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After President Harry Truman relieves him of his command for insubordination, General Douglas MacArthur defends his conduct of the Korean War in a final address to Congress. "Old soldiers never die," he famously says, "they just fade away."

Keywords


Citation

MLA
General MacArthur Gives Farewell Address to Congress

General DOUGLAS MacARTHUR: I called for reinforcements but was informed that reinforcements were not available. I made clear that if not permitted to destroy the enemy build-up bases north of the Yalu; if not permitted to utilize the friendly Chinese force of some 600,000 men on Formosa; if not permitted to blockade the China coast, to prevent the Chinese Reds from getting succor from without, and if there were to be no hope of major reinforcements, the position of the command from the military standpoint forbade victory.

We could hold in Korea by constant maneuver, and at an approximate area where our supply line advantages were in balance with the supply line disadvantages of the enemy. But we could hope at best for only an indecisive campaign, with its terrible and constant attrition upon our forces, if the enemy utilized his full military potential.

I have constantly called for the new political decisions essential to a solution. Efforts have been made to distort my position. It has been said in effect that I was a warmonger. Nothing could be further from the truth.

[Applause]

I know war as few other men now living know it. And nothing to me [applause], and nothing to me is more revolting. I have long advocated its complete abolition, as its very destructiveness on both friend and foe has rendered it useless as a means of settling international disputes.

[Applause]

Indeed on the second day of September 1945, just following the surrender of the Japanese nation on the Battleship Missouri, I formally cautioned as follows:

Men, since the beginning of time, have sought peace. Various methods through the ages have been attempted to devise an international process to prevent or settle disputes between nations. From the very start, workable methods were found insofar as individual citizens were concerned. But the mechanics of an instrumentality of larger international scope have never been successful. Military alliances, balances of
power, leagues of nations, all in turn fail, leaving the only path to be by way of the crucible of war. The utter destructiveness of war now blocks out this alternative, we have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual requiescent, an improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all material and cultural developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit if are to save the flesh.

[Applause]
But once war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War’s very object is victory, not prolonged indecision. [Applause] In war, there is no substitute for victory.

There are some who for varying reasons would appease Red China. They are blind to history’s clear lesson. For history teaches with unmistakable emphasis that appeasement but begets new and bloodier war. It points to no single instance where this end has justified that means, where appeasement has led to more than a sham peace. Like blackmail, it lays the basis for new and successively greater demands, until as in blackmail violence becomes the only alternative.

Why, my soldiers asked of me, surrender military advantages to an enemy in the field? I could not answer. [Applause]
Some may say to avoid spread of the conflict into an all-out war with China, others to avoid Soviet intervention. Neither explanation seems valid. For China is already engaging with the maximum power it can commit, and the Soviet will not necessarily mesh its actions with our moves. Like a cobra, any new enemy will more likely strike whenever it feels that the relativity and military or other potential is in its favor on a worldwide basis.

The tragedy of Korea is further heightened by the fact that, as military action is confined to its territorial limits. It condemns that nation which it is our purpose to save, to suffer the devastating impact of full naval and air bombardment while the enemies’ sanctuaries are fully protected from such attack and devastation.

Of the nations of the world, Korea alone, up to now, is the sole one which has risked its all against communism. The magnificence of the courage and fortitude of the Korean people defies description. They have chosen to risk death rather than slavery. Their last words to me were, ‘Don’t scuttle the Pacific.’ [Applause]
I have just left your fighting sons in Korea. They have met all tests there, and I can report to you without reservation that they are splendid in every way. [Applause]
It was my constant effort to preserve them and end this savage conflict honorably, and with the least loss of time and a minimum sacrifice of life. Its growing bloodshed has caused me the deepest anguish and anxiety. Those gallant men will remain often in my thoughts, and in my prayers always. [Applause]
I am closing my 52 years of military service. [Applause] When I joined the army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many
times since I took the oath on the plane at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished. But I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day, which proclaimed most proudly that “old soldiers never die, they just fade away.” And, like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Goodbye.

[Standing Ovation]