

Editor's Note:

This is the famous “give me bread or give me bullets” response that MacArthur gave to Congress over the cost of sending food to Japan post-war.

Unfortunately for us historians, he didn't actually quite say that – you have to read “between the lines” in the statement he issued to Congress, which was reprinted in:

Political Reorientation of Japan, September 1945 to September 1948
By Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Government Section
Pages 763-764

IN SUPPORT OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR OCCUPATION PURPOSES

20 February 1947.

In compliance with the request of the War Department for his views to be presented to Congress in support of appropriations for occupational purposes, General MacArthur dispatched the following message on 20 February 1947:

There is a popular misconception that the achievement of victory in modern war, wherein a clash of ideologies is involved, is solely dependent upon victory in the field. History itself clearly refutes this concept. It offers unmistakable proof that the human impulses which generated the will to war, no less than the material sinews of war, must be destroyed. Nor is it sufficient that such human impulses merely yield to the temporary shock of military defeat. There must be a complete spiritual reformation, such as will not only control the defeated generation but will exert a dominant influence upon the generations to follow as well. Unless this is done, victory is but partially complete and offers hope for little more than an armistice between one campaign and the next—as the great lesson and warning of experience is that victorious leaders of the past have too often contented themselves with the infliction of military defeat upon the enemy power, without extending that victory by dealing with the root causes which led to war as an inevitable consequence. Thus in the occupation of Japan, while we have destroyed Japan's war making power and neutralized from a material standpoint its war making potential, we are yet in the process of finalizing the victory that the ensuing peace at war's great cost may be vital and real. This will require a complete reformation of the Japanese people—reformation from feudalistic slavery to human freedom, from the immaturity that comes of mythical teachings and legendary ritualism to the maturity of enlightened knowledge and truth, from the blind fatalism of war to the considered realism of peace.

In the accomplishment of this purpose, all policy in the administration of the occupation is attuned to those very ideals for which we fought—that by example we may point the way. This in turn is infusing in the Japanese mind both an understanding of and an enthusiasm for our own concept in human relationship—a concept which embodies within itself a spiritual repugnance to war.

If we are successful in the accomplishment of this purpose, we shall not have finalized the victory by bringing under control basic causes of war, but we shall have erected here in the Western Pacific a strong bulwark against the reappearance and spread of those same causes which are calculated to plunge the world into future war—for history has shown the futility of dependence upon the violence of war alone to preserve the peace. This is the stake for which we strive. It is yet too early to measure the degree of final success, but Japan is now

already governed by this form of democratic rule and the people are absorbing its substance. They have learned by the hard way the futility of resort to arms for individual and national advancement, and appear to have completely assimilated this bitter lesson. Having repudiated war and renounced all rights of belligerency, they have placed their full reliance for future protection on the good faith and justice of mankind, and are proceeding through legislated reform to develop here a state dedicated, in full reality, to the welfare of the people. Given encouragement this can prove the exemplification of the superiority, in the advancement of the human race, of moral force, generated by spiritual strength, over physical force—with all resources employed for constructive rather than destructive purposes. A spontaneous development which offers both encouragement and inspiration as a measure of the progress of this concept lies in the increasing number of the Japanese people—already estimated at over two million—who, under the stimulus of religious tolerance and freedom, have moved to embrace the Christian faith as a means to fill the spiritual vacuum left in Japanese life by collapse of their past faith. This is partially responsive to the opportunity for comparison between the qualities of the old and the new—to an understanding of those principles of tolerance, justice and human decency which govern our action in the tragedy of their defeat—and, more particularly, from close-hand observation of the American soldier standing in their midst, reflecting, as he does, those fine traits of character, outgrowth of the American home. Through the firm encouragement and strengthening of this yet frail spearhead of Christianity in the Far East lies hope that to hundreds of millions of backward peoples, now easy prey to the ignorant fatalism of war, may come a heretofore unknown spiritual strength based upon an entirely new concept of human dignity and human purpose and human relationship—the very antithesis to those evil attributes which throughout history have led to war.

The American forces committed to occupational duty in Japan, now cut to only a fraction of their former strength, are at the lowest numerical level consistent with either reasonable security or the accomplishment of the regeneration of an entire race from its traditional threat to peace to a powerful bulwark against the recurrence of war—with its orderly emergence from the chaos of destructive defeat to economic, political, and social stability. And highlighting all else, of course, lies the grave responsibility of protecting our national security against future threat to our Pacific Coast. In short, the consolidation of the gains which victory has brought, that we may have peace. Our task is thus but a final phase of war, and it is inescapable that its avoidance may only be at the expense of victory itself.

