

The true story and the challenge of the Cuban journalists

Seven days ago I wrote about one of the great men in history: Salvador Allende, a man the world remembered with deep emotion and respect on his first centennial. However, no one quivered or even recalled the date of October 24, 1891, when the Dominican despot Rafael Leonidas Trujillo was born, eighteen years before our admired Chilean brother.

Both countries, one in the Caribbean and the other in the extreme south of Latin America, suffered the consequences of the danger that Jose Marti foresaw and tried to avert. As he indicated in his celebrated posthumous letter to his Mexican friend who had fought with Juarez, --and this is an idea I never tire of repeating: "Now, I am everyday in danger of giving my life...to timely prevent with the independence of Cuba that the United States expand over the Antilles and that, with that additional force, they may come against our American lands. Everything I've done until today, and everything I'll do, is for that purpose."

Our victorious Revolution was a friend of Allende, at the same time it hated Trujillo. This was an uncouth Pinochet begotten by the United States in the Caribbean. The despot had been the result of one of the Yankees' military interventions in the island that country shares with Haiti, a country which was the first Spanish colony.

The American Navy infantry had invaded that sister republic to secure its country's economic and strategic interests. Of course, there was not even a Platt Amendment there to cover up the action with a legal mantle.

In 1918, they recruited, among others, the adventurous and greedy native Dominican, the son of a small merchant, who was then trained and admitted, as a 27-year old, to the National Army. In 1921, he went on to another training course with the Military Academy established by the country's occupants. After he finished there, he was appointed unit chief and promoted to the rank of Captain for the services paid to the interventionist forces, although he was not previously a Lieutenant.

At the end of the Yankee occupation in 1924, Trujillo was ready to act as an instrument of the United States in high posts in the military, which he would use to deal the classic coup d'etat and the typical "democratic elections" leading him to the presidency of the republic in 1930. The beginning of his term coincided with the years of the Great Depression that hit the US economy so badly.

Cuba, the country most dependent and shackled by the trade agreements, stood to suffer the most severe consequences of that crisis. On the other hand, the Naval Base and the humiliating and unwarranted for Amendment would give them constitutional rights to intervene in our nation and to tear to pieces its glorious history.

In the neighboring country, with less direct economic dependence, the shrewd and voracious Trujillo handled whimsically the properties of the Dominican middle class and the oligarchy. The major sugar mills and many other branches of industry became his private property. That cult to private appropriation did not offend the capitalist concepts of the empire. Many neon signs claimed everywhere "God and Trujillo." Many cities, avenues, roads and buildings were named after him or his relatives. The same year he became President, a hurricane hit hard on Santo Domingo, the country's capital. After the city recovered from the damages, he renamed it Trujillo City. Never before had the world known such a personality cult.

In the year 1937, he carried out along the border a huge massacre of Haitian workers. This was his

reserve labor force in agriculture and construction.

He was a steady US ally. He was involved in the inception of both the United Nations and the OAS in 1948. On December 15, 1952, he traveled to Washington in his other capacity as plenipotentiary ambassador to the Organization of American States and stayed in that country for three and a half months. On July 2, 1954, he traveled to Spain on board a transatlantic ship which took him to Vigo. Franco, who was already an ally of the empire, welcomed him at the Madrid North Station accompanied by all members of the diplomatic corp.

My relationship with the Dominican Republic dates back to my days at the University. I had been honored with an appointment to President of the Committee for Dominican Democracy. It did not sound as a very important position, but since I was kind of rebellious, I took it seriously. The time to do something came up unexpectedly. The Dominican exiled fostered in Cuba the creation of an expeditionary force. I enlisted with it when I had not yet completed my sophomore. I was 21 years old.

I have told the story before of what happened then. After the frustrated Cayo Confites expedition, I was not among the over one thousand prisoners taken to the Columbia military camp, where Juan Bosch went on a hunger strike. These men had been incarcerated by the Head of the Army in Cuba, General Perez Dameron, who had received money from Trujillo to intercept the expedition. The General did this when the expeditionary were close to the Wind Passage.

A Cuban Navy frigate, aiming with its bow cannons at our leading boat, ordered us to return and to dock at the Antilla's port. I then jump into the water of the Nipe Bay together with three other expeditionary. We were four armed men.

