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A New Covenant for American Security

Remarks to Students at Georgetown University

By Governor Bill Clinton

Editor's Note: *This is the last in a series of 3 speeches Governor Clinton gave at Georgetown University in the Fall of 1991.*

First Speech: ["The New Covenant: Responsibility and Rebuilding the American Community"](#)

Second Speech: ["A New Covenant for Economic Change"](#)

GOV. CLINTON:

I was born nearly half a century ago at the dawn of the Cold War, a time of great change, enormous opportunity, and uncertain peril. At a time when Americans wanted nothing more than to come home and resume lives of peace and quiet, our country had to summon the will for a new kind of war -- containing an expansionist and hostile Soviet Union which vowed to bury us. We had to find ways to rebuild the economies of Europe and Asia, encourage a worldwide movement toward independence, and vindicate our nation's principles in the world against yet another totalitarian challenge to liberal democracy.

Thanks to the unstinting courage and sacrifice of the American people, we were able to win that Cold War. Now we've entered a new era, and we need a new vision and the strength to meet a new set of opportunities and threats. We face the same challenge today that we faced in 1946 -- to build a world of security, freedom, democracy, free markets and growth at a time of great change.

Anyone running for President right now -- Republican or Democrat -- is going to have to provide a vision for security in this new era. That is what I hope to do today.

Given the problems we face at home, we do have to take care of our own people and their needs first. We need to remember the central lesson of the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union. We never defeated them on the field of battle. The Soviet Union collapsed from the inside out -- from economic, political, and spiritual failure.

Make no mistake: foreign and domestic policy are inseparable in today's world. If we're not strong at home, we can't lead the world we've done so much to make. And if we withdraw from the world, it will hurt us economically at home.

We can't allow this false choice between domestic policy and foreign policy to hurt our country and our economy. Our President has devoted his time and energy to foreign concerns and ignored dire problems here at home. As a result, we're drifting in the longest economic slump since World War II, and, in reaction to that, elements in both parties now want America to respond to the collapse of communism and a crippling recession at home by retreating from the world.

I have agreed with President Bush on a number of foreign policy questions. I supported his efforts to kick Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. I think he did a masterful job in pulling together the victorious multilateral coalition. I support his desire to pursue peace talks in the Middle East. I agree with the President that we can't turn our back on NATO. And I supported giving the administration fast track authority to negotiate a sound and fair free trade agreement with Mexico.

But because the President seems to favor political stability and his personal relations with foreign leaders over a coherent policy of promoting freedom, democracy and economic growth, he often does things I disagree with. For example, his close personal ties with foreign leaders helped forge the coalition against Saddam Hussein, but also led him to side with China's communist rulers after the democratic uprising of students. The President forced Iraq out of Kuwait, but as soon as the war was over, he seemed so concerned with the stability of the area that he was willing to leave the Kurds to an awful fate. He is rightfully seeking peace in the Middle East, but his urge to personally broker a deal has led him to take public positions which may undermine the ability of the Israelis and the Arabs to agree on an enduring peace.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, we need a President who recognizes that in a dynamic new era, our goal is not to resist change, but to shape it. The President must articulate a vision of where we're going. The President and his administration have yet to meet that test -- to define the requirements of U.S. national security after the Cold War.

Retreating from the world or discounting its dangers is wrong for the country and sets back everything else we hope to accomplish as Democrats. The defense of freedom and the promotion of democracy around the world aren't merely a reflection of our deepest values; they are vital to our national interests. Global democracy means nations at peace with one another, open to one another's ideas and one another's commerce.

The stakes are high. The collapse of communism is not an isolated event; it's part of a worldwide march toward democracy whose outcome will shape the next century. If individual liberty, political pluralism and free enterprise take root in Latin America, Eastern and Central Europe, Africa, Asia, and the former Soviet Union, we can look forward to a grand new era of reduced conflict, mutual understanding, and economic growth. For ourselves and for millions of people who seek to live in freedom and prosperity, this revolution must not fail.

And yet, even as the American Dream is inspiring people around the world, America is on the sidelines, a military giant crippled by economic weakness and an uncertain vision.

