

NYTimes

OCT 9 1975

For Which We Stand: IV

ABROAD AT HOME

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Oct. 8—Last summer Fidel Castro was asked by James Reston of The New York Times about efforts to export his revolution to the rest of Latin America. He answered that he was doing no exporting—it was the United States that was exporting counterrevolution.

The answer would make most Americans instinctively bristle with innocence, but there happens to be a lot to it. Whatever Castro's desire, the Cuban revolution has not been duplicated elsewhere in this hemisphere. But the United States helped to install a right-wing tyranny in Chile and intervened with armed force on the rightist side in the Dominican Republic.

Americans remain extraordinarily innocent about our country's impact on the world. We think of ourselves as devoted to human rights and freedom, and we naturally assume that American actions abroad work to the same ends. We have maintained that virtuous self-image, many of us, despite a staggering accumulation of facts to the contrary.

We used to shudder, for example, at stories of Soviet agents abroad murdering opponents of Communism. But we have discovered lately that our Central Intelligence Agency planned, and perhaps attempted assassinations of foreign political leaders.

We thought of terrorism as a dreadful tactic in the Communist drive for power. But official figures put the deaths at over 20,000 in the Phoenix program, our campaign of political terrorism in Vietnam.

We worried about the Soviets cheating on arms control agreements, given the secrecy and deception built into their system. But now we know that American officials secretly kept stores of biological weapons in violation of international agreement and Presidential order.

We feared Communist military aggression, and it was a real danger. But in fact, over the last thirty years, there has been nothing remotely to match the horror of the aggressive war carried out by the United States in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos.

Nor is there much evidence that the United States Government has drawn appropriate lessons from that record. Has any official expressed regret at the destruction of Cambodia by American bombers? Indeed, the agents of our worst policies have been promoted. William Colby of the Phoenix program now heads the C.I.A. The diplomat who soiled the history of the Foreign Service by secretly targeting bombers from our embassy in Phnom Penh, Thomas O. Enders, is an Assistant Secretary of State.

The dark pages on the record of recent years should make anyone dubious of a leading American role on issues of human rights in the world. But old habits of mind persist. The United States has more freedom at home than just about any other country, and I cannot help feeling that it should be able to apply its ideals elsewhere.

Power is the distorting factor. At home, our Constitution safeguards liberty by diffusing power and subjecting it to law. But abroad, our enormous power may be exercised without the restraints of tradition and law. In "Reflections on Vietnam," published last summer, Antonia Lake summarized what we should all have learned: "I am fearful of power even when it is used with the best of intentions."

And so we want no more moral crusades—no more wars to make the

world, or Vietnam, safe for democracy. But there are lesser, more discreet, more useful things that we can do for the cause of basic humanity in the world. At a minimum, we can make our position clear when human rights are under attack.

When Ambassador Moynihan referred to President Amin of Uganda the other day as a racist murderer, it was inspiring: An American official had spoken the truth out loud about a situation that shames mankind. But of course it is not enough to speak out about a situation in which we have little political stake.

Human rights are indivisible. If we have principles against slaughter in Uganda, they should apply in Burundi even though we have economic interests there. We should care about official brutality in South Korea despite our concern for her security, in the Soviet Union despite our interest in détente.

America's posture on issues of human rights has been bedeviled, in recent years, by the false notion that we must do either everything or nothing. We cannot remake other nations, but we need not appear indifferent to inhumanity. We do not have to stand alone among civilized countries in lending legitimacy to authoritarianism in Spain and racism in Rhodesia. We do not have to invite Italian neo-Fascists to meet our National Security Council staff.

To an astonishing degree, the victims of inhumanity around the world still believe in American ideals. That is always touching to discover. But is it justified? Antonia Lake wrote that she was skeptical: "We Americans do not know ourselves . . . so how can we show others?" The optimists, and I am one, think that it is a question of leadership—that the American faith is there to be renewed.