I had met Juan Bosch, an outstanding Dominican leader, in Cayo Confites, where we trained, and we talked at length. He was not the chief of the expedition but he was certainly the most prestigious personality among the Dominicans, even if he was ignored by some of the main leaders of that movement and by the Cuban chieftains who had rather important and well paid official relations. I was then very far from even imagining this that I'm writing today!

Eleven years later, when our fight on the Sierra Maestra Mountains was about to successfully conclude, Trujillo granted a credit to Batista to buy weapons and ammunitions, which were brought by plane in the second quarter of 1958. He also volunteered to airborne three thousand Dominican troops, and later another force that would land in Oriente.

Batista's tyranny was defeated on January 1st, 1959, thanks to the hard blows dealt by the Rebel Army and the revolutionary general strike. The repressive state came crumbling down all throughout the island and Batista left for the Dominican Republic. He traveled there in the company of other sinister characters of that regime such as the well known thug Lutgardo Martin Perez, his 25-year old son Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez, and a group of the top military chiefs of his defeated army.

Trujillo offered Batista a warm welcome and accommodated him at an official residence for distinguished guest, although he later sent him to a luxurious hotel. He was concerned over the example of the Cuban Revolution, therefore, he counted on the top chiefs of Batista's former army and the likely support of the tens of thousands of members of the three army branches and the police, to organize a counterrevolution and support it with the Caribbean Legion, which might have had about 25 thousand soldiers from the Dominican Army.

The US Administration, being aware of these plans, sent a CIA officer to Santo Domingo to talk with Trujillo and assess his plans against Cuba. By midst February 1959, this man met with John Abbes Garcia, head of the Dominican Intelligence services to whom he recommended to send agents to recruit hostile elements in the ranks of the victorious Revolution. He did not say that the US government already had William Alexander Morgan Ruderth, an American citizen and CIA agent, who had infiltrated the Second Front in the Escambray, a man they had promoted to the rank of Commander and who was

one of the main chiefs there.

The development of these events, which make for a fascinating story, can be found in the books of senior Cuban Intelligence and Security officers, in the testimonies of leaders of military units of the Rebel Army who were directly involved, in autobiographies, official statements made in those days and reports by national and foreign journalists, all of whom it would be impossible to mention in this Reflection.

There is another book in the process of publication written by a comrade who joined the Militias when he was 17, and who for his good conduct and sharp mind was then transferred to the Prime Minister's and Commander in Chief's security detail where he studied to become a stenographer, then took notes of the conversations and collected the testimony of hundreds of participants in the events he narrates. This chapter of the history of our Revolution has yet to be recounted.

As is understood, the top revolutionary leaders were constantly informed of the news about the enemy's plans. We then conceived the idea of dealing the Yankee's, Batista's and Trujillo's counterrevolution a hard blow.

When the weapons sent by sea from Florida to carry out the first actions and the chiefs and plotters were all under strict control, we simulated a successful counterrevolution in the mountainous Escambray zone, and in Trinidad, which had an airstrip. We then proceeded to isolate the municipality of that small and friendly town where revolutionary political work was intensified.

Trujillo was full of enthusiasm. A company of our soldiers disguised as peasants shouted at the airstrip: "Long live Trujillo! Down with Fidel!" which was reported to headquarters in the Dominican Republic. They had dropped plenty of ammunitions from planes. Everything was unfolding according to plan.

On August 13th, a plane came in with a special envoy from Trujillo. It was Luis del Pozo Jimenez, the son of a former mayor and Batista follower in the capital and a prominent figure with the regime. He pointed out on a map the positions that would be bombed by the Dominican Air Force and inquired about the number of legionnaires necessary in the first stage.

Another notable envoy came with him. It was Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez who, as we have already indicated, had traveled with his father and Batista as they escaped to the Dominican Republic that January 1st. He was accompanied by several mercenary leaders who would stay behind. The plane had to go back. Its crew was the same that had carried Batista when he ran away.

I was in the proximity of the airstrip with Camilo Cienfuegos and other military chiefs. The head of the Cuban military personnel who had to unload the weapons and communication equipment had understood that they should arrest the aircraft crew. At this point, a copilot realized that something was wrong shot on them and a shootout ensued. Trujillo's envoys and the other mercenary chiefs were then arrested. There were casualties.

