Today, as we celebrate the 31st anniversary of Armistice Day, it is only fitting that we give serious thought to the meaning of this day.

Many of us recall that joyous hour in 1918 when word was flashed that the "war to end all wars" was over. On each November 11th since then, people have gathered at the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery and in cities and towns throughout our land to pay solemn tribute to those who made the supreme sacrifice.

For those first few years, there was a mixture of sadness and rejoicing in our hearts as we marked the day. We had made the world safe for democracy. There would be no more wars. And to show our sincerity, we led the way in scrapping our navy and slashing our armed forces to a point of extreme impotency.

But a feeling of apprehension began to develop in the minds of a few. A feeling of doubt that all nations did not share our desire for peace and freedom slowly began to spread. Throughout those years The American Legion pleaded with the American people to awaken to the danger of our inadequate defenses. The result to a large extent was a branding of Legionnaires as "war mongers". The Legion's pleas to Congress to expand our armed forces, to institute universal military training, and to fortify our bases in the Pacific fell on deaf ears.

Even when guns began to boom again in Europe, a complacent America sat back to watch and listen. It was not our fight. Nobody was going to attack us. After all, we had two oceans separating us from aggressors.

The bombs that fell on Pearl Harbor shattered that dream for all time. Suddenly we found ourselves in the midst of the greatest conflict in the history of civilization; a conflict in which the freedom of all men throughout the world was at stake.

AND WE WERE NOT READY FOR SUCH A WAR.

Fortunately, our allies were able to continue the fight while we prepared to take our place in the firing line. Think of how the course of history would have changed had we not been afforded those precious months for making ready.

But Pearl Harbor did more than awaken us from our dreams of security; it instilled in the minds and hearts of every American a fierce determination to end this terrible war as quickly as possible.

The end of World War II brought with it the same jubilation that followed Armistice Day in 1918. The ruthless aggressors had been crushed completely. Never again would young men march away to war.
In the belief that nations could settle all differences peacefully, the United Nations was born.

This time the United States, realizing its position and responsibilities as the greatest nation on earth, assumed its place at the council tables instead of remaining apart as it did with the ill-fated League of Nations.

Where it took years for a dictator to threaten the peace of the world following World War I, it was but a matter of months before the realization came that an enemy greater than Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo combined was casting a covetous eye over the rest of the world.

Even before the embers of this terrible war had died, we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of another war - a cold war.

Once again a dictator was on the march.

Once again freedom-loving people felt a tyrant's yoke.

Everything was the same except the technique.

Gone were the lightening-like blitzes into weaker countries by strong, well armed troops. This time countries found themselves crumbling from within -- a pre-conceived part of master plan of world conquest.

As the red tide of communism inundated free men in Europe and Asia, many Americans found refuge in the thought that, as long as we had the atomic bomb and Russia didn't, there was nothing to worry about.

These Americans were shocked out of their lethargy on September 23, when President Truman announced to the world that the United States had (and I quote) "evidence that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R." It was expected that eventually Russia would learn the secret of the atomic bomb, but it was thought that it would take several years yet. No doubt it would have taken considerably longer had not Russian agents been so successful in stealing secret atomic information from under our noses.

Now that both Russia and the United States are able to manufacture atomic bombs, there looms the possibility of an all-out production race. On the day following President Truman's announcement the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission declared that this country must do everything to "establish unquestioned and unmistakable leadership" in an atomic armaments race.

The outcome of such a race could very well be a war from which there would emerge no victor, a war that would leave both sides in a state of chaos and destruction.

What are we going to do about it? We are not talking about nightmares of fiction writers. We are talking about grim realities. We are talking about the potential dynamite of future contingencies.

The American Legion, which has always been realistic about national
defense requirements, knows the only thing that can be done sensibly about this situation.

That thing is national preparedness.

The only way we can keep faith with the uncounted thousands of patriots who died in all our wars to preserve America as a land of the free, is to make and keep America strong.

