

A Fragile Peace

by Richard Grassl

Gabriel Molina's January 13, 2017 *Granma International* article, Rarely has a Statesman shone so brightly, elaborates on the true meaning of the victory of January 1, 1959. The indomitable will of Fidel Castro and insubordinate spirit of the Cuban people united after the triumph of the Rebel Army over the Batista dictatorship.

History has recorded many contentious moments between the U.S. and Cuba. In this context Molina highlights Fidel — statesman as he was — essentially saying that Cuba is sovereign and must be taken seriously. It was not taken seriously in 1898, in 1962 (October crisis), nor in 2014 with the agreement between Barack Obama and Raul Castro.

Since the defeat of U.S. forces at the Battle of Giron (Bay of Pigs) in April 1961, every means available to thwart Cuba's political and social independence was employed including mercenary raids, infiltration of spies, sabotage and military intimidation.

Justification for Cuba's strong defense of their right to self-determination dates back to U.S. intrusions in 1898. For example, when the Treaty of Relations was signed by Cuba and the United States, May 22, 1903, against the will of the Cuban people, a false Republic (imposed by the interventionist 1901 Platt Amendment), converted Cuba into a neo-colony and U.S. protectorate. Thereafter, the independence of the nation remained subject to the whims of every U.S. administration.

The illegal U.S. occupation of Guantanamo Bay years before did not end with the Good Neighbor policy (FDR) and its Treaty of Commercial Reciprocity (1934). "So long as the two governments shall not agree to a modification of its present limits," the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo became a permanent feature of U.S. policy. Unless the United States cedes its hold to and/or abandons the lease to the naval station in recognition of Cuban sovereignty over their land, U.S. control will continue indefinitely.

The October Missile crisis at the height of the Cold War was the most serious breakdown in strained relations for either nation. Although he was well aware of the risks for placement of defensive missiles “in anticipation of an imminent U.S. invasion”, Fidel proposed to publicly announce the agreement between Cuba and the Soviet Union. When Nikita Khrushchev delayed the announcement, President Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of the island. However, Fidel, familiar with the history of U.S. maneuvers (specifically the U.S. denial to invite Cuba to peace talks with Spain during the Treaty of Paris, December 10, 1898), had prepared a five-point peace plan for lasting peace to be presented to the United States at the right moment. His plan should be recalled now. It was never acted upon, but if it had been, relations would have been different for future generations.

Though a nuclear catastrophe was averted through the negotiation process, Cuba once again was denied a voice in discussions between JFK and Khrushchev. In the words of President Castro, “because Cuba was not consulted and agreements were reached behind our backs ... what was achieved was a fragile peace. If we had been consulted, much more could have been achieved. We could have attained a lasting peace and other objectives.”

What were the demands of Fidel’s peace plan?

1. Suspend unauthorized, random attacks on Cuban soil and other acts of aggression and terrorism that result in death and property damage;
2. Withdrawal from the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo and return of land to rightful ownership by the Cuban people;
3. Prevention of espionage and dirty warfare techniques to destabilize the legitimate government of Cuba;
4. Stop the endless stream of disinformation and propaganda against the Cuban revolution, and
5. Lift the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba.

Many lessons have been learned during the intervening years with respect to the Cold War after the United States, Cuba and the Soviet Union pulled back from the brink. Fidel's strategy to prevent a pre-emptive nuclear first strike scenario was of paramount importance for the survival of humanity. Cuba's claim to develop its own economy independent from outside interference as defined by the Act of

State Doctrine is a legal right upheld by international law. Likewise, President Obama's emphasis that now is "the time to forget the past and leave it behind" is actually a constant reminder that the US economic blockade is no longer a viable policy.

The path to normalization of relations with Cuba was pointed out by Fidel in 1962. He continued to express his concern about the grave danger of nuclear weapons until he passed in 2016. In order to reconcile differences, it is necessary to pay attention to details that Cuba is demanding now to achieve a lasting peace with the United States. The Cuban people have made their own contribution to history. Let us not forget.

Richard Grassl is a member of the Carpenters Union in Washington State.