We face two great foreign policy challenges today. First, we must define a new national security policy that builds on freedom's victory in the Cold War. The communist idea has lost its power, but the fate of the peoples who lived under it and the fate of the world will be in doubt until stable democracies rise from the debris of the Soviet empire.

And second, we must forge a new economic policy to serve ordinary Americans by launching a new era of global growth. We must tear down the wall in our thinking between domestic and foreign policy.

We need a coherent strategy that enables us to lead the world we have done so much to make, and that supports our urgent efforts to take care of our own here at home. We cannot do one without the other.

We need a New Covenant for American Security after the Cold War, a set of rights and responsibilities that will challenge the American people, American leaders, and America's allies to work together to build a safer, more prosperous, more democratic world.

The strategy of American engagement I propose is based on four key assumptions about the requirements of our security in this new era:

- First, the collapse of communism does not mean the end of danger. A new set of threats in an even less stable world will force us, even as we restructure our defenses, to keep our guard up.
- Second, America must regain its economic strength to maintain our position of global leadership. While military power will continue to be vital to our national security, its utility is declining relative to economic power. We cannot afford to go on spending too much on firepower and too little on brainpower.
- Third, the irresistible power of ideas rules in the Information Age. Television, cassette tapes, and the fax machine helped ideas to pierce the Berlin Wall and bring it down.
- Finally, our definition of security must include common threats to all people. On the environment and other global issues, our very survival depends upon the United States taking the lead.

Guided by these assumptions, we must pursue three clear objectives: First, we must restructure our military forces for a new era. Second, we must work with our allies to encourage the spread and consolidation of democracy abroad. And third, we must reestablish America's economic leadership at home and in the world.

Restructuring Our Military Forces

When Americans elect a President, they select a Commander in Chief. They want someone they can trust to act when our country's interests are threatened. To protect our interests and our values, sometimes we have to stand and fight. That is why, as President, I pledge to maintain military forces strong enough to deter and when necessary to defeat any threat to our essential interests.

Today's defense debate centers too narrowly on the size of the military budget. But the real questions are, what threats do we face, what forces do we need to counter them, and how must we change?

We can and must substantially reduce our military forces and spending, because the Soviet threat is decreasing and our allies are able to and should shoulder more of the defense burden. But we still must set the level of our defense spending based on what we need to protect our interests. First let's provide for a strong defense. Then we can talk about defense savings.

At the outset of this discussion, I want to make one thing clear: the world is still rapidly changing. The world we look out on today is not the same world we will see tomorrow. We need to be ready to adjust our defense projections to meet threats that could be either heightened or reduced down the road.

Our defense needs were clearer during the Cold War, when it was widely accepted that we needed enough forces to deter a Soviet nuclear attack, to defend against a Soviet-led conventional offensive in Europe and to protect other American interests, especially in Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf. The collapse of the Soviet Union shattered that consensus, leaving us without a clear benchmark for determining the size or mix of our armed forces.

However, a new consensus is emerging on the nature of post- Cold War security. It assumes that the gravest threats we are most likely to face in the years ahead include:

- First, the spread of deprivation and disorder in the former Soviet Union, which could lead to armed conflict among the republics or the rise of a fervently nationalistic and aggressive regime in Russia still in possession of long-range nuclear weapons.
- Second, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, as well as the means for delivering them.
- Third, enduring tensions in various regions, especially the Korean peninsula and the Middle East and the attendant risks of terrorist attacks on Americans traveling or working overseas.
- And finally, the growing intensity of ethnic rivalry and separatist violence within national borders, such as we have seen in Yugoslavia, India and elsewhere, that could spill beyond those borders.

To deal with these new threats, we need to replace our Cold War military structure with a smaller, more flexible mix of capabilities, including:

- Nuclear deterrence. We can dramatically reduce our nuclear arsenals through negotiations and other reciprocal actions. But as an irreducible minimum, we must retain a survivable nuclear force to deter any conceivable threat.
- Rapid deployment. We need a force capable of projecting power quickly when and where it's needed. This means the Army must develop a more mobile mix of mechanized and armored forces. The Air Force should emphasize tactical air power and airlift, and the Navy and Marine Corps must maintain sufficient carrier and amphibious forces, as well as more sealift. We also need strong special operations forces to deal with terrorist threats.
- Technology. The Gulf War proved that the superior training of our soldiers, tactical air power, advanced communications, space-based surveillance, and smart weaponry produced a shorter war with fewer American casualties. We must maintain our technological edge.
- Better intelligence. In an era of unpredictable threats, our intelligence agencies must shift from military bean-counting to a more sophisticated understanding of political, economic and cultural conditions that can spark conflicts.