That same night I visited the wounded from both sides. We couldn't go ahead with the plan. Up until then, communications between Trujillo and the counterrevolution in the Escambray had taken place through short wave. Trujillo's official radio station broadcast triumphant military reports similar to those we would hear from Radio Swan and Miami in the days of Giron. We never used Cuba's public stations to spread false official reports.

It would have been possible to continue with the game even after the plane had been seized and Luis del Pozo Jimenez and Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez were arrested. We could have faked a mechanic failure of the plane that should have returned there, but that would have misled and confused our people, which were by then restless over the news about the alleged counterrevolutionary victories in Escambray publicly spread from Trujillo City.

That August 13, 1959 was my 33rd birthday. I was in my prime, physically and mentally strong.

It was a major revolutionary victory, but at the same time a signal about the times that would come and a sad gift from Rafael Leonidas Trujillo on my anniversary. Twenty months later we would be fighting at Giron; there would be violence and bloodshed in the Escambray, by the sea shore, in towns and all over the country. It was the counterrevolution organized by the United States.

In that country they would have executed Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez and Luis del Pozo Jimenez, as mercenaries in the service of an enemy power. The Revolutionary Courts sentenced them to prison, and they were not mistreated. What was the final destiny of Martin Perez? He migrated to the United States, legally, and he is today a standard bearer of the Cuban American terrorist Mafia which supports Republican candidate McCain.

A distinguished Canadian journalist and researcher, Jean-Guy Allard, describes the terrorist life of Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez as follows:

"...in fact, since early in his life, 'Macho' (his nickname) Martin Perez joined the Batista police and, for his special merits, that is, his beating of the prisoners in the last months of the bloody regime, he earned the rank of Sergeant.

"Both, the father and son were so close to Batista that, on January 1st, 1959, instead of running away to Miami, they followed the dictator to his sanctuary in the Dominican Republic.

"...released on May 29, 1987...in 1989 he joined the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) established by the CIA under Ronald Reagan.

"He would very soon be leading the paramilitary committee created by this organization which ensures the financing, among others, of the terrorist group Alpha 66 and other extremist groups acting against Cuba.

"...Martin Perez Rodriguez took part in the arrangement of a series of failed attempts on the life the President of Cuba during various Ibero American Summits.

"In 1994, on the occasion of Fidel's attendance to the 4th Summit, in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia... he purchased a 50 mm Barret gun and explosives which were transferred to Colombia from Miami...by plane!

"...he plotted with Jimenez Escobedo and Eugenio LLameras with a view to the 5th Ibero American Summit in 1995. That year, he revived the same plan for the Non Aligned Movement Summit, also in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.

"In 1997, at Margarita Island, Venezuela, on the occasion of the 7th Ibero American Summit of Heads of State and Government, Posada mounted another conspiracy with direct support from Martin Perez Rodriguez and other leaders of CANF..."

"...he signed the Declaration of support for terrorism against Cuba published by the Foundation on August 11th...Roberto Martin Perez, Feliciano Foyo and Horacio Garcia are some of the people Posada publicly named as the 'financiers' of his terrorist actions during his interview with the New York Times in 1997.

"...he sponsored in Miami an exhibition of paintings by [Orlando] Bosch and Posada [Carriles], the two masterminds of the sabotage against the Cuban civilian plane, in 1976, where 73 people were killed.

"In 1998, the great advocate of the 'political prisoner' carried out one of his dirtiest deeds: with other Miami Mafia ringleaders...he led the new FBI chief, the very corruptible Hector Pesquera, to the arrest of

five Cubans who had infiltrated the ranks of the terrorist organizations.

“...his unfailing friendship with Guillermo Novo Sampol, the murderer of Chilean leader Orlando Letelier is well known...

“The Republican candidate should know that his 73-year-old protégé was the first to assert that on the day of his longed for victory over the Cuban Revolution he would drive a bulldozer from the Cabo San Antonio to the Punta de Maisi crushing the island population guilty of any links with the Revolution.

“...on another occasion, asked about the risk of killing innocents in an attempt on Cuban leaders he said that he didn’t care if ‘the Pope died’.”

