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THE QUEST FOR A NEW WORLD LEADERSHIP

Oscar Arias Sánchez
Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress

Preface

Oscar Arias Sánchez, former President of Costa Rica and winner of the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize for his work toward peace in Central America, presented "The Quest for New World Leadership" at the Woodrow Wilson Center's Evening Dialogue of March 19, 1992.

Evening Dialogues, which are made possible by the generosity of the Xerox Foundation, are special occasions at the Wilson Center. The series is one of the most visible ways in which the Center achieves its mission of bringing together "the world of learning and the world of public affairs." Typically, the evening begins with a reception and is followed by dinner and remarks by the guest speaker. The speaker often engages in a short discussion session with the audience after the presentation.

Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez was born in Heredia, Costa Rica, on September 13, 1940. He attended elementary school in his hometown of Heredia and high school at Saint Francis High School in San José. Dr. Arias studied law and economics at the University of Costa Rica. In 1969, he received a Master's degree in economics and political science from the London School of Economics. He completed his studies in 1974 at the University of Essex, where he received his Ph.D. in political science.

In 1970, Dr. Arias began working in the public sector as the economic advisor to the President of Costa Rica and as vice president of the Costa Rican Central Bank. From 1972 to 1975, he served as director of the Office for National Planning and Economic Policy. His training and experience led to numerous publications on the political, economic, and social life of Costa Rica.

Dr. Arias's political career began in 1977 when he ran for Congress on the National Liberation Party ticket. He was elected to Congress for the 1978 to 1982 term, but relinquished his seat in 1981 to serve as General Secretary of the National Liberation Party. He served in this position until 1985, when he became the National Liberation Party's candidate for the presidency. In 1986, Dr. Arias was elected President of Costa Rica.

As President, Dr. Arias focused on encouraging the development of Costa Rica. His administration implemented various initiatives in housing, education, science, technology, women's rights, and environmental conservation. Recognizing that violence in Central America threatened its potential for development, Dr. Arias dedicated his efforts to promoting peace in the region. His commitment was based on the conviction that development cannot be achieved without peace and that lasting peace requires development and democracy.

Dr. Arias's efforts to encourage peace in Central America culminated with the signing of the Central American Peace Plan at Esquipulas, Guatemala, in August of 1987. The presidents of Central America committed themselves to the pursuit of dialogue and consensus as tools for resolving conflict and finding solutions to national problems. Dr. Arias's efforts and achievements in the region's struggle for peace earned him the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1988, Dr. Arias devoted the monetary award accompanying the Nobel Peace Prize to the creation of the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress. The Foundation was established as part of his promise to continue promoting the welfare of the neediest sectors of society. Today, Dr. Arias works at the Foundation on the development of the Center for Peace and Reconciliation. Through studies, workshops, and seminars, the Center is serving as Dr. Arias's institutional arm in his continued efforts toward peace, development, and democracy.

The Woodrow Wilson Center's Evening Dialogue with Dr. Arias was a delightful and informative event. The following is the text of Dr. Arias's presentation.

THE QUEST FOR A NEW WORLD LEADERSHIP

I am pleased that your institution bears the name of President Woodrow Wilson, whose acts and ideas have affected people throughout the world. The United States's political and military involvement in the tragic European conflict known as the First World War and the initiatives to create the League of Nations signified an international transformation which continues to affect us today. Thus, it is not strange that a citizen of a small Third World nation remembers that great statesman while reflecting upon the new international order and about the present and future role of the United States.

Analysts increasingly assert that the United States truly won the Cold War. For them, the Soviet Union, the political structure that was perceived as this country's principal ideological and military threat for decades, has disappeared. This would indicate a United States victory as much as the surrender of the enemy at the end of the First and Second World Wars did.

The Cold War may have ended just a few months ago. It is still too early to know if this new international situation embodies the conditions necessary to strengthen lasting peace, and if this new basis of the United States predominance will endure.

Uncertain situations characterized by civil war, economic failure, and the threat of social chaos now prevail in several previously communist regions of Europe and Asia. These are not the conditions of stability that will enable us to consecrate victory and win the prize of peace: we must be cautious not to confuse the end of a battle with the final end of the war.

