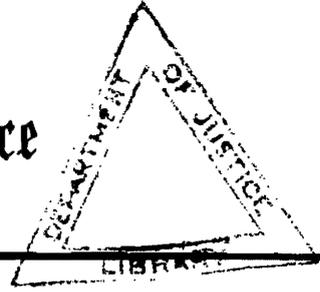




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ADDRESS

BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

AT

NATIONAL COMMANDERS' DINNER

AMERICAN LEGION CONVENTION

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

OCTOBER 9, 1962

I am most happy to have this opportunity to be with you this evening. I only wish that my participation in the convention did not have to be confined to this more solemn part of the program.

It's reassuring to be here with men like you who have proven a devotion to this nation by your service in the armed forces. Your organization, through its history, has stood for a secure national defense and a strong America.

I want, therefore, to take this occasion to report to you on the steps this Administration has taken in the last twenty-one months to strengthen our country in every way -- and thereby maintain the peace on honorable terms, protect freedom at home and abroad, and defeat Communism.

I need say very little to this audience about the character of the cold war and the Communist threat. The American Legion was formed sixteen months after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and ever since, the Legion has been in the forefront of those determined to alert the American people to the dangers of Communism.

The Communist purpose, now as in 1917, is to remake the world in the Communist image. The Communist faith is that history inevitably will sweep all other forms of society into the dustbin of the past. The Communist conviction is that any means is justified to advance military, political and economic policies designed to undermine and capture free governments and free peoples.

The enormous global struggle which we call the cold war is being fought at every level. Moscow remains energetic and alert and its challenge to our freedom is dangerous and determined.

Communism counts its opportunities in terms of decades -- not of weeks. Its means of aggression consist not only of nuclear weapons and missiles with enormous boosters and not only of spies, agents and terrorists, but of great masses of men and women, deluded by a common ideology which inspires them with a false hope.

That we face a long and hard struggle is evident but I believe that the tide has turned and that we have it within our strength and our ability to keep world Communism on the defensive.

This morning you heard from J. Edgar Hoover, a man whose record of service and dedication to his country cannot be surpassed. I doubt that any of you who heard Mr. Hoover could really question that the forces of this government are alertly arrayed against the danger of Communist subversion here at home.

In just the past few months, outstanding work by the FBI has resulted in the exposure and expulsion of four Russian representatives of the United Nations who were abusing their privileges of residence in this country by engaging in espionage.

It has been just a year since the orders of the Supreme Court became final in the Communist Party registration case. The Communist Party and two of its officers have been indicted for failure to register.

The law provides that if the Communist Party and its officers do not register, then the responsibility falls on the Party's members. However, before the members can be penalized for not registering, they must be given an individual hearing before the Subversive Activities Control Board and the Board must issue an order which each member has a right to challenge through the courts.

We have petitioned the Subversive Activities Control Board to order ten key members of the Party to register. These hearings are now in progress.

But as insidious as the Communist threat is here at home, far more dangerous problems and crises confront us all around the world.

At this time, our only immediate guarantee of national safety lies in the adequacy of our military strength -- from nuclear weapons to guerrilla warfare -- strength which continues to make military action by the Communists very unattractive and very irrational.

I am here to tell you tonight that never in our history has this nation been so prepared militarily to meet its commitments and to defend freedom.

On that cold day in January when we came to responsibility, the President instructed the Secretary of Defense to build the forces we need to defend the vital interests of the United States.

The President's instructions are being followed effectively and vigorously. We have rebuilt the strength of this nation in the last twenty-one months.

In order to counter and deter the Soviet nuclear force, we have concentrated on building a nuclear force that is hardened, dispersed and concealed -- that is, in short, invulnerable to enemy attack.

To this end:

-- we are increasing the number of Polaris submarines so that by 1964 we shall have one-half again as many as we originally planned for;

-- we have increased by 50 per cent this number of our strategic bombers on 15-minute ground alert;

-- we are procuring more hardened and dispersed Minutemen missiles, and we have doubled our production capacity.

We are committed to maintaining a nuclear force strong enough and impregnable enough to ride out any conceivable nuclear attack and retain enough striking power to annihilate any conceivable attacker. We have such a force today and we are budgeting some \$1.5 billion over the level proposed in January 1961 to see to it that we keep it that way.