The historical truth tells us that John McCain’s father commandeered the amphibious attack, the invasion and occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965 against the nationalist forces led by Francisco Caamaño, another great hero of that nation whom I knew very well and who always had confidence in Cuba.

I dedicate this Reflection on historical events to our dear journalists, since it coincides with the 8th Congress of the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC, by its Spanish acronym), whom I consider like family. How I would have liked to study the techniques of their trade!

The UPEC has been very generous in publishing a book under the title Fidel, the journalist, which will be presented tomorrow afternoon. They sent me a copy with several articles published in clandestine or legal newspapers over five decades ago, with a prologue by Guillermo Cabrera Alvarez and the selection, introduction and notes by Ana Nuñez Machin.

I gave Guillermo Cabrera the nickname of “the genius” since I first met him. It was the impression I received from that great man who unfortunately passed away last year. He had had a heart surgery some time ago at the prestigious Cardiovascular Center established by our Revolution in Santa Clara City.

I reread some of the articles published in Alerta, Bohemia and La Calle, and I relived those years.

I wrote those articles when I felt the need to convey certain ideas. I did it out of pure revolutionary instinct. I always applied the principle that words should be simple and the concepts understandable to the masses. Today I have more experience, but I’m not as strong; it’s harder for me to do it. Our people’s educational level is higher with the Revolution, thus the task is more difficult.

From the revolutionary point of view, discrepancies are not important; it is the honesty of the opinion that counts. And, it is from the contradictions that the truth will emerge. Perhaps, it would be worthwhile some other time to make an effort to make some observations on this issue.

Yesterday, an important event took place, which will be an issue the following days. This is the release of Ingrid Betancourt and a group of people held by the FARC, that is, the Revolutionary Armed Forces from Colombia.

On January 10th this year, our ambassador to Venezuela, German Sanchez, following a request of the Venezuelan and Colombian governments, took part in the release of Clara Rojas to the International Red Cross. She had been a candidate to vice President of Colombia when Ingrid Betancourt was running for President and was kidnapped on February 23, 2002. Consuelo Gonzalez, a member of the House of Representatives, kidnapped on September 10, 2001, was released with her.

An era of peace was opening for Colombia. This is a process Cuba has been supporting for over two decades, as it is most convenient for the unity and peace of the peoples of our America, using new ways in the special and complex circumstances prevailing after the demise of the USSR in the early 1990s

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--which I won't try to analyze here-- very different from those existing in Cuba, Nicaragua and other countries in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s of the 20th century.

The bombing of a camp in Ecuadorian soil in the early hours of March 1st, --while Colombian guerrillas and young visitors from different nationalities were sleeping-- using Yankee technology; the occupation of the territory, the coup de grace on the wounded and the kidnapping of corpses as part of the terrorist plan from the United States government was repudiated the world over.

A Rio Group meeting was then held in the Dominican Republic on March 7th. There the events were strongly condemned while the US administration applauded.

Manuel Marulanda, a peasant and communist militant, the main leader of that guerrilla founded almost half a century ago was still alive. He passed away on the 26th of that same month.

Ingrid Betancourt, feeble and sick, as well as other captives with a serious health condition could hardly resist any longer.

Out of a basically humanist sentiment, we rejoiced at the news that Ingrid Betancourt, three American citizens and other captives had been released. The civilians should have never been kidnapped neither should the militaries have been kept prisoners in the conditions of the jungle. These were objectively cruel actions. No revolutionary purpose could justify it. The time will come when the subjective factors should be analyzed in depth.

We won our revolutionary war in Cuba by immediately releasing every prisoner absolutely unconditionally. The soldiers and officers captured in battle were released to the International Red Cross; we only kept their weapons. No soldier will ever surrender if he thinks he will be killed or subjected to cruel treatment.

We are watching with concern how the imperialists try to capitalize on what happened in Colombia in order to hide and justify their heinous crimes of genocide against other peoples. They want to deflect international attention from their interventionist plans in Venezuela and Bolivia and from the presence of the 4th Fleet in support of the political line that intends to obliterate the independence of the countries located south of the United States while taking possession of their natural resources.

These should be illustrative examples for all of our journalists. In our times, truth is navigating rough seas, where the mass media are in the hands of those threatening human survival with their immense economic, technologic and military resources. That's the challenge faced by the Cuban journalists!

Fidel Castro Ruz

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