From the European experience, for example, some historians view the two great wars of this century as the same conflict, tinged by a type of prevailing armistice between 1918 and 1939. In this light, the Second World War was merely a revival of the First. This interpretation provides a valuable insight into the potential direction of international relations in the post-Cold War world, encouraging us to analyze and better understand some events that have still not been fully appreciated.

We should remember that, over time, historians tend to discover patterns and processes that were not always envisioned by the players themselves. In the future, a glance at the economic leadership that Japan and Germany exerted at the end of the twentieth century could reduce the historical importance attributed to the military defeat of both countries in 1945. Similarly, the present situation of the former Soviet states may be used by future analysts to question them as victors of the Second World War. In ten years, it will still be difficult for a political science teacher to explain the dramatic changes that have characterized the present decade to young students.

When we invoke the name of President Wilson, we recall his vision of an organization to debate international differences that had previously led to violent conflict. That proposal responded to the idea, prevailing after the First World War, that modern war had become so devastating for all parties involved that the traditional concept of victory no longer had any meaning. It was also based upon the hope that such war would never be possible in the future.

President Wilson advanced the view that war had become a meaningless recourse that future leaders must never consider as a political instrument. He believed that the men and women of this planet could create a new international order to peacefully resolve conflicts. Such an order would establish an international organization to universalize democracy and equality among states. The world would be "secure for democracy," as he conceived it in his speech declaring war on Germany. To assure this, world leaders must create a general association of nations that guaranteed the right to self-determination and territorial integrity of all states, as the Treaty of Versailles and the Charter of the League of Nations did.

The situation that Europe and the United States faced in 1918 somewhat parallels that which the world encounters in 1992. The Persian Gulf War illustrated that there is an increasing need to strengthen the United Nation's role in the preservation of peace. At the same time, more than ever before, the people throughout the world understand that peace and national development can only be sustained in democratic systems. And today, as in 1918, the United States emerges with new responsibilities. These responsibilities stem as much from its economic and military might as from the legacy of liberty, justice, and equality of the American Revolution.

The world's future now depends largely upon the decisions made by the people of the United States and their leaders. Regardless of which conditions actually shaped the global situation, this undeniably powerful nation faces a fundamental choice. It may either choose to exercise a leadership based on the ethical principles that lie at the root of its national

origins, or to attempt to impose a universal economic and political system concerned only with its own hegemonic interests, or to adopt a new version of isolationism by repudiating its responsibilities as a great power. Whatever the path this nation chooses, it will have greatly defined the fortune and future characteristics of the world.

We can only speculate about how the United States would have influenced world events between the two World Wars had President Wilson's proposal succeeded. In particular, it is appropriate to ask ourselves if the United States's participation in the League of Nations would have promoted peace and impeded acceleration of the conflicts that led to the Second World War.

Through these questions, I allude to the United States's citizens' tendency to adopt an isolationist attitude. This isolationism is often justified by the desire, expressed long ago by George Washington, to keep the nation out of the international disputes that filled Europe.

This position is perfectly understandable for a nation seeking independence. From a Latin American point of view, however, it is extremely paradoxical and it revives painful memories. The isolationism of the United States was never translated into a refusal to intervene in the internal affairs of our countries. To cite only two examples, it left as a legacy the despotic governments of Somoza and Trujillo in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic respectively. The United States government did not promote democracy in Latin America as Wilson had idealistically conceived of it in Europe. Rather, it embarked upon a pragmatic attempt to further its own economic interests and national security. This

undertaking not only delayed the democratic development of our countries, but also contradicted the ethical principles of the American Revolution.

At the end of the Second World War, the United States rose to a new position of leadership and power filled with great responsibilities. This time, however, these responsibilities coincided with the establishment of the United Nations, a modified version of the League of Nations that stemmed from Wilson's vision.

The Charter of the United Nations should have given the United States the appropriate framework through which to create a new international order that was "safe for democracy." However, the start of the Cold War immediately concentrated many of this society's resources in the struggle against Communism. That struggle postponed the attention that should have been given to the most serious problems of our time, among them that of increasingly unjust relations between the developed nations and those of the developing world.

