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Important!

An American Task

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The most important, even urgent, task facing Americans today is to educate ourselves about the realities of international relations. Our future as a nation, as well as the plans and dreams of millions of individual Americans, rests with our success or failure in this field in which we have very little training and limited practical experience.

At the outset, we must understand that each of us must be informed. Our foreign policy is no longer the exclusive property of a limited number of men; every time we vote (or don’t vote) we indicate a choice for one policy or another. Quite often, of course, we are not aware of this, thus ignoring our own vital interests in this crucial area of public policy. An awareness of world politics, its intimate relation to our personal lives and its role in our national destiny is our first obligation.

Basic principles

Closely related to this concern for international understanding is the necessity of mastering the basic principles of international politics. Somehow, without any serious effort to study the complex principles of world politics, we fancy ourselves authorities on world problems and make important judgments which in any other subject we would never hazard without careful analysis. Before we attempt to evaluate our foreign policy, or that of another nation, we should ask ourselves several questions:

1. What is the nature of the multiple nation-wide system in which our nation lives?
2. What are the legitimate objectives of a nation’s foreign policy?
3. How can the United States use the vast power it presently possesses to promote the welfare of its own citizens as well as that of other peoples?

These questions challenge us with opportunities on a scale no previous generation of Americans ever faced. Never have we held so much power, or possessed so great a responsibility for its wise and patient use. Most of us have come to the realization, however reluctantly, that this great power must be used and that our role in world leadership is inescapable.

But how does the citizen in such a nation think and act? How does he regard his individual role in so great a scheme of things?

First, each of us must learn that to survive he must act rationally, rather than from blind emotion, hysterical prejudice or uncritical naivete. We cannot have peace by thinking only in terms of solving our problems with other nations through force. While power is at the heart of our present system its wisest use is in its restraint, its most effective contribution in creating rather than destroying.

Using our strength

Second, our strategy for peace must use our undeniable strength to create a more stable political structure and to stimulate economic advance. This is a cooperative task, often calling for our planning and working with many friends and allies in strange and little-known places. We cannot hope for stability if we speak of nothing but conflict, nor can we expect the restive peoples of the world to remain quiet under economic poverty or political frustration. America’s strength will be used to encourage, to enlighten and to aid, or our power will be endlessly and pointlessly dissipated and our leadership rejected.

Be patient

Finally, we must learn to be patient. Just as our complex problems in domestic politics require time for study and solution, so will the infinitely more complicated issues of world politics require time to resolve themselves. Our impatience with our allies, with the United Nations and with our own leaders has retarded our progress, unduly complicated our problems and jeopardized our role of world leaders.

Leadership, however, has its rewards as surely as it has its responsibilities. All of us can take pride in our national commitment to a policy of peace and progress, however painful and slow the course we run. And every one of us can resolve that only over our protest will American power be used to enslave, to conquer or to debase the aspirations which challenge the better angles of our nature.