To achieve these capabilities, I would restructure our forces in the following ways:

First, now that the nuclear arms race finally has reversed course, it's time for a prudent slowdown in strategic modernization. We should stop production of the B-2 bomber. That alone could save \$20 billion by 1997.

Since Ronald Reagan unveiled his "Star Wars" proposal in 1983, America has spent \$26 billion in futile pursuit of a fool- p roof defense against nuclear attack. Democrats in Congress have recommended a much more realistic and attainable goal: defending against very limited or accidental launches of ballistic missiles. This allows us to proceed with R&D on missile defense

within the framework of the ABM treaty -- a prudent step as more and more countries acquire missile technology.

At the same time, we must do more to stop the threat of weapons of mass destruction from spreading. We need to clamp down on countries and companies that sell these technologies, punish violators, and work urgently with all countries for tough, enforceable, international non-proliferation agreements.

Although the President's plan does reduce our conventional force structure, I believe we can go farther without undermining our core capabilities. We can meet our responsibilities in Europe with less than the 150,000 troops now proposed by the President, especially as the Soviet republics withdraw their forces from the Red Army. We can defend the sea lanes and project force with 10 carriers rather than 12. We should continue to keep some U.S. forces in Northeast Asia as long as North Korea presents a threat to our South Korean ally.

To upgrade our conventional forces, we need to develop greater air and sea lift capacity, including production of the C-17 transport aircraft. But we should end or reduce programs intended to meet the Soviet threat. Our conventional programs, like the new Air Force fighter and the Army's new armored systems, should be redesigned to meet regional threats.

The administration has called for a 21 percent cut in military spending through 1995, based on the assumption, now obsolete, that the Soviet Union would remain intact. With the dwindling Soviet threat, we can cut defense spending by over a third by 1997.

Based on calculations by the Congressional Budget Office, my plan would bring cumulative savings of about \$100 billion beyond the current Bush plan. If favorable political and military trends continue, and we make progress on arms control, we may be able to scale down defense spending still more by the end of the decade. However, we should not commit ourselves now to specific deeper cuts ten years from now. The world is changing quickly, and we must retain our ability to react to potential threats.

Also, we must not forget about the real people whose lives will be turned upside down when defense is cut deeply. The government should look out for its defense workers and the communities they live in. We should insist on advanced notification and help communities plan for a transition from a defense to a domestic economy. 31 percent of our graduate engineers work for the defense industry. They and other highly skilled workers and technicians are a vital national resource at a time when our technological edge in a world economy must be sharper than ever before. I have called for a new advanced research agency -- a civilian DARPA -- that could help capture for commercial work the brilliance of scientists and engineers who have accomplished wonders on the battlefield.

Likewise, those who have served the nation in uniform cannot be dumped on the job market. We've got to enlist them to help meet our many needs at home. By shifting people from active duty to the National Guard and reserves, offering early retirement options, limiting re-enlistment and slowing the pace of recruitment, we can build down our forces in a gradual way that doesn't abandon people of proven commitment and competence.

Our people in uniform are among the most highly skilled in the areas we need most. We need to transfer those human resources into our workforce and even into our schools, perhaps in part by using reserve centers and closed bases for community-based education and training programs.

The defense policy I have outlined keeps America strong and still yields substantial savings. The American people have earned this peace dividend through forty years of unrelenting vigilance and sacrifice and an investment of trillions of dollars. And they are entitled to have the dividend reinvested in their future.

Finally, America needs to reach a new agreement with our allies for sharing the costs and risks of maintaining peace. While Desert Storm set a useful precedent for cost-sharing, our forces still did most of the fighting and dying. We need to shift that burden to a wider coalition of nations of which America will be a part. In the Persian Gulf, in Namibia, in Cambodia and elsewhere in recent years, the United Nations has begun to play the role that Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman envisioned for it. We must take the lead now in making their vision real -- by expanding the Security Council and making Germany and Japan permanent members; by continuing to press for greater efficiency in U.N. administration; and by exploring ways to institutionalize the U.N.'s success in mobilizing international participation in Desert Storm.