Recent events have illustrated that democracy and Marxist totalitarianism are incompatible. However, it is also clear that avoidable excesses have been committed in the name of the free world. It was not necessary to support the rise of fascist dictators in order to defend democracy. Only a fraction of the economic resources that Western democracies dedicated to the arms race would have been enough to salvage many of the Latin American democracies of past decades. Had this nation even begun to consider and understand our people's aspirations for

liberty and human development, it would have not collaborated with the overthrow of our democratically elected governments.

We should remember that at the end of the Second World War, the United States promised to help both the victors and the defeated to reconstruct their societies. The Marshall Plan, an example of courage and productive leadership, constituted a fundamental pillar of modern European democracy. Without the abundant and generous support of the United States, devastated Europe may have become a center of chaos and totalitarianism rather than one of democratic integration.

The timely massive assistance of the Marshall Plan contributed to United States security more than could the greatest military might. This confirmed that fostering other people's democracy and prosperity is the most effective way for a great power to guarantee its own security.

This is the challenge posed by the burial of Marxist totalitarianism and the renewed world-wide desires for democracy. The United States, Japan, and the oldest democracies of Europe have the opportunity, as well as the obligation, to prove that the world can be a better place.

That which was not evident in 1918 cannot be ignored today: isolationism is impossible in the highly interdependent world of the late Twentieth Century. No society can enjoy the luxury of ignoring the most localized problems or conflicts. In our time, no tragedy or human suffering is foreign. On a Caribbean island, a coup d'etat brought generalized turmoil that further impoverished the Haitian people and immediately became a burden for the most powerful country in the world. Thousands of Haitians

sought refuge in the United States, thrown by hunger and political repression into a desperate and dangerous navigation. The massive emigration has been imposed upon the women and men of Haiti by a basic law of nature: anything should be attempted for survival.

This example has been increasingly duplicated in other regions of the United States and around almost all of the developed countries. It dramatically reveals that in the modern world we cannot relegate the effects of inequality and poverty to some border. We now live in a world without borders, in which it is essential to establish a just international order, a product of foresight rather than force.

The developing world, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union comprise the regions devastated by the Cold War. There, the elements of future planetary instability accumulate. Yet the United States is called upon to play the role of a leading power. If that role is to be permanent, the United States must demonstrate its ability to exercise the true leadership that the post-Cold War world is desperately seeking. Not an imposing leadership based upon military superiority, but one that is guided by principle.

The leadership of the United States and of the great European and Asian democracies should reflect the will to prevent the extreme poverty brought by the scourge of authoritarianism and instability in many countries. It is imperative that the current superpowers revive the spirit of the Marshall Plan and dedicate themselves to lend technical and economic assistance to the new democracies, with the boldness and courage of a confident leader. Otherwise, the surrounding chaos and

uncertainty that we are now witnessing will confine the United States to the embarrassing and trivial role of global policeman.

Traditionally, the so-called world order consisted of a few powers attempting to divide the world into zones that they could exclusively dominate or influence. Yet this was an incomplete idea of order. Ultimately the child of violence, it inevitably led the powers and empires to employ the use or threat of military force to contain one another. Military might represented a mere ability to maintain an international order that, almost by definition, was rooted in fear and domination. The Persian Gulf War and its aftermath demonstrate that, despite the efficiency and technological refinement of the most powerful armed forces on earth, military strength alone cannot establish a true international order.

At this time, at least, it seems that we are nearer than ever to agreeing that the new international order should be based on justice and democracy. The world has significantly advanced towards greater justice among nations and the full respect of political liberties and human rights. All Latin American countries, with the exceptions of Cuba and Haiti, have governments chosen in the voting booths, a situation that would have been impossible only a decade ago.

Numerous authors refer to this characteristic of the post-cold War period as the "Pax Democratica," as opposed to the "Pax Americana", which exclusively reflects the interests of the United States. The difference between the two expressions is not insignificant. A Pax Democratica suggests that the international community should not recognize the legitimacy of any regime that has not been freely elected. It will protect

human liberties and rights from arbitrary antidemocratic treatment and rigid economic models. The Pax Americana, on the other hand, alludes to the imposition of the economic, and cultural norms of the United States upon the value, political traditions, and cultures of other nations. We face problems and dilemmas that extend much deeper than generational, political, philosophical, or cultural differences.

