navy. And the one Navy which we now have must use the Panama Canal to move from ocean to ocean, and it is an utter impossibility to give that canal 100 per cent protection. Moreover, it will take 6 years to finish the double sets of locks at Panama which will greatly increase its safety.

This is not a pretty picture, but it is a truthful one—which is not obscured by the fact that frantic and praiseworthy efforts are now being made to remedy the shortages. It is, moreover, hard to understand how we could arrive at this point in our destiny so woefully unprepared when we look at the warnings of the past few years. In the fall of 1938, for example, it was clear to all observers that the spectre of war, raging and terrible, was again at large in the world. But we did not heed it. I wonder why not. It was surely not due to a desire for economy. We were lavishing billions on all kinds of luxury projects. Even in the case of our military appropriation, a large part of the funds went to care-taking and house-keeping and other non-combatant purposes. It is astounding to note that we spent a larger proportion of federal funds on national defense in the fiscal year 1929 than we have in any subsequent year. Seventeen and seven-tenths percent of our federal expenses went to national defense in that year, as compared with eleven and two-tenths per cent in the year 1939. Even more astounding is the fact that in spite of threats abroad, we spent a smaller part of our federal funds on national defense in 1939 than we did in 1938. I do not try to give the reason for this negligence. The stark fact remains that we are not prepared today to avoid the danger of war by being so strong that no one will dare to provoke us.

Threats and Bluster

What has been our record since these first awful warnings of war became so glitteringly clear two years ago? Unfortunately, our record has been a wavering and a contradictory one, a record of