In war the complete blockade of a force dependent for food and other supply from outside sources is the most effective weapon known to military science. It was through the use of this weapon that our starving men on Bataan and Corregidor were finally forced to yield to the enemy hordes who surrounded them. It was through the use of this same weapon, more than any other, that the Japanese Armed Forces were finally brought to the futility of further resistance, as segment after segment of their extended position, by envelopment, were cut off from needed supplies on the grim road back. Thereafter, when reconquest of the Philippines completely severed the Japanese war-gained empire and permitted a blockade of the Japanese home islands themselves, traditionally dependent for sustenance from sources without, total collapse became imminent.

Since the surrender this blockade of the Japanese home islands has been continued, extended, and intensified. Not only have Manchuria, Korea and Formosa, long contributors to Japanese sustenance, been taken away but many millions of Japanese citizens have been repatriated from the outside back into these four home islands. Trade and financial intercourse with the rest of the world is by our decree so prohibited as to constitute economic strangulation.

Cut off from our own projected relief supplies in these circumstances, countless Japanese would face starvation—and starvation breeds mass unrest, disorder, and violence. Worse still, it renders a people easy prey to any ideology, however evil, which bears with it life sustaining food. To permit such a condition to arise would be to repudiate those very ideals and principles on which our country has always stood and for which many of our countrymen selflessly have died. For under the responsibilities of victory the Japanese people are now our prisoners, no less than did the surviving men on Bataan become their prisoners when that Peninsula fell. As a consequence of the ill treatment including starvation of Allied prisoners in Japanese hands, we have tried and executed many Japanese officers upon proof of responsibility. Yet can we justify such punitive action if we ourselves in reversed circumstances, but with hostilities at end, fail to provide the food to sustain life among those Japanese people over whom we now stand guard within the narrow confines of their home islands?

Nor must sight be lost of the circumstances under which such food and other emergency relief supplies are provided. There is involved an appropriation of public funds only for the purpose of their acquisition, the corresponding cost becoming thereafter a charge against Japan, which should be protected by a first lien on every asset within Japan. It is not charity, nor have I found that the Japanese want charity. It is but a means to secure needed life preserving sustenance until such time as

we ourselves relax the restrictions which now prevent Japan from securing the same by the normal methods of trade and commerce with the other nations of the world. Nor, if reasonable precautions are taken, will the American taxpayer ultimately be out of pocket a single dollar as a result.

At most it is but a temporary measure in discharge of a clear responsibility which victory has imposed. It must be and remain our firm purpose to restore peace and normalcy at the very earliest time practicable, and it is my full intention to recommend removal of the existing military controls over Japan just as soon as civilian controls safely may be substituted. History points out the unmistakable lesson that military occupations serve their purpose at best only for a limited time, after which a deterioration rapidly sets in—deterioration of the populace in an occupied country which becomes increasingly restive under the deprivation of personal freedom, inherent in such a situation—and deterioration of the occupying forces which in time assume a dominant power complex pointing to the illusion of a master race.

While I have herein discussed our national responsibilities of occupation largely from the viewpoint of Japan, much that I have said applies with even more poignant force to Korea, wherein our public commitment to assist in the establishment of a stable free government, for a friendly people liberated by allied arms, imposes upon us an even more solemn obligation.

I am in fullest accord with the desire of the American Congress to practice the most rigid economy in the administration of Government which our national interests reasonably may permit. Economy in both blood and supply was a rule which guided every strategic plan in the prosecution of our phase of the Pacific War—and economy has since been the rule here in the extension and consolidation of victory. A rationalization of the cost involved in this great task shows it to be, in the aggregate, infinitesimal compared with that which might have been incurred in a comparable period of extended combat.

I have observed the workings of the American Congress for many years, and have never seen it hesitate vigorously to preserve and advance our American interests. When provided with full knowledge of the situation, I do not believe, therefore, that it will take any action which would prejudice fulfillment of occupation objectives, to which we are already committed and in honor bound, as a prerequisite to finalizing the victory and insuring the peace.

MACARTHUR.

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