One proposal worth exploring calls for a U.N. Rapid Deployment Force that could be used for purposes beyond traditional peacekeeping, such as standing guard at the borders of countries threatened by aggression; preventing attacks on civilians; providing humanitarian relief; and

combatting terrorism and drug trafficking.

In Europe, new security arrangements will evolve over the next decade. While insisting on a fairer sharing of the common defense burden, we must not turn our back on NATO. Until a more effective security system emerges, we must give our allies no reason to doubt our constancy.

Promoting Democracy Around the World

As we restructure our military forces, we must reinforce the powerful global movement toward democracy.

U.S. foreign policy cannot be divorced from the moral principles most Americans share. We cannot disregard how other governments treat their own people, whether their domestic institutions are democratic or repressive, whether they help encourage or check illegal conduct beyond their borders. This does not mean we should deal only with democracies, or that we should try to remake the world in our image. But recent experience from Panama to Iran to Iraq shows the dangers of forging strategic relationships with despotic regimes.

It should matter to us how others govern themselves. Democracies don't go to war with each other. The French and British have nuclear weapons, but we don't fear annihilation at their hands. Democracies don't sponsor terrorist acts against each other. They are more likely to be reliable trading partners, protect the global environment, and abide by international law.

Over time, democracy is a stabilizing force. It provides nonviolent means for resolving disputes. Democracies do a better job of protecting ethnic, religious and other minorities. And elections can help resolve fratricidal civil wars.

Yet President Bush too often has hesitated when democratic forces needed our support in challenging the status quo. I believe the President erred when he secretly rushed envoys to resume cordial relations with China barely a month after the massacre in Tiananmen Square; when he spurned Yeltsin before the Moscow coup; when he poured cold water on Baltic and Ukrainian aspirations for self-determination and independence; and when he initially refused to help the Kurds.

The administration continues to coddle China, despite its continuing crackdown on democratic reforms, its brutal subjugation of Tibet, its irresponsible exports of nuclear and missile technology, its support for the homicidal Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and its abusive trade practices. Such forbearance on our part might have made sense during the Cold War, when China was a counterweight to Soviet power. But it makes no sense to play the China card now, when our opponents have thrown in their hand.

In the Middle East, the administration deserves credit for bringing Israel and its Arab antagonists to the negotiating table. Yet I believe the President is wrong to use public pressure tactics against Israel. In the process, he has raised Arab expectations that he'll deliver Israeli concessions and fed Israeli fears that its interests will be sacrificed to an American-imposed solution.

We must remember that even if the Arab-Israeli dispute were resolved tomorrow, there would still be ample causes of conflict in the Middle East: ancient tribal, ethnic and religious hatreds; control of oil and water; the bitterness of the have-nots toward those who have; the lack of democratic institutions to hold leaders accountable to their people and restrain their actions abroad; and the territorial ambitions of Iraq and Syria. We have paid a terrible price for the administration's earlier policies of deference to Saddam Hussein. Today, we must deal with Hafez Assad in Syria but we must not overlook his tyrannical rule and domination of Lebanon.

We need a broader policy toward the Middle East that seeks to limit the flow of arms into the region, as well as the materials needed to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction; promotes democracy and human rights; and preserves our strategic relationship with the one democracy in the region: Israel.

And in Africa as well, we must align America with the rising tide of democracy. The administration has claimed credit for the historic opening to democracy now being negotiated in South Africa, when in fact it resisted the sanctions policy that helped make this hopeful moment possible.

Today, we should concentrate our attention on doing what we can to help end the violence that has ravaged the South African townships, by supporting with our aid the local structures that seek to mediate these disputes and by insisting that the South African government show the same zeal in prosecuting the perpetrators of the violence as it did in the past when pursuing the leaders of the anti-apartheid movement. The administration and our states and cities should only relax our remaining sanctions as it becomes clearer that the day of democracy and guaranteed individual

rights is at hand. And when that day does dawn, we must be prepared to extend our assistance to make sure that democracy, once gained, is not lost there.