We have preserved our superiority in nuclear weapons. Our strategic nuclear forces today include nearly 1,700 intercontinental bombers, including 630 B-52s, 55 B-58s and 1,000 B-47s. We have 96 Polaris missiles in nuclear powered submarines now operational. We have dozens of operational intercontinental missiles in place across the United States.

We mean to lead the world in the exploration of space. We are determined to see that space is filled with instruments of knowledge and understanding, not weapons of war and mass destruction. We will be constantly alert against the hostile misuse of space as we stand today firmly against the hostile misuse of the land, sea or air. But it is our purpose to explore space without adding fuel to the fire of war.

We mean to go to the moon and we mean to go in this decade. The Mariner space ship is on its way to Venus. Telstar is transmitting television pictures around half the globe, and Commander Schirra's flight is notable not only for his incredible individual effort but for the accuracy and competence of Project Mercury.

In some aspects of the space program, we are behind. But we do not intend to stay behind. We intend to move ahead and we are making the effort to do so.

At the same time this administration has reacted strongly to the problem of Communist subversion through guerrilla warfare. I would guess that many of you were infantrymen in the Second World War. You probably had time to reflect with some scorn on those experts who said, when you were recruits, that foot soldiers would not be needed; that the fighting would be done by men in planes and tanks. Thus, I am sure you understand more than most the conditions under which several thousand of our fellow Americans are serving in the undeclared war in South Viet Nam.

They are there because last November a comprehensive program was initiated calling for many forms of American aid to reverse the trend in South Viet Nam. This included military assistance to the friendly forces combatting the Communists, economic assistance to the villagers who were the Communist's principle target, and administrative and technical assistance to bolster the Viet Nam government.

The courageous effort underway in South Viet Nam is not the only governmental response to the threat of guerrilla warfare. In Washington, a special group of senior officials -- reporting directly to the President -- supervises the development and use of all defense assets which can play a role in counter-insurgency. One example of the activities of this special group has been to overhaul the instruction in the Departments of State and Defense, as well as in all other agencies which participate in counter-insurgency programs. Between now and next June some 57,000 government officials, many having high rank and vast experience, will attend courses dealing with counter-insurgency.

Last June at West Point, President Kennedy described this new challenge to the graduating class in these words:

"This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin -- war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him. It is a form of warfare uniquely adapted to what has been strangely called 'wars of liberation', to undermine the efforts of new and poor countries to maintain the freedom that they have finally achieved. It preys on economic unrest and ethnic conflicts. It requires in those situations where we must counter it . . . if freedom is to be saved, a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training."

Many of you know what is involved in this effort. In Malaya, the Communist guerrilla war lasted from 1946 to 1957. It involved 400,000 armed men and caused nearly 16,000 casualties.

In Greece the period of conflict was from 1945 to 1950. Three hundred thousand men were involved and 130,000 casualties were inflicted.

You know that this kind of warfare can be long, drawn out and costly, but if Communism is to be stopped, it is necessary. And we mean to see this job through to the finish.

The substantial increase in our military power, shifting from primary reliance on atomic weapons and massive retaliation to a force which can deal with all forms of aggression, is one fulfillment of the President's pledge to meet our commitments around the globe.

None of the crises we faced in January 1961 have been resolved but the momentum of Khrushchev's offensive has slowed noticeably and we and our allies are the ones who have begun to move.

In Laos the President made clear that American troops would intervene if the Communists tried to exploit their advantage on the ground and we have converted a war that was being lost into a tenuous, still dangerous, but much better peace.

In Viet Nam the situation is far more hopeful than it was six months ago. The road ahead there appears long and difficult but the guerrillas are meeting increasingly strong resistance and the effort we are making is fully worth it.

Although the Congo problem is not settled, the danger that the Communists would establish a political and guerrilla warbase which would tear apart Central Africa, has receded. We are backing the efforts of the United Nations to help the Congolese create a unified, independent and viable nation.

In Cuba the last chapter of that sad story remains to be written. Our aim is to isolate the Cuban regime and rid South and Central America of Soviet Communist influence. We will not permit the Cuban regime to export its aggressive purposes by force or by threat of force. We are prepared to take whatever steps necessary to prevent the Cuban regime from taking action against

its neighbors. The President has stated very plainly that if at any time the Communist buildup in Cuba endangers or threatens our security in any way, we will do what is necessary to protect our own security and that of our allies.

