

On that unhappy island [of Cuba], as in so many other arenas of the [Cold War], the news has grown worse instead of better. I have emphasized before that this was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator. While [the US] could not be expected to lend our sympathies, we made it repeatedly clear that the armed forces of this country would not intervene in any way. ...

Any unilateral American intervention, in the absence of an external attack upon ourselves or an ally, would have been contrary to our traditions and to our international obligations. But let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible. Should it ever appear that the inter-American doctrine of non-interference merely conceals or excuses a policy of nonaction — if the nations of this Hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against outside Communist penetration — then I want it clearly understood that this Government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our Nation! ...

It is not the first time that Communist tanks have rolled over gallant men and women fighting to redeem the independence of their homeland. Nor is it by any means the final episode in the eternal struggle of liberty against tyranny. ...

But there are ... useful lessons for all to learn. ...

First, it is clear that the forces of communism are not to be underestimated; in Cuba or anywhere else in the world, the advantages of a police state — its use of mass terror and arrests to prevent the spread of free dissent — cannot be overlooked by those who expect the fall of every fanatic tyrant. ...

Secondly, it is clear that this Nation ... must take an even closer and more realistic look at the menace of external Communist intervention and domination in Cuba. The American people are not complacent about Iron Curtain tanks and planes less than 90 miles from our shore.... We and our Latin friends will have to face the fact that we cannot postpone any longer the real issue of the survival of freedom in the hemisphere itself. ...

Third, and finally, it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies or even nuclear armaments.... [Communism is] picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations which do not permit our own armed intervention.

Power is the hallmark of this offensive — power and discipline and deceit. The legitimate discontent of yearning peoples is exploited.... Once in power, all talk of discontent is repressed; all self-determination disappears, and the promise of a revolution of hope is betrayed, as in Cuba, into a reign of terror. ...

We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat it — whether in Cuba or South Viet-Nam. ...

The complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away [by Communism]. Only the strong, only the industrious, only the determined, only the

courageous, only the visionary who determine the real nature of our struggle can possibly survive.

- John F. Kennedy, Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors (April 20, 1961) excerpt