For the new international order to be democratic, it cannot be limited to a specific form, nor can it deny pluralism in any aspect of the social structure. We must not forget that the confrontation with totalitarianism has always affirmed that democracy is best able to guarantee liberty and material well-being to nations. This affirmation implies that political and economic relations between democratic countries must be both peaceful and just. The uniqueness of this historical moment is rooted in the fact that almost the entire world now realizes that democracy faces a crucial challenge. If we fail to meet this challenge, we will face distrust, poverty, and totalitarianism throughout the world. Specific problems which affect only a single country or region have ceased to exist. Today everyone recognizes that a community of problems and threats requires shared solutions. Never before has the human species been so conscious of the fact that it can no longer postpone a great alliance for mutual defense integrating all of the planet's countries and nations against our common problems.

In the past, the concept of defense often served as a pretext for war. The word "defense", permanently linked to the term "security", has always had a predominantly military connotation. The institutions and resources

that nations dedicate to the preparation for aggression are presented as institutions and resources of defense, the guarantors of security.

Many people now believe that national defense and security drive the most important events of our time. Yet these terms incorporate a dangerous mythology of prejudices, exaggerated nationalism, and arrogance. With the false pretext of guaranteeing national defense and security, this point of view not only underrates the true natural threats against human life, but also creates others which are even more complex and more dangerous.

Injustice, ignorance, illness, poverty, inequality, and environmental deterioration are enemies against which humanity should unite in a plan for common security. The concepts of defense and security that states and alliances of states have employed up to now have not only led us to ignore the natural enemies of our species, but also have paradoxically resulted in other, more serious threats to our existence: arms proliferation, militarization, the intensification of impoverishment through the waste of resources, the aftermath of oppression, and destruction and death provoked by war.

The new international order must respond to these problems if it is to be lasting and stable. We must take advantage of this opportunity to reflect upon the need for the men and women of the developed countries and the nations of the developing world to combat militarism and the proliferation of arms together. We must unite in an alliance based upon security and mutual defense that takes the interests and needs of all nations and all human beings into account.

Amigos:

We should be optimistic now that the Cold War has been resolved. Our optimism should not stem from humanity's past desire that the Soviet Union cease to exist. The atomization of that enormous state has already stirred doubts about the advantages of its immediate disintegration. Instead, we should be optimistic because the peoples who had endured decades of totalitarian rule spontaneously expressed their desires for peace and liberty to produce these events.

The disappearance of the threat of a catastrophic confrontation between the two most powerful military blocs in history signifies a great conquest for humanity. We should be pleased that many peoples have recovered the liberty to choose their own destiny. We should also rejoice in the fact that the youth of many countries are now less likely to be sacrificed in war.

We hope that the end of the East-West conflict will lead to the installation of a new world order of peace and prosperity. However, let us never forget that the great powers had always converted their ideological struggles and military growth into excuses to postpone the resolution of humanity's greatest problems. I am not exaggerating when I state that the economic resources dedicated to the arms race in recent decades would have been sufficient to eliminate all of the world's poverty. Ideological manipulation and intolerance have delayed political development and advances towards democracy throughout the world.

Thus, as we call upon the post-Cold War situation to direct the future, we find that peace, well-being, and the security of all human beings are still uncertain. The danger of nuclear proliferation remains. The effects of environmental destruction grow. National and regional economies are buried in recessions. Local and regional conflicts that once appeared resolved now reemerge. The increase of poverty in the poorest countries generates migratory pressures that, among other things, revive racism and ignite the most detestable expressions of nationalism.

Although the principal effects of the calamities now seem to fall upon only certain countries or regions, they soon will have touched all societies equally. Everyone has the obligation to seek solutions. I therefore conclude by calling on the citizens of this country to assume their full responsibility to influence the United States to use its leadership wisely and to abide by the principles that gave rise to this great nation.

Thank you very much.