

# American Preparedness

By Theodore Roosevelt

*In an address at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, delivered on July 21, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt said:*

I HAVE a very strong feeling about the Panama Exposition. It was my good fortune to take the action in 1903, failure to take which, in exactly the shape I took it, would have meant that no Panama Canal would have been built for half a century, and, therefore, that there would have been no exposition to celebrate the building of the canal. In everything we did in connection with the acquiring of the Panama Zone we acted in a way to do absolute justice to all other nations, to benefit all other nations, including especially the adjacent States, and to render the utmost service, from the standpoint alike of honor and of material interest, to the United States. I am glad that this is the case, for if there were the slightest taint upon our title or our conduct it would have been an improper and shameful thing to hold this exposition.

The building of the canal nearly doubles the potential efficiency of the United States Navy, as long as it is fortified and is in our hands; but if left unfortified it would at once become a menace to us.

What is true as to our proper attitude in regard to the canal is no less true as regards our proper attitude concerning the interests of the United States taken as a whole. The canal is to be a great agency for peace; it can be such only, and exactly in proportion as it increased our potential efficiency in war.

Those men who like myself believe that the highest duty of this nation is to prepare itself against war so that it may safely trust its honor and interest to its own strength are advocating merely that we do as a nation regard-

ing our general interests what we have already done in Panama. If, instead of acting as this nation did in the Fall of 1903, we had confined ourselves to debates in Congress and diplomatic notes; if, in other words, we had treated eloquence as a substitute for action, we would have done nobody any good, and for ourselves we would have earned the hearty derision of all other nations—the canal would not even have been begun at the present day, and there would have been a general consensus of international opinion to the effect that we were totally unfit to perform any of the duties of international life, especially in connection with the Western hemisphere.

Unfortunately in the last few years we have as regards pretty much everything not connected with the Isthmus of Panama so failed in our duty of national preparedness that I fear there actually is a general consensus of opinion to precisely this effect among the nations of the world as regards the United States at the present day. This is primarily due to our unpreparedness.

We have been culpably, well-nigh criminally, remiss as a nation in not preparing ourselves, and if, with the lessons taught the world by the dreadful tragedies of the last twelve months, we continue with soft complacency to stand helpless and naked before the world, we shall excite only contempt and derision if and when disaster ultimately overwhelms us.

Preparedness against war does not invariably avert war any more than a fire department in a city will invariably avert a fire; and there are well-meaning foolish people who point out this fact as offering an excuse for unpreparedness. It would be just as sensible if after the Chicago fire Chicago had announced that it would abolish its fire de-

partment as for our people to take the same view as regards military preparedness. Some years ago I was looking over some very old newspapers contemporaneous with the early establishment of paid fire departments in this country, and to my amusement I came across a letter which argued against a paid fire department upon the ground that the knowledge of its existence would tend to make householders careless, and therefore would encourage fires.

Greece was not prepared for war when she went to war with Turkey a score of years ago. But this fact did not stop the war. It merely made the war unsuccessful for Greece. China was not prepared for war with Japan twenty-odd years ago, nor for war with the Allies who marched to Peking fifteen years ago.

*Colonel Roosevelt then discussed in detail the cases of China and Belgium, comparing Belgium with Switzerland, and asserting that Switzerland would have met Belgium's fate if she had not been prepared to oppose invasion. Then taking up the case of China, he said:*

She has acted on the theory that the worst peace was better than the best war, and therefore she has suffered all the evils of the worst war and the worst peace. The average Chinaman took the view that China was too proud to fight and in practice made evident his hearty approval of the sentiments of that abject pacifist song: "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier," a song which should have as a companion piece one entitled: "I Didn't Raise my Girl to be a Mother," approval of which of course deprives any men or women of all right of kinship with the soldiers and with the mothers and wives of the soldiers, whose valor and services we commemorate on the Fourth of July and on Decoration Day; a song, the singing of which seems incredible to every man and woman capable of being stirred to lofty and generous enthusiasm by the tremendous surge of Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." China has steadily refused to prepare for war.

Accordingly China has had province after province lopped off her, until one-half of her territory is now under Japanese, Russian, English and French control.

The professional pacifists, the peace-at-any-price, non-resistance, universal arbitration people are now seeking to Chinify this country.

During the past year or so this nation has negotiated some thirty all-inclusive peace treaties by which it is agreed that if any issue arises, no matter of what kind, between itself and any other nation, it would take no final steps about it until a commission of investigation had discussed the matter for a year. This was an explicit promise in each case that if American women were raped and American men murdered, as has actually occurred in Mexico; or American men, women, and children drowned on the high seas, as in the case of the *Gulflight* and *Lusitania*; or if a foreign power secured and fortified Magdalena Bay or the Island of St. Thomas, we would appoint a commission and listen to a year's conversation on the subject before taking action.

England and France entered into these treaties with us, and we begged Germany to enter into one, and, although Germany refused, yet if we were right in entering into them with England and France, we deprived ourselves of moral justification in refusing to fulfill their spirit as regards Germany. Personally I believe that it was absolutely necessary when the concrete case arose to repudiate the principle to which we had thus committed ourselves. But it was a shameful thing to have put ourselves in such a position that it had to be repudiated, and it was inexcusable of us to decline to follow the principle in the case of the *Lusitania* without at the same time making frank confession of our error and misconduct by notifying all the powers with whom we had already made the treaties that they were withdrawn, because in practice we had found it impossible and improper to follow out the principle to which they committed us.