

[Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, president of the Republic of Cuba, at the extraordinary session of the National Assembly of People's Power, Havana International Conference center. june 26, 2002 \[1\]](#)

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Comrades:

Everything has been said and much better than I could say it. The best I can do is to make a summary and go over some points.

Around the time when he assumed office, we wanted to avoid any rhetorical exchanges with the new president of the United States. Even though we didn't have the slightest doubt about his Cuba policy, we didn't see the point in casting the first stone. We would be patient.

A group from the extreme right had taken power in the United States and we knew about the agreements and commitments it had made before the elections with groups from the Miami Mob to destroy the Cuban Revolution —these did not exclude assassinating me. Fate added the peculiar circumstances that it was those groups that, using electoral fraud, were decisive in getting Bush elected president.

In the first stage of his presidency there were the normal anti-Cuban maneuvers in Geneva. Nothing new, only that the methods of pressuring the delegations at the Commission on Human Rights were more brutal than usual.

Almost all the first year went by without anything particularly new happening: the most noteworthy events in our bilateral relations were the traditional rhetorical attacks on Cuba, the FTAA meeting in Quebec and Bush's incorrect reference there to Martí's ideas. This gave rise to a flood of letters from Cuban children and adolescents explaining, as politely as possible, our national hero and apostle and his philosophy to the US president.

In the international arena, the decision to build a nuclear anti-missile shield, the contempt shown for the commitments entered into at Kyoto and the announcement of huge military expenditures to develop new sophisticated weapons when the cold war no longer even existed gave the world an early warning signal of the way of thinking, the style and the methods of the hegemonic superpower's new administration.

The international economy began to show worrying symptoms all over the place: all the indices and forecasts were pessimistic. The world was entering an uncertain and distressing recession. The prices of primary products, which are what the overwhelming majority of Third World countries make their living from, were at rock bottom while neo-liberal globalization, forced privatization, the foreign debt and the price of petroleum were sky-high.

The tragic, absurd and unjustifiable events of September 11 took place in the midst of this situation. The

world gave its unanimous help and solidarity to the U.S. people. Whatever errors and inconsistencies there may have been in the foreign policy of that country's administrations, nobody remained unmoved in face of the terrible massacre of thousands of innocent Americans, both the U.S. native-born and those coming from the widest variety of countries.

It was the moment for the super powerful nation to examine its conscience, and not to stir up, multiply and capitalize on the ridiculous hatreds accumulated over decades. It should have kept calm, and the rest of the world should have been brave. The first depended on the U.S. leaders, the second on elementary common sense and dignity. Such virtues, however, are not abundant. Neither one nor the other did as they should. The most powerful declared a world coup d'état on September 20, 9 days after the condemnable terrorist act when, on the warpath, it declared that every country had to decide whether it was its ally or its enemy. The United Nations lost what little authority was bestowed on it by a Charter rendered invalid by that most undemocratic of instruments: the veto. The other 184 states, which usually spend time voting for conventions that are almost always well meaning but never implemented, this time lost even their right to speak.

Since then only the shocking sound of irrationality, of threats and weapons has been heard.

The economic crises with their aftermath of poverty and hunger are multiplying; selfishness is growing stronger, solidarity is growing weaker; diseases, worse at times than war itself, threaten to wipe out entire regions. Economic science finds itself up against problems that it had never even imagined, tied as it is to concepts and categories that, like a heavy burden, drag it down into a sea of uncertainty and helplessness. It is what they have learned in the great and prestigious universities of the economic and social system that today has become an anachronistic world empire. Politics has ceased to offer the illusion of a noble, useful art, an illusion that it always dreamed of using to justify itself, only to become a futile and discredited entertainment. This is a huge but not insuperable tragedy. The fact that the system is unsustainable will lead human kind to look for solutions.

Coming back down to earth, in the limited area of the planet, which our country occupies, we Cubans have the right to enjoy the modest privilege of a duty done. We are the offspring of major events and historical currents that have developed over many centuries. A little over a century ago this was a colonial, slave-based society where there were strong annexationist and anti-independence feelings among the richest strata of the native born whites. Then, a titanic 30-year struggle by the growing patriotic sector led them close to achieving their goal when the U.S. troops intervened in that nation forged by the tenacity and heroism of its best sons, which were thus betrayed and sold out, pushed and pulled by infinitely superior forces, until today when we have a small independent and absolutely free country that stands tall before the most powerful imperial force that has existed, the same which is no friend of peace nor of the rights of other peoples.

There was no record in any book of such a special case. The ideas, the feelings and the strengths that have brought us where we are today, that keep us and will keep us here, rose up from the deep abyss of the past.

Dangerous things started happening last May after the embarrassing maneuvers in Geneva, where the U.S. government managed to win a Pyrrhic victory by the smallest possible margin after using brutal pressure. On May 6, the United States accused us of doing research into biological weapons; on May 20, Bush's speeches in Washington and Miami; on May 21, they once again included Cuba on their list of countries which sponsor terrorism; on June 1, Bush's incredible statements in West Point.