An American foreign policy of engagement for democracy will unite our interests and our values. Here's what we should do:

- First, we need to respond more forcefully to one of the greatest security challenges of our time, to help the people of the former Soviet empire demilitarize their societies and build free political and economic institutions. Congress has passed \$500 million to help the Soviets destroy nuclear weapons, and for humanitarian aid. We can do better. As Sen. Sam Nunn and Rep. Les Aspin have argued, we should shift money from marginal military programs to this key investment in our future security. We can radically reduce the threat of nuclear destruction that has dogged us for decades by investing a fraction what would otherwise have to be spent to counter that threat. And, together with our G-7 partners, we can supply the Soviet republics with the food and medical aid they need to survive their first winter of freedom in 74 years. We should do all that we can to coordinate aid efforts with our allies, and to provide the best technical assistance we can to distribute that food and aid.

No national security issue is more urgent than the question of who will control the nuclear weapons and technology of the former Soviet empire. Those weapons pose a threat to the security of every American, to our allies, and to the republics themselves.

I know it may be bad politics to be for any aid program. But we owe it to the people who defeated communism, the people who defeated the coup. And we owe it to ourselves. A small amount spent stabilizing the emerging democracies in the former Soviet empire today will reduce by much more the money we may have to commit to our defense in the future. And it will lead to the creation of lucrative new markets which mean new American jobs. Having won the Cold War, we must not now lose the peace.

- We should recognize Ukraine's independence, as well as that of other republics who make that decision democratically. But we should link U.S. and western non-humanitarian aid to agreements by the republics to abide by all arms agreements negotiated by Soviet authorities, demonstrate responsibility with regard to nuclear weapons, demilitarize their economies, respect minority rights, and proceed with market and political reforms.
- We should use our diplomatic and economic leverage to increase the material incentives to democratize and raise the costs for those who won't. We have every right to condition our foreign aid and debt relief policies on demonstrable progress toward democracy and market reforms. In extreme cases, such as that of China, we should condition favorable trade terms on political liberalization and responsible international conduct.
- We need to support evolving institutional structures favorable to countries struggling with the transition to democracy and markets, such as the new European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, whose mission is to rebuild the societies of Central and Eastern Europe. We are right to encourage the European Community to open its doors to those societies, perhaps by creating an affiliate status that carries some but not all of the privileges of membership.
- We should encourage private American investment in the former Soviet empire. The Soviet republics, after all, are rich in human and natural resources. One day, they and Eastern Europe could be lucrative markets for us.
- We should regard increased funding for democratic assistance as a legitimate part of our national security budget. We should support groups like the National Endowment for Democracy, which work openly rather than covertly to promote democratic pluralism and free markets abroad. I would encourage both the Agency for International Development and the U.S. Information Agency to channel more of their resources to promoting democracy. And just as Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America helped bring the truth to the people of those societies, we should create a Radio Free Asia to carry news and hope to China and elsewhere.
- Finally, just as President Kennedy launched the Peace Corps 30 years ago, we should create a Democracy Corps today that will send thousands of talented American volunteers to countries that need their legal, financial, political expertise.

Restoring America's Economic Leadership

Our second major strategic challenge is to help lead the world into a new era of global growth. Any governor who's tried to create jobs over the last decade knows that experience in international economics is essential and that success in the global economy must be at the core of national security in the 1990s.

Without growth abroad, our own economy cannot thrive. U.S. exports of goods and services will be over a half-trillion dollars in 1991 -- about 10 percent of our economy. Without global growth, healthy international competition turns all too readily to economic warfare. Without growth and economic progress, there can be no true economic justice among or within nations.

I believe the negotiations on an open trading system in the GATT are of extraordinary importance. And I support the negotiation of a North American Free Trade Agreement, so long as it's fair to American farmers and workers, protects the environment, and observes decent labor standards.

Freer trade abroad means more jobs at home. Every \$1 billion in U.S. exports generates 20-30,000 more jobs. We must find ways to help developing nations finally overcome their debt crisis, which has lessened their capacity to buy American goods and probably cost us 1.5 million American jobs.

