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REFLECTIONS BY THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF: THE EMPIRE AND THE INDEPENDENT ISLAND

The history of Cuba during the last 140 years is one of struggle to preserve national identity and independence, and the history of the evolution of the American empire, its constant craving to appropriate Cuba and of the horrendous methods that it uses today to hold on to world domination. Prominent Cuban historians have dealt in depth with these subjects in different periods and in various excellent books which deserve to be readily available to our compatriots. These reflections are addressed especially to the new generations with the aim of helping them learn about very important and decisive events in the destiny of our homeland.

Part I: The Imposition of the Platt Amendment as an appendix to the Neocolonial Cuban Constitution of 1901. The "ripe fruit doctrine" was formulated in 1823 by Secretary of State and later President John Quincy Adams. The United States would inevitably achieve taking over our country, by the law of political influence, once colonial subordination to Spain had ended.

Under the pretext of blowing up the "Maine" -- a still unraveled event of which it took advantage to wage war against Spain, like the Gulf of Tonkin incident, an event which was demonstrably prefabricated in order to attack North Vietnam -- President William McKinley signed the Joint Resolution of April 20, 1898, stating "that the people on the island of Cuba are and by right ought to be free and independent", "that the United States herewith declare that they have no desire or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction or control over said island, except for pacification thereof, and they affirm their determination, after this has been accomplished, to leave the government and control of the island to its people." The Joint Resolution entitled the President to use force to remove the Spanish government from Cuba.

Colonel Leonard Wood, chief commander of the Rough Riders, and Theodore Roosevelt, second in command of the expansionist volunteers who landed in our country on the beaches close to Santiago de Cuba, after the brave but poorly utilized Spanish squadron and their Marine infantry on board had been destroyed by the American battleships, requested the support of Cuban insurrectionists who had weakened and defeated the Spanish Colonial Army after enormous sacrifices. The Rough Riders had landed without horses.

Following the defeat of Spain, representatives of the Queen Regent of Spain and of the President of the United States signed the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898 and, without consulting of the Cuban people, agreed that Spain should relinquish all claim of sovereignty over and title to the island and would evacuate it. Cuba would then be occupied by the United States on a temporary basis.

Already appointed U.S. military governor, Army Major General Leonard Wood, issued Military Order 301 of July 25, 1900, which called for a general election to choose delegates to a Constitutional Assembly that would be held in the city of Havana at twelve noon on the first Monday of November in 1900, with the purpose of drafting and adopting a Constitution for the people of Cuba.

On September 15, 1900, elections took place and 31 delegates from the National, Republican and Democratic Union parties were elected. On November 5, 1900, the Constitutional Convention held its opening session at the Irijoa Theatre of Havana which on that occasion received the name of Martí Theatre.

General Wood, representing the President of the United States, declared the Assembly officially installed. Wood advanced the intention of the United States government: After you have drawn up the relations which, in your opinion, ought to exist between Cuba and the United States, the government of the United States will undoubtedly adopt the measures conducive to a final and authorized treaty between the peoples of both nations, aimed at promoting the growth of their common interests.

The 1901 Constitution provided in its Article 2 that "the territory of the Republic is composed of the Island of Cuba, as well as the islands and neighboring keys which together were under Spanish sovereignty until the ratification of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898".

Once the Constitution was drafted, the time had come to define political relations between Cuba and the United States. To that end, on February 12, 1901, a committee of five members was appointed and charged with studying and proposing a procedure that would lead to the stated goal.

On February 15, Governor Wood invited the members of the committee to go fishing and hosted a banquet in Batabanó, the main access route to the Isle of Pines, as it was known then, also occupied at that time by the U.S. troops which had intervened in the Cuban War of Independence. It was there in Batabanó that he revealed to them a letter from the Secretary of War, Elihu Root, containing the basic aspects of the future Platt Amendment. According to instructions from Washington, relations between Cuba and the United States were to abide by several aspects. The fifth of these was that, in order to make it easier for the United States to fulfill such tasks as were placed under its responsibility by the above mentioned provisions, and for its own defense, the United States could acquire title, and preserve it, for lands to be used for naval bases and maintain these in certain specific points.

Upon learning of the conditions demanded by the U.S. government, the Cuban Constitutional Assembly, on February 27, 1901, passed a position that was opposed to that of the U.S. Executive, eliminating therein the establishment of naval bases. The U.S. government made an agreement with Orville H. Platt, Republican Senator from Connecticut, to present an amendment to the proposed Army Appropriations Bill which would make the establishment of American naval bases on Cuban soil a fait accompli.

In the Amendment, passed by the U.S. Senate on February 27, 1901 and by the House of Representatives on March 1, and sanctioned by President

McKinley the following day, as a rider attached to the ?Bill granting credit to the Army for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 1902,? the article mentioning the naval bases was drafted as follows:

?Art. VII.- That to enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States lands necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points to be agreed upon with the President of the United States.?

Article VIII adds: ??the government of Cuba will embody the foregoing provisions in a permanent treaty with the United States.?

The speedy passage of the Amendment by the U.S. Congress was due to the circumstance of it coming close to the conclusion of the legislative term and to the fact that President McKinley had a clear majority in both Houses so that the Amendment could be passed without any problem. It became a United States Law when, on March 4, McKinley was sworn in for his second presidential term in office.

Some members of the Constitutional Convention maintained the view that they were not empowered to adopt the Amendment requested by the United States since this implied limitations on the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Cuba. Thus, the military governor Leonard Wood hastened to issue a new Military Order on March 12, 1901 where it was declared that the Convention was empowered to adopt the measures whose constitutionality was in question.

