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THE RESULTS
AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE BUENOS AIRES
CONFERENCE

ADDRESS BY THE
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THE RESULTS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUENOS AIRES CONFERENCE

It is with unusual satisfaction that I avail myself of this opportunity to review briefly the results and the significance of the Buenos Aires meeting. I welcome the opportunity especially because to those who, like myself, were privileged to take an active part in the work of the Conference, the experience remains a vivid and inspiring memory.

The work of the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace touched the very heart of the tangled complex of problems which today plague the responsible statesmen of the world and upon the solution of which depends so greatly the future welfare of the nations. The 21 American republics have forged among themselves new ties of friendship and peace. More than that they have, in my opinion, made a genuine contribution not only to the safeguarding of peace but to the strengthening of democracy and of international order as well. While dealing with regional problems, the Conference pointed straight at the frightful deterioration of many essential international relationships everywhere and vigorously proclaimed a basic program for their restoration.

I

The Buenos Aires meeting was one of a succession of inter-American conferences which have been, for nearly 50 years, a factor of ever-growing importance in the international life of the Western Hemisphere. There were, how-

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ever, two features of outstanding importance which distinguished it from its predecessors and invested it with the character of a truly extraordinary occasion. The first of these was the subject matter of the Conference itself—its all-embracing concentration upon the problem of safeguarding the maintenance of peace. The second was the dismal world setting, in which the representatives of the American republics assembled for their arduous and momentous labors.

The problem of peace was never absent from the thoughts of those statesmen who had in the past gathered together in major inter-American conferences. Step by step foundations were laid for the organization of pacific relations.

A feeling of mutual trust, an attitude of the “good neighbor”, for some years have been steadily growing among the American republics. I well recall how completely and how gratifyingly that accumulated feeling permeated the atmosphere of the Seventh International Conference of American States, held at Montevideo in 1933. More than any other factor it was responsible for the constructive achievements which made that meeting a memorable occasion in the annals of American history.

But even there opportunity was still lacking for a comprehensive effort to build a complete structure of enduring peace in the Western Hemisphere. It was primarily to launch this vast undertaking that the convocation of the Buenos Aires Conference was proposed by President Roosevelt in his letter, addressed on January 30, 1936, to the chiefs of state of the other 20 American republics.

President Roosevelt’s proposal met with prompt, unanimous, and enthusiastic response. The character of the response and the readiness and vigor with which the American republics engaged in the preparation of the proposed conference made it abundantly clear that the time was ripe for the effort which was in contemplation.

All of us had watched with increasing apprehension the swelling of the angry stream of recent events in world affairs. The tendency almost everywhere was steadily in the direction of international anarchy. Religion and morals, constituting the entire foundation of normal and worth-while international relations and of civilized intercourse itself, were breached, and often flouted, with impunity. International or domestic strife was in progress in some parts of the world and in undisguised preparation in others. The construction of armaments was proceeding on a scale unparalleled in history, and more and more nations were being drawn into the suicidal race, notwithstanding that the late World War and the recent world panic had not been liquidated.

The regime of international law was honored more in the breach than in the observance. Unilateral departure from treaties—or, to put it more bluntly, the policy of breaking a given word—endangered the whole structure of international agreements.

Combined with this, economic policies were being evolved by various governments, supposedly for their individual advantage, devised to restrict and confine trade and to burden commerce with almost medieval restrictions and discriminations. The resulting destruction and artificial diversion of trade were creating, among nations, animosities and resentment and were provoking economic aggression and retaliation. They were causing, within nations, acute economic distress, with declining standards of living and deepening dissatisfaction.

All these conditions and tendencies were breeding widespread unrest, were undermining governmental structures and impairing political stability. They were disrupting democratic institutions and, by correspondingly encouraging and strengthening autocratic rule, were hopelessly handicapping the forces of peace and international order.
All of us knew only too well the destruction and misery which the onrushing stream of all these discordant elements was leaving in its wake. All of us realized only too acutely the even more fearsome consequences that would emerge if the stream were to overflow and widespread military conflict were to engulf our entire civilization.

It was with a clear visualization constantly before them of these unprecedented difficulties and critical conditions that the responsible statesmen of the American republics went to the Buenos Aires Conference.

II

From the very first interchange of views among the delegates, it became manifest that all the American republics are determined in their desire that peace prevail among them, as well as between each of them and the rest of the world. There was no mistaking the concerted will of the 21 nations for an effective renunciation of war as a means of policy and action and for the enthronement of peaceful means as the sole instrument for the adjustment of differences. As the work of the Conference progressed, this solidarity of purpose and unity of determination became more and more crystallized.

