

Address by

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Vice President of the United States

before

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OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

WASHINGTON

An Address On

VIETNAM AND THE SECURITY  
OF THE FREE WORLD

With the compliments of  
The Vice President

*"Today you begin your service in the most powerful military establishment yet known to man. You can be rightfully proud of your new responsibility. But as you serve, I ask you to know and to ponder the cause that you uphold. I ask you to remember the promise of America."*



Today, you receive your commissions as officers in the service of your country. As such, you will be associated with military power far beyond that ever seen before on earth.

A little more than a year ago, at Johns Hopkins University, our President spoke of military power. "We often say how impressive power is," he said. "But I do not find it impressive at all. The guns and the bombs, the rockets and the warships, are all symbols of human failure. They are necessary symbols. They protect what we cherish. But they are witness to human folly."

I think that few Americans would disagree with what President Johnson said—few, particularly, among those who wear our nation's military uniform.

### Our Military Leaders

It is to the eternal credit of this country that some of our finest military officers have been great civilians at heart. I think of General Eisenhower, General Bradley, and General Marshall, to mention just a few. No Americans have demonstrated a greater dedication to freedom and a greater respect for civilian authority than these men.

There is something else that needs to be said about our military men. They are nation-builders as well, and they are engaged in this task in many places on this earth—building schools, teaching, opening health centers, doing the works of peace as well as of war.

### No Arrogance in U.S. Power

I have heard it said that our country today suffers from an "arrogance of power."  
I dispute that.

If anything, our country has been—in my generation and yours—perhaps overhastant in the necessary application of its power.

As a people, we abhor the use of force. We oppose coercion. We suspect those who give orders. We live by the creed, and rightly so, that each person and each nation should have maximum freedom to pursue individual destiny—so long as that pursuit does not trample on the rights of others.

In our time, there has been some trampling. And, because of our hesitancy in the use of power, we have sometimes waited too long to respond to it—yes, with tragic result.

And I don't mean this just in the international sense. It took us a long time in this century to get very excited about trampling going on among our fellow citizens.

### Positive Efforts for the Oppressed

But we ultimately did respond, and we are responding still. We did not respond merely in the sense of punishing transgressors. No, we responded, and are responding, with positive laws, actions, and ideas to lift the oppressed.

There is no negative philosophy behind our efforts today to give the Negro American an unfettered chance to get an even break in life. Nor is there anything negative about our efforts, in America's urban ghettos, to make the walls come tumbling down . . . nor in our efforts to help young children, from families bent by generations of poverty, break out of desperate spirals of despair and hopelessness.

We do, however, maintain police forces. And—unless the Great Society, this better America that we work and pray for, comes to full achievement sooner than any of us think—we'll need them for some time to come.

This does not mean that we are committed to the use of force—it is evidence, rather, that the business of democracy is still unfinished.

### Reaction to Overseas Challenges

If our reaction time has been slow at home, it has been slower in the world.

Let us be frank: It took two disastrous world wars to convince us that we had better take an interest in what was happening around us.

Since the end of World War II, we have engaged ourselves. I will not recite today the accomplishments of the Marshall Plan, of Point Four, of Food for Peace. Nor will I speculate about what might have happened in the world had we not stood firm in Berlin, in Korea, or in the Cuban missile crisis. Each one of these decisions carried with it the possibility of war—and in the case of Korea, the actuality of war. The

role of leadership is not an easy one. It is hard and dangerous, but it is necessary. Yet we only begin to appreciate the massive tasks which still face us ahead.

### Challenge in Vietnam

Today there is a challenge from totalitarianism in Southeast Asia. There is, in Vietnam, a shooting war.

I have no doubt that, there will inevitably be a settlement in Vietnam—although there may be much pain and heartbreak in between.

But, even if peace were to come tomorrow in Vietnam, we would face a world still on the verge of daily explosion.

For we live in a world where there exist ideologies openly in opposition to man's independence and self-determination.

### World Nuclear Peril

We live in a world where, if a button were pushed at this moment, this city would disappear in a half-hour's time.

We live in a world—and this is the most important of all—where two-thirds of our fellow men live in such abject poverty that it is beyond our imagination.

What chance is there for the future of peace and of the human family in such an environment?

How shall we respond? We must respond with the commitment of our power.

### The Full Range of Power

I do not mean military power alone.

I mean the power of our free economic system. I mean the power of our well-trained and dedicated people. I mean the power of our compassion. I mean the power of our ideas.

More powerful than any army is an idea whose time has come.

### The Revolution of Human Freedom

The idea of our time is that of our own American Revolution: That men ought to have the right to govern themselves . . . that men should be able to make their own choices, to chart their own lives.

This is the real revolution in the world. It has little to do with Karl Marx or with the racial supremacists or with the people who march in jackboots.

This is the revolution of human freedom.

And, if you put your ear to the ground, you can hear the tramping feet of that revolution from a million villages around this earth. People are on the march. They will not be denied.

Nor shall they be.

Whether oppression exists in an Asian rice field, where a man's home is burned, his crop stolen, his son kidnapped; whether it exists in a comfortable, well-lighted motel along an American highway where a Negro father, his wife and children are turned away from lodging . . . we cannot turn our eyes.

### "Monuments" To Justice

Our monuments need not be, after all, a thousand lost golf balls.

Our monuments can be a nation and a world where there will be no knocks at the door at night . . . where there will be no armies of occupation . . . where there will be no breadlines, no political prisons, no swastikas and slogans of hate . . . where no man's skin, or last name, or religion will be a mark against him.

Our monuments can be a nation and world where each young man knows that, so long as he respects the rights of others, the future lies open ahead . . . that he may go where he wishes . . . say what he pleases . . . that he may be himself . . . that he may make his place in life, without any taps on the shoulder.

These are the tasks for American power.

These are the tasks to be undertaken, not with arrogance but with humility and determination.

### Your New Responsibility

Today, you begin your service in the most powerful military establishment yet known to man. You can rightfully be proud of your new responsibility.

But, as you serve, I ask you to know and to ponder the cause that you uphold. I ask you to remember the promise of America. I ask you to know the precious ideal that depends upon you for its protection. It is the ideal that men were born to be free. You are the guardians of that ideal—the protectors not only of our own freedom, but the freedom of others, both those who presently have it and those who aspire to it.