Other Convention members, such as Manuel Sanguily, held the opinion that the Assembly should be dissolved rather than adopt measures that so drastically offended the dignity and sovereignty of the people of Cuba. But during the session of March 7, 1901, a committee was appointed yet again in order to draft an answer to Governor Wood; the presentation of this was entrusted to Juan Gualberto Gómez who recommended, among other things, rejecting the clause concerning the leasing of coaling or naval stations.

Juan Gualberto Gómez maintained the most severe criticism of the Platt Amendment. On April 1, he tabled a debate of the presentation where he challenged the document on the grounds that it contravened the principles of the Treaty of Paris and of the Joint Resolution. But the Convention suspended the debate on Juan Gualberto Gómez's presentation and decided to send another committee "to ascertain the motives and intentions of the government of the United States about any and all details referring to the establishment of a definitive order to relations, both political and economic, between Cuba and the United States, and to negotiate with the government itself, the bases for agreement on those extremes that would be proposed to the Convention for a final solution.

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The Guantanamo Naval Base since September 11.

On September 18, 2001, President Bush signed United States Congress legislation authorizing the use of force as a response to the September

11 attacks. Bush used this legislation as a basis to sign a Military Order on November 13 of that same year which would establish the legal bases for arrests and trials by military tribunals of individuals who didn't hold U.S. citizenship, as part of the "war on terrorism".

On January 8, 2002 the United States officially informed Cuba that they would be using the Guantanamo Naval Base as a detention center for Afghan war prisoners.

Three days later, on January 11, 2002, the first 20 detainees arrived, and the figure reached the number of 776 prisoners coming from 48 countries. Of course none of these data were mentioned. We assumed they were Afghan war prisoners. The first planes were landing full of prisoners, and many more guards than prisoners. On the same day, the government of Cuba issued a public declaration indicating its willingness to cooperate with medical assistance services as required, clean-up programs and a fight against mosquitoes and pests in the area surrounding the base which is under our control, or any other useful, constructive and humane measure that might come up. I remember the data because I was personally involved in details concerning the Note presented by the MINREX in response to the United States Note. We were very far from imagining at that moment that the U.S. government was getting ready to create a horrendous torture center at that base.

The Socialist Constitution proclaimed on February 24, 1976 had set forth in its Article 11, section c) that the Republic of Cuba repudiates and considers as null and illegal those treaties, pacts or concessions concerted under conditions of inequality or which disregard or diminish her sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On June 10, 2002, the people of Cuba, in an unprecedented process of popular referendum, ratified the socialist content of that Constitution of 1976 as a response to the meddling and offensive expressions of the President of the United States. Likewise, it mandated the National People's Power Assembly to amend it so that it would expressly state, inter alia, the irrevocable principle which must govern the economic, diplomatic and political relations of our country with other states, by adding to the same Article 11, section c): Economic, diplomatic and political relations with any other State may never be negotiated under aggression, threat or coercion by a foreign power.

After the Proclamation to the People of Cuba was made public on July 31, 2006, the U.S. authorities have declared that they do not hope for a migration crisis but that they are pre-emptively preparing to face one, with the use of the Guantanamo Naval Base as a concentration camp for illegal migrants intercepted in the high seas being a consideration. In public declarations, information reveals that the United States is expanding its civilian buildings on the Base with the aim of increasing their capacity to receive the illegal emigrants.

Cuba, for her part, has taken all possible measures to avoid incidents between the armed forces of both countries, and has declared that she is abiding by the commitments contained in the Joint Declaration on migratory issues signed with the Clinton administration. Why is there so much talking, threats and brouhaha? The symbolic annual payment of \$3,386.25 for the lease of the territory occupied by the Guantanamo Naval Base was maintained until 1972 when the Americans adjusted it themselves to \$3,676. In 1973, a new adjustment was made for the value

of the old U.S. Gold dollar, and for that reason the cheque issued by the Treasury Department was since then increased to \$4,085.00 each year. That cheque is charged to the United States Navy, the party responsible for operations at the Naval Base.

The cheques issued by the government of the United States, as payment for the lease, are in the name of the ?Treasurer General of the Republic of Cuba?, an institution and official who, many years ago, have ceased to function within the structure of the Government of Cuba. This cheque is sent on a yearly basis, through diplomatic channels. The one for 1959, due to a mere confusion, was entered into the national budget. Since 1960 until today these cheques have not been cashed and they are proof of the lease that has been imposed for more than 107 years. I would imagine, conservatively, that this is ten times less than what the United States government spends on the salary of a schoolteacher each year.

Both the Platt Amendment and the Guantanamo Naval Base were unnecessary. History has shown that in a great number of countries in this hemisphere where there has not been a revolution, their entire territory, governed by the multinationals and the oligarchies, needs neither one nor the other. Advertising took care of their mostly ill-trained and poverty-stricken populations by creating reflexes.

From the military point of view, a nuclear aircraft carrier, with so many fast fighter-bombers and escort ships supported by technology and satellites, is several times more powerful and can move to any point on the globe, wherever the empire needs it the most. The Base is needed to humiliate and to carry out the filthy deeds that take place there. If we must await the downfall of the system, we shall wait. The suffering and danger for all humanity shall be great, like today's stock market crisis, and a growing number of people forecast it. Cuba shall always be waiting in a state of combat readiness.

Fidel Castro Ruz August 14, 2007. 6:00 p.m.