We must be strong at home to lead and maintain global growth. Our weakness at home has caused even our economic competitors to worry about our stubborn refusal to establish a national economic strategy that will regain our economic leadership and restore opportunity for the middle class.

How can we lead when we have gone from being the world's largest creditor country to the world's largest debtor nation --now owing the world \$405 billion? When we depend on foreigners for \$100 billion a year of financing, we're not the masters of our own destiny.

I spoke in my last lecture about how we must rebuild our nation's economic greatness, for the job of restoring American's competitive edge truly begins at home. I have offered a program to build the most well-educated and well-trained workforce in the world, and put our national budget to work on programs that make America richer, not more indebted.

Our economic strength must become a central defining element of our national security policy. We must organize to compete and win in the global economy. We need a commitment from American business and labor to work together to make world-class products. We must be prepared to exchange some short-term benefits -- whether in the quarterly profit statement or in archaic work rules -- for long-term success.

The private sector must maintain the initiative, but government has an indispensable role. A recent Department of Commerce report is a wake-up call that we are falling behind our major competitors in Europe and Japan on emerging technologies that will define the high-paying jobs of the future -- like advanced materials, biotechnology, superconductors, and computer-integrated manufacturing.

I have mentioned a civilian advanced research projects agency to work closely with the private sector, so that its priorities are not set by government alone. We have hundreds of national laboratories with extraordinary talent that have put the United States at the forefront of military technology. We need to reorient their mission, working with private companies and universities, to advance technologies that will make our lives better and create tomorrow's jobs.

Not enough of our companies engage in export -- just 15 percent of our companies account for 85 percent of our exports. We have to meet our competitors' efforts to help smaller and medium-sized businesses identify and gain foreign markets.

And most important, government must assure that international competition is fair by insisting to our European, Japanese and other trading partners that if they won't play by the rules of an open trading system, then we will play by theirs.

We have no more important bilateral relationships than our alliance with Japan, a relationship that has matured from one of dependency in the 1950s to one of partnership today. Our relationship is based on ties of democracy, but as we cooperate, we also compete. And the maturity of our relationship allows American Presidents, as I will, to insist on fair play. As we put our own economic house in order, Japan must open the doors of its economic house, or our partnership will be imperiled with consequences for all the world.

Now we must understand, as never have before, that our national security is largely economic. The success of our engagement in the world depends not on the headlines it brings to Washington politicians, but on the benefits it brings to hardworking middle-class Americans. Our "foreign" policies are not really foreign at all.

When greenhouse gas emissions from developed nations warm the atmosphere and CFCs eat away at the ozone layer, our beaches and farmlands and people are threatened. When drugs flood into our country from South America and Asia, our cities suffer and our children are put at

risk. When a Libyan terrorist can go to an airport in Europe and check a bomb in a suitcase that kills hundreds of people, our freedom is diminished and our people live in fear.

So let us no longer define national security in the narrow military terms of the Cold War. We can no longer afford to have foreign and domestic policies. We must devise and pursue national policies that serve the needs of our people by uniting us at home and restoring America's greatness in the world. To lead abroad, a President of the United States must first lead at home.

Half a century ago, this country emerged victorious from an all-consuming war into a new era of great challenge. It was a time of change, a time for new thinking, a time for working together to build a free and prosperous world, a time for putting that war behind us. In the aftermath of that war, President Harry Truman and his successors forged a bipartisan consensus in America that brought security and prosperity for 20 years.

Today we need a President, a public and a policy that are not caught up in the wars of the past -- not World War II, not Vietnam, not the Cold War. What we need to elect in 1992 is not the last President of the 20th century, but the first President of the 21st century.

This spring, when the troops came home from the Persian Gulf, we had over 100,000 people at a welcome home parade in Little Rock. Veterans came from all across the state -- not just those who had just returned from the Gulf, but men and women who had served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. I'll never forget how moved I was as I watched them march down the street to our cheers, and saw the Vietnam veterans finally being given the honor they deserved all along. The divisions we have lived with for the last two decades seemed to fade away amid the common outburst of triumph and gratitude.

That is the spirit we need as we move into this new era. As President Lincoln told Congress in another time of new challenge, in 1862:

"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country. Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history."

Thank you very much.