In Berlin, Khrushchev knows without any doubt that we are prepared to defend our vital interests and those of the West with all the force at our command.

Last week Mayor Willy Brandt of West Berlin was in Washington. That articulate, courageous man, who is so dedicated to freedom, told a group of us:

"I must make one thing clear. I did not come here to ask for guarantees from you to defend West Berlin. I know I don't have to ask for them."

It is quite possible that we will face a great crisis in Berlin in the weeks just ahead. But the determination and unity of this country to maintain our position in West Berlin is apparent. American military strength has increased and we face that possible crisis with confidence.

Fifteen years ago Europe was on its back. Its warshattered economies were hardly able to feed and clothe the people. Communism was knocking at the door.

At this point, the United States stepped in with the Marshall Plan. In the last dozen years, free Europe has been transformed. The spread of Communism has been halted. Out of the rubble of war has emerged a new united Europe, finding in its Common Market a key to growth and prosperity.

As I travelled around the world earlier this year, I sometimes wondered what this world of 1962 would have been like if we had had no foreign aid programs in the years since the war -- no Marshall Plan -- no Point Four -- no economic or military assistance to Latin America or Asia or Africa.

That world would now have been largely conquered by Communism or chaos -- and our own country, isolated and beleaguered, surrounded by poverty and hostility, would have been in terrible peril.

Every American has a legitimate reason for pride in the record and performance of our country. As we have gathered our strength, we have learned to live close to the edge of war in the atomic age with courage, cool nerves and unshakable purpose.

Around the world I found that, however much other people might misunderstand actual conditions in America, their hopes for their own country are best fulfilled in the ideal of America -- that is, a society committed to freedom; founded on the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights and dedicated to the rule of law in which the state is the servant of the individual and not the individual the servant of the state.

It is the faith in these ideals plus the fact that wherever Communism has been in direct competition with the free world, Communism has come out second best. That causes me to believe deeply in the success of our endeavors. I have no doubt at all about the final outcome.

Nothing is more false than the notion that the triumph of Communism is inevitable or that the Communists are steadily pushing the free world into a corner.

The tide running against us roughly from the time of the first Soviet Sputnik to the early months of 1961 has been stemmed. We are moving forward while the Communist world is falling increasingly into turmoil and disarray.

Khrushchev's post-Sputnik offensive, based on nuclear blackmail, expanding Communist power in underdeveloped areas and exploiting Soviet space feats psychologically and politically with vigor and imagination, has run out of steam.

The fact is that Mao's "Great Leap Forward" has fallen miserably short of its target. There is a major disaster inside Red China, demonstrating for all the world to see that Communist methods lead not merely to hunger for the people but to industrial stagnation.

The fact is that nations which seemed a few years ago to be moving into the Communist orbit are working their way back to independence.

The fact is that Communism has made no headway at all in Africa in recent years, very little in Asia and apart from Cuba, has lost ground in Latin America.

The fact is the Communist bloc shows signs of fragmentation with the Sino-Soviet dispute bedeviling every Communist Party in the world.

But as I said earlier, the Communist threat to this nation is dangerous in the extreme. There are many aspects of the cold war which could turn against us, particularly if the strength, unity and will of the free world should falter. Thus the challenge of the future requires not panic but power; not doubts but deeds.

The image of America must be that evoked by Oliver Wendell Holmes of "freedom leaning on her spear."

But what we do to control Communist subversion here at home, or to combat Communist guerilla warfare, or to maintain our military strength or to be first in outer space, will in the last analysis not add up to much unless we remain true to our own ideals--unless we are dedicated to the proposition that liberty and law are inseparable; that we truly believe social progress strengthens and enlarges freedom.

Woodrow Wilson said, "I believe in democracy because it releases the energy of every human being."

The spirit of our democracy is that we live together by the rule of law; that we constantly seek the truth; that we speak out when we disagree and we speak up for unpopular causes; that our government exists for the people and not the people existing for the government.

Our greatest strength and vitality lies in our ability to handle our own affairs in our own communities. Thus, we not only need your patriotic support but we need your full participation in the affairs of your cities and your states.

This is a strong nation and we have always had toughness, courage and perseverance to see the job through. We have the will to win and with your help I know we will win.