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The Claremont Institute--PRECEPTS| |March 8, 2000
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Just this past week, China threatened the United States with nuclear war. Two anniversaries that pass together this week remind us what we should think about that.

Seventeen years ago today Ronald Reagan gave his "Evil Empire" speech. It fits in a category with Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946. Both speeches concerned the Soviet Union. Both have much more to do with the United States and its place in the world.

The most famous phrase of the evil empire speech occurs near the end, where Reagan urges his audience to "beware the temptation of pride--the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil."

Typically, the press seized on the phrase "evil empire"--they could not help but draw a connection to the Evil Empire of "Star Wars" fame--neglecting the essence of the speech and denouncing it as a dangerous and imprudent provocation of the Soviets.

The reaction to Reagan in 1983 was similar to the reception given 37 years before to Churchill's bold condemnation of Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe. "From Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent," he said famously. In America, both the isolationist and the liberal press denounced Churchill's speech, if for different reasons. Stalin attacked it bitterly.

Both Reagan and Churchill built their foreign policy upon a moral view, a view of good and evil. Both pursued sophisticated and resolute policies in the face of fierce resistance and at great risk. They were able to maintain these policies because they were built upon the same simple distinction, which is sometimes apparent to so few, between despotism and liberty.

Today, China has made its second threat of destruction of

American civilians upon a massive scale. They would accomplish this destruction if we were to intervene to fulfill our commitment to the people of the island of Taiwan. In a few days, Taiwan will conduct democratic elections to choose a government. Their current president will retire after those elections. In mainland China, such events are impossible. And therefore, this election constitutes a danger to the strong men of the Chinese Politburo who rule because, and only because, the Army supports them with force.

If you doubt that the answer to such threats is strength, we invite you to read both these great speeches on our website, <http://www.claremont.org>. If you doubt that such threats constitute a danger to liberty, we invite you to contemplate the massive prudence of Reagan and Churchill. And if you do not doubt these great truths, read the speeches anyway. They are noble.

Also, I would direct your attention to an interesting new Reagan website produced by our friends at The Federalist Digest. It is called, fittingly, Reagan 2000, and features many of Reagan's speeches. You can find it at <http://www.reagan2000.com>.

Sincerely,
Larry P. Arnn
President, The Claremont Institute

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