Let no world aggressor think, even for a moment, that America would not go forth again to battle in freedom's cause. America is the stronghold of liberty. With the help of God and the red blood of patriotic Americans, America will remain that stronghold until the end of time.

Until the world resolves a workable peace, we have monumental tasks before us, tasks calling for increased devotion.

The three million members of The American Legion believe in and support The United Nations. As veterans, Legionnaires know war best and hate it most. We have the strongest desire of all for peace, but until that desire is transformed into a lawful world body, capable of effectively dealing with international problems and disputes, we believe America must be prepared to meet force with force.

The American Legion has studied the United Nations organization thoroughly and has made recommendations which we think will enable it to do the job it was organized to do. We propose that there be a redistribution of power on the security council. We favor the abolition of the veto power on matters of aggression. We urge reorganization of the world court power to permit its interpretation of any disputed points by a majority vote. We believe there should be an effective system for world-wide control and inspection of armaments. We recommend creation of a tyranny-proof world police force, to compel compliance with the directives of the security council.

All these proposals are aimed at strengthening the United Nations. They would tend to make the UN something more than a perpetually-hung jury, riddled with Russian vetoes.

That is the long-range approach to peace.

In these uncertain days when free people throughout the world look to America, Uncle Sam must be a genuine symbol of strength and protection.

Our national defense system must be constructed on a firm foundation of manpower, for without men trained to defend their country at the moment of aggression, all other efforts may be in vain.

The American Legion believes that the only democratic means of supplying the reserve of manpower so direly needed is through a system of national security training. Evidently, the American public shares these sentiments, for public opinion polls consistently show that approximately three fourths of the people favor youth training.
Other phases of our national defense structure need attention. Our industry, transportation facilities, all our national resources, our entire citizenry as well as the land, sea and air components of our armed forces must be kept geared for swift conversion to wartime duties.

The Merchant Marine must be developed for commercial service in peace and maintained for military service in event of war.

Research in nuclear energy and other scientific and technical fields must be continued and expanded.

America must establish and adequately maintain stockpiles of strategic materials, difficult to procure during emergencies.

We must establish as an integral part of our national defense plan a civil defense system, designed to minimize the effect of enemy action directed at the civilian population and our production centers.

If we adopt this sound and common sense program, we shall be in a position to discharge our responsibility of world leadership towards universal peace. Our voice at the council table will be heeded because it will be the voice of an America strong enough to command respect. We will not fail our World War II dead as we failed the dead of World War I.

To be sure, this is a program that entails sacrifice and great cost. But that is the price of our future freedom. A future without that freedom is something that makes us shudder to contemplate.

In addition to our natural resources, our industrial capacity, our armed forces, and our wealth, we must have something else in this struggle - be it a cold or hot war - against the pagan communists; we must have the guidance and assistance of Almighty God.

We of The American Legion believe that Americans have forgotten the spiritual foundation upon which this nation grew. Perhaps life has been too easy during the past few years. Perhaps our memories are too short to recall the prayers said in foxholes for strength and courage and the prayers said at home for the protection and speedy return of loved ones overseas.

When peace came to the world once more, many of us forgot to thank God for that peace.

Now, as we live from day to day in fear of the spark that will ignite this cold war, we need God's help as we have never needed it before.

It has been said, "Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a goodly Christian's weapon."

Let us be sure that we make full use of this weapon. Let us remember, not only today as we pray for those brave men who fell in two terrible wars, but every day, that the courageous people who first came to these shores sank to their knees at the water's edge, thanking God and asking Him for guidance in
building a new nation. The men who drew up our Constitution paused to pray for help when their task seemed beyond human achievement. Throughout our history the builders and defenders of our nation have asked and received guidance and assistance through their prayers.

The American Legion believes that a return to faith in God in our daily lives is the firmest basis on which to work out our individual, our group and our national problems.

Let us be proud of wearing the shiny armor of Christianity! We are the modern Crusaders! We are today the last defenders of a way of life that was brought to us by Christ Himself! We are defending it against the pagan philosophy of communism that denies the very existence of Christ!

This is a real fight for God and Country, the precept of The American Legion!