The whole Conference was not one in which rival governments sought exclusive national advantages or purposes. Instead, throughout, a similarity of thinking and of outlook demonstrated itself and made our meetings a truly joint effort for a mutually desired purpose. The Conference drew from all present a willing contribution toward a general result which corresponded to the underlying purpose of all.

This was the real condition that made possible a successful conference. This was the fact which explains why the major agreements were brought before the Conference as drafts supported and presented unanimously by the participating governments. What was sought and attained was not a diplomatic victory by any of the nations represented, but full understanding, friendly cooperation, and long-range planning.

Three main premises were accepted by all. The first was that the American hemisphere has a distinct and peculiar contribution to make because no nation in it is driven by any compulsion or professes any right to threaten the peace of its neighbors. The second was that the only safety for all nations is loyal acceptance of a rule of law under which the integrity of every country, large or small, will be assured. The third was that renunciation of war and other similar declarations must be implemented by a method of action which can set into operation almost instantaneously the cooperative effort of the hemisphere in the direction of pacific settlements.

With this in mind, various proposals for implementation were advanced, but they swiftly merged into a single dominant idea: Any threat to the maintenance of peace on this continent must lead to an immediate consultation between all of our governments with a view to seeking common policies and taking common measures which may end a conflict in progress, or prevent a conflict not yet begun.

It was out of these considerations that emerged the major treaties and agreements negotiated at the Conference. These instruments provide a complete consultative system. They are designed thus to bring into active cooperation all 21 governments whenever the peace of the hemisphere is menaced either from within or without, or whenever a sufficiently grave situation arises elsewhere in the world which may create a threat to the peace of the western world.

III

Of the numerous accords reached at Buenos Aires, there were three which, if universally ratified, will constitute an effective organization
various American governments pledge themselves to consult with each other in three different types of circumstances which might threaten their peace. First, in the event that the peace of the American republics is menaced; second, in the event of war between American states; and third, in the event of an international war outside America which might menace the peace of the American republics.

I have faith in the usefulness of this prospective process of consultation. I believe that if and when crises of the kind envisaged should arise, the peoples of the American continent will demand of their governments that they find in consultation the means of avoiding or ending conflict.

In adhering to this agreement, the American republics accept and demonstrate a joint concern for the "peace of the American Republics." This concern was also recognized and set forth in the declaration of principles of inter-American solidarity and cooperation, adopted at the Conference, which declares "that every act susceptible of disturbing the peace of America affects each and every one of them, and justifies the initiation of the procedure of consultation . . . ." In this promise of concerted obligation small states will find assurance. The Government of the United States welcomes this action as completely in line with the historic concern which it has always had for the independence and territorial integrity of this hemisphere.

Third. The additional protocol relative to nonintervention. This agreement reaffirms the convention signed at Montevideo in 1933 which embodies the fundamental principle that "no State has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of others." In the continued reaffirmation of this principle and continued pledge of its observance, the American republics see a guarantee of full equality and complete freedom to manage their own affairs.

for the maintenance of peaceful and cordial relationships between the American republics. These were:

First. The convention to coordinate, extend, and assure the fulfillment of the existing treaties between the American states. In this agreement the American governments reaffirm the obligations they had previously accepted in five international pacts and accords (among which are the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the treaty of nonaggression and conciliation signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1933). These comprise the obligation of the nations to settle, by pacific means, controversies of international character that may arise between them.

The nations furthermore agree to consult and cooperate to make available effective means of pacific settlement. They further pledge themselves that, while such consultation is in progress, the parties in dispute, for a period of at least 6 months, will not have recourse to hostilities or any military action whatever. And those American nations which may be involved in a controversy likewise oblige themselves to report to the other American governments the methods of pacific settlement which they select, as well as the progress made in the adjustment of their dispute.

Lastly, the agreement provides that in the event that, despite these pledges and arrangements, war should occur between any American republics, the other American republics will attempt through consultation to adopt, in their character as neutrals, a common and solidary attitude in order to discourage or prevent the spread or prolongation of hostilities.

Second. The convention for the maintenance, preservation, and reestablishment of peace. This agreement is based on the conviction expressed in its text, "that every war or threat of war affects directly or indirectly all civilized peoples and endangers the great principles of liberty and justice which constitute the American ideal and the standard of American international policy." In its five brief articles the
What a boon to humanity it would be if other groups of nations were, at this crucial stage in world affairs, to give their plighted faith to a similar undertaking—if they were, in a spirit of peace, unity, and moral consecration, to reassert and revitalize the law of nations, international morality, and treaty obligations, and to pledge solemn observance of the doctrine of the equality, the sovereignty, the territorial integrity, and the liberty of all nations.

