

President John F. Kennedy's Man on the Moon Speech

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, my copartners in Government, gentlemen-and ladies: The Constitution imposes upon me the obligation to "from time to time give to the Congress information of the State of the Union." While this has traditionally been interpreted as an annual affair, this tradition has been broken in extraordinary times. These are extraordinary times. And we face an extraordinary challenge. Our strength as well as our convictions have imposed upon this nation the role of leader in freedom's cause.

No role in history could be more difficult or more important. We stand for freedom. That is our conviction for ourselves--that is our only commitment to others. No friend, no neutral and no adversary should think otherwise. We are not against any man--or any nation--or any system--except as it is hostile to freedom. Nor am I here to present a new military doctrine, bearing any one name or aimed at any one area. I am here to promote the freedom doctrine.

I.

The great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the whole southern half of the globe--Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East--the lands of the rising peoples. Their revolution is the greatest in human history. They seek an end to injustice, tyranny, and exploitation. More than an end, they seek a beginning. And theirs is a revolution which we would support regardless of the Cold War, and regardless of which political or economic route they should choose to freedom. For the adversaries of freedom did not create the revolution; nor did they create the conditions which compel it. But they are seeking to ride the crest of its wave--to capture it for themselves.

Yet their aggression is more often concealed than open. They have fired no missiles; and their troops are seldom seen. They send arms, agitators, aid, technicians and propaganda to every troubled area. But where fighting is required, it is usually done by others--by guerrillas striking at night, by assassins striking alone--assassins who have taken the lives of four thousand civil officers in the last twelve months in Vietnam alone--by subversives and saboteurs and insurrectionists, who in some cases control whole areas inside of independent nations.

[At this point the following paragraph, which appears in the text as signed and transmitted to the Senate and House of Representatives, was omitted in the reading of the message:

They possess a powerful intercontinental striking force, large forces for conventional war, a well-trained underground in nearly every country, the power to conscript talent and manpower for any purpose, the capacity for quick decisions, a closed society without dissent or free information, and long experience in the techniques of violence and subversion. They make the most of their scientific successes, their economic progress and their pose as a foe of colonialism and friend of popular revolution. They prey on unstable

or unpopular governments, unsealed, or unknown boundaries, unfilled hopes, convulsive change, massive poverty, illiteracy, unrest and frustration.]

With these formidable weapons, the adversaries of freedom plan to consolidate their territory--to exploit, to control, and finally to destroy the hopes of the world's newest nations; and they have ambition to do it before the end of this decade. It is a contest of will and purpose as well as force and violence--a battle for minds and souls as well as lives and territory. And in that contest, we cannot stand aside.

We stand, as we have always stood from our earliest beginnings, for the independence and equality of all nations. This nation was born of revolution and raised in freedom. And we do not intend to leave an open road for despotism.

There is no single simple policy which meets this challenge. Experience has taught us that no one nation has the power or the wisdom to solve all the problems of the world or manage its revolutionary tides--that extending our commitments does not always increase our security--that any initiative carries with it the risk of a temporary defeat--that nuclear weapons cannot prevent subversion--that no free people can be kept free without will and energy of their own--and that no two nations or situations are exactly alike.