

President John F. Kennedy on Cuba

From the Election of 1960

September 2, 1960 - Portland, Maine:

I think he [Castro] should be condemned. I think he is a source of maximum danger.

September 21, 1960 - Nashville, Tennessee:

I am not satisfied to see a communist satellite ninety miles off the coast of Florida, eight minutes by jet. Those who say they will stand up to Khrushchev have not demonstrated any ability to stand up to Mr. Castro.

December 15, 1958, in Puerto Rico:

I realize that it will always be a cardinal tenet of American foreign policy not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations-and this is particularly true in Latin America. I realize that we cannot force out any duly constituted government, however repugnant its methods or views may be-particularly when we have no guarantee that its successors in the long run will be a real improvement... For there is little question that should any Latin country be driven by repression into the arms of the communists, our attitude of nonintervention would change overnight.

Strategy of Peace - January 1, 1960:

Whether Castro would have taken a more rational course after his victory had the United States Government not backed the dictator Batista so long and so uncritically, and had it given the fiery young rebel a warmer welcome in his hour of triumph, especially on his trip to this country, we cannot be sure.

October 6, 1960 - Cincinnati, Ohio:

But Castro is not just another Latin American dictator-a petty tyrant bent merely on personal power and gain. His ambitions extend far beyond his own shores.

October 15, 1960 - Johnstown, Pennsylvania:

The first thing we have to do is let the Cuban people know our determination that they will someday again be free. We did not make clear to the Cubans our devotion to freedom during the brutal regime of the Batista dictatorship-and we are not making our position any clearer under the Castro dictatorship...

Secondly, we must end the harassment, which this government has carried on, of liberty-loving anti-Castro forces in Cuba and other lands. While we cannot violate international law, we must recognize that these exiles and rebels represent the real voice of Cuba and should not be constantly handicapped by our Immigration and Justice Department Authorities.

Third, we must let Mr. Castro know that we do not intend to be pushed around any longer and in particular do not intend to be pushed out of our naval base at Guantanamo...

From News Conferences (1961)

News Conference Number 1, (January 25, 1961) State Department Auditorium, Washington, D. C .

QUESTION: Under what conditions would you consider reopening diplomatic relations with Cuba, and are you considering such a step now?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, to take the last part first, we are not considering such a step, at the present time. I may say that the United States is interested, and I think that this Administration is extremely interested, in movements in Latin America and Central America, and the Caribbean, which provide a better life for the people.

And if American interests may be damaged by those movements, or revolutions, or whatever term you want to use, we feel that this should be a matter that should be negotiated. What we are, of course, concerned about is when these movements are seized by external forces and directed not to the improving the welfare of the people involved, but towards imposing an ideology which is alien to this hemisphere. That is a matter of concern, particularly when that intervention takes the form of military support which threatens the security and the peace of the Western Hemisphere.

Now, I am hopeful that governments will be established throughout all of Latin America, and governments which are established -- and I think nearly all of them do share the same view -- that we have to provide in this hemisphere a better life for the people involved, that we are interested in that, that we are concerned about it, that American policy will be directed towards that end. But we are also concerned that in the name of that peaceful revolution, when it is seized by aliens for their purposes, it is very difficult for the United States to carry on happy relations with those countries.

So in answer to your question, we have no plan at present to resume diplomatic relations with Cuba, because of the factors which are involved on that island. . . .

News Conference Number 3, (February 8, 1961) State Department Auditorium, Washington, D.C.

QUESTION: Mr. President, on Monday, Mr. Rusk said that the United States was prepared to take cooperative action with the other American Republics to end tyranny, he said, against either the left or the right. Is it contemplated that we shall ask the other American states to join with us in some steps on the Cuban problem?

THE PRESIDENT: Cuba, and the problem of tyranny throughout all of Latin America, is a matter which is of course of special concern to Mr. Berle and his Inter-Departmental group; and they have not concluded their analysis as yet.

QUESTION: Mr. President, Castro is reported to have built a new radio station, one of the largest in the Hemisphere, which will begin operations within a few months to broadcast pro-Castro propaganda throughout Latin America. Is there anything we can do, or plan to do, to counter this?

THE PRESIDENT: We are giving the matter of Cuba and its export of its revolution throughout Latin America high priority. I could not state what actions will be taken yet until Mr. Berle, Mr. Mann and Mr. Rusk have concluded their deliberations, which are now going ahead very intensively. . . .

News Conference Number 9, (April 12, 1961)
State Department Auditorium, Washington, D.C.

QUESTION: Mr. President, has a decision been reached on how far this country would be willing to go in helping an anti-Castro uprising or invasion in Cuba? And what could you say with respect to recent developments as far as the anti-Castro movements in Cuba are concerned?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first I want to say that there will not be, under any conditions, be an intervention in Cuba by United States armed forces, and this government will do everything it possibly can, and I think it can meet its responsibilities, to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba.

Secondly, the Justice Department's recent indictment of Mr. Masferrer, of Florida, on the grounds that he was plotting an invasion of Cuba, from Florida, in order to establish a Batista-like regime, should indicate the feelings of this country towards those who wish to reestablish that kind of administration inside Cuba.

Third, we do not intend to take any action with respect to the property or other economic interests which American citizens formerly held in Cuba, other than formal and normal negotiations with a free and independent Cuba.

The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba; it is between the Cubans themselves. And I intend to see that we adhere to that principle. And as I understand it, this Administration's attitude is so understood and shared by the anti-Castro exiles from Cuba in this country.

QUESTION: Mr. President, could you give us your views, sir, about the Soviet achievement of putting a man in orbit, and what it would mean to our space program as such?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it is a most impressive scientific accomplishment, and also I think that we, all of us, as members of the race, have the greatest admiration for the Russian who participated in this extraordinary feat. I have already sent congratulations to Mr. Khrushchev, and I sent congratulations to the man who was involved.

I indicated that the task force which we set up on space, way back last January -- January 12th -- indicated that because of the Soviet progress in the field of boosters, where they have been ahead of us, that we expected that they would be first in space, in orbiting a man in space. And of course, that has taken part. We are carrying out our program, and we expect to hope to make progress in this area this year ourselves.

QUESTION: Mr. President, your white paper last year -- last week, referred in very diplomatic language to the takeover by communism in Cuba. Is it your view that Fidel Castro is personally a Communist?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, he has indicated his admiration on many occasions for the Communist revolution. He has appointed a great many Communists to high positions. A great many of those, I think in the white paper -- well, rather, the state paper -- he indicated that two-thirds of those who had been members of his first government had fled Cuba, people who had a strong feeling for the revolution, but who did not propose to see it come under the domination of the Communists.

So that I would not want to characterize Mr. Castro, except to say that by his own words he has indicated his hostility to democratic rule in this hemisphere, to democratic liberal

leaders in many of the countries of the hemisphere who are attempting to improve the life of their people, and has associated himself most intimately with the Sino-Soviet bloc, and has indicated his desire to spread the influence of that bloc throughout this hemisphere.

Material taken from the following sources (See Primary Source Annotation for more details):

<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/baypigs/jfk-1.htm>

http://www.ifklibrary.org/jfk_press_conference_610208.html

http://www.ifklibrary.org/jfk_press_conference_610215.html

http://www.ifklibrary.org/jfk_press_conference_610412.html