IV

In addition to the three accords just described, the Conference adopted a number of significant and far-reaching agreements and resolutions calculated to increase the flow of trade, to stimulate cultural interchange, and to improve the methods of communication.

There was general and emphatic agreement that all countries must work toward a system of freer economic interchange, so that the standards of living in the various countries may be gradually raised and the commercial necessities of each country adequately recognized, and that thereby the economic compulsions toward war and domestic strife may be removed. There was equally emphatic agreement that rising economic prosperity, resulting from growing and mutually beneficial international trade, is an essential condition for freedom and for the preservation and strengthening of democratic institutions, and that such institutions constitute a most effective peace insurance.

The Conference unanimously affirmed the necessity and desirability of lessening the present excessive obstacles to international trade and of conducting trade relations on principles which assure equality of treatment. It asserted the necessity of shaping governmental policy to the end that trade will not be diverted into artificial channels created by narrow and forced political arrangement, but will flow along lines of economic benefit. It recog-
nations that their relations with each other should be conducted on the basis of friendly cooperation, of law and justice, and not by the rule of force.

At Buenos Aires the American nations, speaking through their governments, demonstrated their conviction that the maintenance of peace requires the reestablishment of profound respect for international law and a sincere concern for the higher principles of international relationship. It is my firm belief that the agreements, resolutions, and recommendations formulated and adopted at Buenos Aires represent an important step in the direction of the reestablishment and revitalization of international law.

This profession of faith in the desirability and possibility of a world organized for peace and advancing civilization, rather than for war and degrading savagery, is applicable not only to our hemisphere but to all other parts of the world. In other regions external conditions may be different from those which prevail in the American continent. The agreements and arrangements adopted by the American republics may not, in all their detail, meet the requirements of the other continents. But the principles underlying the instruments of peace forged at the Buenos Aires Conference are universal in their application. They, within themselves, constitute an appealing invitation to all nations to accept them without delay.

The right of each country to manage its own affairs free from outside interference; the principle of sovereignty and of equality of states, irrespective of size and strength; sincere respect for law and the pledged word as the foundation of an international order; friendly and cooperative effort to promote enduring peace; mutually advantageous economic intercourse based upon the rule of equal treatment; and mutually broadening and uplifting cultural relationships—all these are indispensable if the governments of the world are to fulfill the sacred trust involved in the task of planning and providing for the safety and welfare of their peoples.

The future of our entire civilization is bound up with the acceptance by all governments of these fundamental tenets of constructive statesmanship. The longer important nations delay their adoption, the graver will be the jeopardy into which all worth-while international relationships will be plunged, and with them the welfare, the happiness, and the civilized existence of all nations. A government which substitutes for these principles, policies based upon extremes of national pride, ambition, aggrandizement, and ever-increasing armaments, renders the greatest possible disservice not only to the world at large but to its own people as well.

VI

The issue which confronted the American republics at the Conference, the issue which confronts today every nation of the earth is clear. In the portentous future which lies immediately ahead, will the nations move further in the direction of increasing distrust and suspicion, of destructive commercial policy, of growing economic antagonism, of unprece-
dented races in armaments, of the worst extremes of militarism—and thus inevitably plunge many parts of the world either into a military catastrophe or a crushing economic collapse? Or will the nations, as at Buenos Aires, embrace a program of understanding and trust, of friendly and peaceful relations, of fair dealing and cooperative effort for the restoration of conditions of economic well-being?

So far as the Western Hemisphere is concerned, the answer has thus been given. Our own country is prepared to do its full part to bring it about that, on the basis of the arrangements reached at Buenos Aires, the nations of
this continent will order their lives upon a sane balance of national freedom and practical international cooperation. We are confident that our sister republics will act likewise.

If we succeed, this will remain a healthy and hopeful hemisphere. And its 21 nations, with their quarter of a billion inhabitants, freed by their common action from the dread and scourge of war, should be able to encourage and, to the extent consistent with their traditional policies, cooperate with other nations to surmount their difficulties by similar methods.

There is every reason to believe that friends of peace all over the world, hitherto laboring under the utmost discouragement, have taken increased hope from what was said and done at Buenos Aires. It is not too much to say that the acts and utterances of the Conference are at once a challenge to the statesmanship of the world and a heartening symbol to the peoples of all nations.

I cannot believe that it is beyond the power of the statesmen of today to check and reverse the drift toward international anarchy, in the direction of which some parts of the world find themselves moving. The work of the recent Conference proves, in my judgment, that no part of the world needs to reconcile itself fatalistically to the inevitability of war. Upon the same basic principles that were implemented at Buenos Aires, the entire world can—and, I hope with all my heart, will—build a structure of enduring peace.