

This week in Cuba March 1 to March 7, 2020



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, the commemoration in Cuba of the first act of state-sponsored terrorism directed against revolutionary Cuba on March 4, 1960; and secondly, an article in Granma reviewing the consequences of the U.S. eighteen-year war in Afghanistan.

(1) The first act of state-sponsored terrorism against Cuba, March 4, 1960

It is difficult to analyze terrorism, because the issue is manipulated for political purposes, and therefore its meaning is not used consistently. I find useful the distinction made by Tamim Ansary between classical terrorism and a new type of violence that has emerged since 1967. Classical terrorism was a strategy of resistance against repressive regimes. It involved the assassination of officials of the state, especially those known for their brutality; or the assassination of collaborators with the regime. Although classical terrorism was debated within revolutionary movements and apparently was adopted in some cases, it was used on a very limited scale, even in cases in which the struggle took the form of a guerrilla war. The

Communist International took an explicit position against terrorism, and prohibited its member parties from practicing it. The 26 of July Movement in Cuba rejected the practice as immoral and unethical and as a dysfunctional political strategy.

The terrorism that has emerged since 1967 as a new social pattern involves a much higher level of violence. It kills civilians intentionally, not as an unintended byproduct; moreover, it targets indiscriminately, without selecting the individuals targeted for assassination on the basis of their specific role in the political system. The deliberate indiscriminate killing of civilians by clandestine groups occasionally occurred prior to 1967. But after the Six Day War of 1967, the new form of terrorism emerged in the Arab world as a social phenomenon, occurring with a degree of regularity.

Applying such a definition, it can be said that Cuba since the triumph of the revolution has been the victim of terrorism, carried out by clandestine groups that often were carrying out their activities with the support and authorization of the government of the United States. The Cuban government has calculated that such state-sponsored terrorism in Cuba has resulted in 3,478 deaths and 2,099 persons permanently incapacitated.

The first of these terrorist acts was carried out on March 4, 1960, when the French steamship La Coubre exploded, as a result of sabotage. The explosion left more than 100 persons dead and 400 wounded, including forty-four dockworkers and six crew members. The ship had arrived in Havana on February 13 from the Belgian port of Amberes, with 31 tons of grenades and 44 tons of ammunition, which the Cuban Revolutionary Government had purchased from Belgium, with the intention of strengthening Cuba's capacity for self-defense.

A March 5, 2020 article in the Cuban daily newspaper Granma by Delfín Xiqués Cutiño notes that the ship's captain, George Dalmas, testified that there had been irregularities in the loading of the ship in Belgium. Instead of loading in the port, as was the norm, it was loaded in a nearby river, using boats. Moreover, two passengers were on board, a Frenchman who was traveling to Mexico and a U.S. citizen heading to Miami. A commission of Cuban specialists arrived to the conclusion that the explosion was an act of sabotage, for which the CIA was responsible. However, the government of the United States continues to deny to turn over documents in its secret files related to La Coubre. The article also observes that the French Lines Association in Le Havre has a file labeled "La Coubre. Explosion in Havana," marked with the prohibition, "for release in 150 years."

The March 4, 2020 issue of Granma publishes fragments of the words pronounced by Fidel Castro at the funeral rites of the victims of the explosion at the Colón cemetery on March 5, 1960. Three themes come to my attention in Fidel's discourse. First, the Cuban people, Fidel asserted, have the right to conclude that the explosion was intentional, and not an accident, and that it was carried out by the enemies of the Revolution, inasmuch as the U.S. consul and a military attaché of the U.S. embassy in Belgium had been trying to pressure the factory and the Belgian Minister of Foreign Relation to not sell these arms to Cuba.

Secondly, Fidel was impacted by the courage of the people, which was demonstrated by the multitudes of soldiers, workers, firefighters, sailors, and militias, already having heard two explosions and knowing the danger, advanced toward that place of death and danger in order to rescue the wounded and to rescue the victims from the burning ship. He declared that he hoped that the perpetrators would have the common sense to understand that any invasion of any kind on Cuban soil would be a mistake, because the Cuban people have demonstrated that they are prepared to struggle to their last drop of blood and to their last breath. We will resist any aggression against us, and we will overcome any aggression. In a memorable moment in the history of the Revolution, Fidel declared that since the beginning of the revolution we have said, "Liberty or Death." Now we understand that liberty means something more, liberty means "homeland." So our choice now will be, "Patria o muerte" "Homeland or Death."

Finally, Fidel promised those who had died that "Cuba will not be intimidated! Cuba will not retreat! The Revolution will not be stopped! The Revolution will not retreat! The Revolution will continue ahead

victoriously! The Revolution will continue unwavering in its march!” In a Granma article of March 5, 2020, Leidys María Labrador writes that Cuba still embraces that clarion call to combat, “born of the vibrant discourse of that infinite man, the natural leader that lives above time, the greatest of the sons of Martí.”

Nor does Cuba forget sixty years later, writes Alejandra García Elizalde, the image of that gigantic column of smoke, “one of the saddest footprints of state terrorism, the sabotage that was the first in a saga of thousands of crimes organized and financed from the United States.”

(2) The U.S. eighteen-year war in Afghanistan

An article in Granma on March 3 by Elson Concepción Pérez discusses the so-called peace agreement between Washington and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and it assesses the results of two decades of war launched by the United States. Concepción maintains that the United States has failed in its desire to impose a puppet state that would be managed in accordance with U.S. interests, and it therefore has no option except for a peace that would give the United States a way out. Although U.S. military presence has declined from its height of 98,000 soldiers in 2011, there still remain 16,000 combat troops, of which 8,000 are contributed by the United States and the rest by other member countries of NATO, plus another 14,000 uniformed non-combat troops.

Since 2001, Concepción notes, 60,000 civilians have died, and 150,000 have been wounded. U.S. combat deaths have reached 1,909, with 20,717 wounded. The United Kingdom, Canada, and France also have suffered deaths in combat; 454, 157, and 89, respectively.

Concepción observes that Afghanistan is one of the five poorest countries in the world. He writes that 18 years ago, it would have been better for the United States, instead of investing in bombs and deaths, had employed its resources to provide aid for development, health, education, and employment.

This is Charles McKelvey. We will be back next Sunday with “This week in Cuba,” reviewing the news emerging during the week from revolutionary Cuba.

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