On May 20, the president of the United States dedicated an entire day to Cuba and the Revolution. What a great honor! He remembers us, therefore we are!

I don't know when it is that the U.S. president writes his speeches, or if he assigns this task to one of his closest advisors, or if they are a hybrid of the two. Whatever the circumstances, arrogance, demagoguery and lies are usually an inseparable part of those speeches. He gave two speeches on that day, one in

the White House and the other in Miami. He was disparaging, insulting, and showed little respect for his adversary. The most significant part was not the offense and insults. Those who lack valid arguments have no choice but to resort to lies and adjectives. What must be considered as fundamental are his macabre intentions, his reckless plans and his mistaken ideas.

A staggering example of falsehood and disrespect for international public opinion took place when, in his White House speech, Mr. Bush calmly announced that the United States and its friends and allies won the freedom of countries like South Africa.

The whole world knows, and future generations should also know, that the end of apartheid was decided in Cuito Cuanavale and in south east Angola by more than 40,000 Cuban troops who fought there together with Angolan and Namibian soldiers. The U.S. administrations armed Savimbi, who planted millions of landmines and killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. Those administrations kept a conspiratorial silence over South Africa's possession of seven nuclear weapons in the hope that they would be used against the Cuban troops.

Bush tends to mistake his wishes for the strangest fantasies.

"One hundred years ago", he said in Miami, "a proud island people declared independence and put Cuba on a democratic course. We are here today to celebrate this important anniversary".

As far as he is concerned the Platt Amendment never existed, nor did the deceit, the betrayal, the right to intervention and the violation of Cuban sovereignty that it meant. History didn't even exist.

He spoke of a "Peter Pan", today one of his ministers. But he didn't say that 14,000 Cuban children were clandestinely taken out of Cuba in that monstrous operation that bore the name of Peter Pan and that was organized by U.S. authorities around a cynical and repulsive lie.

He went right on to relate the melodramatic tale of a Cuban boy who arrived in the United States in 1995 when he was ten years old, who will be graduating within a few weeks from a Miami senior high school and who will be the first person to have graduated from that high school to attend Harvard. He didn't have and couldn't have the minimal honesty needed to admit that only a child from Cuba —the only country in the hemisphere where all children attend school from kindergarten on and where one hundred per cent of student graduate from sixth grade with twice the average level in language and mathematics as in other countries in the Americas according to an UNESCO survey— could go to Harvard after only a few years study. This was not the case of an immigrant from another Latin American country, educated in a public school, nor a Native American or an African American.

He immediately added that no one had given anything to anybody in Cuba; "they had brought Cuba's workers, farmers and families nothing -- nothing but isolation and misery", he said.

He didn't even try to explain why then, after four decades of U.S. aggression, terrorism, blockade and economic war —and a good measure of political conscience, education, heroism and popular support was needed to withstand all that— they have not been able to destroy or weaken a Revolution which has done nothing for the people.

Mr. Bush added, among other nonsense, that when every other nation in the hemisphere has chosen the path to democracy, I chose, " to jail, to torture and exile Cuban people for speaking their minds". This slanderous reference to the use of torture in our country was made by none other than the head of State whose government trained tens of thousands of Latin Americans in special schools, the same who, in almost all of the countries in our hemisphere, were responsible for hundreds of thousands of cases of torture, disappearance and death. Our security forces never received training from such experienced teachers. If Mr. Bush were able to point to a single case of torture in Cuba over the more than four decades of Revolution we would be prepared to erect a solid gold statue in honor of his memory as the least dishonest of all the liars in the world, even if we had to melt down our numismatic museum's

collection

Those who know our country and its long and hazardous history in depth know that the Revolution's ethical principles, which explain its amazing strength and capacity for endurance, are far from being Mr. Bush's principles.

In his incoherent speeches on May 20 he stated:

"My administration will also continue to look for ways to modernize Radio and TV Martí".

As can be seen, whereas Cuba devotes a large number of hours every day to school programming and to University for All and is investing resources to expand to all of Cuba coverage of the educational channel, which is gaining more and more prestige and support from the people, the U.S. government, in addition to the offensive use of the name of the most sacred figure in our history, is promising to invest more money to modernize radio and TV stations to attack our culture and to sow disinformation, lies, poison and subversion in our country.

In what seemed to be a flight of delirious fancy, Bush admitted he was astounded to have read, —nobody knows where he read it— that in this day and age the Cuban regime forbids the sale of computers to the public. He treats us as if we were a rich and developed country. Nevertheless, it hasn't occurred to anyone to tell him that currently Cuba is the only county in this hemisphere including, possibly, the United States where one-hundred percent of schools and educational centers, from kindergarten to the highest university level, have computer laboratories and professors in spite of the cruel, ironclad economic and technological blockade imposed on our country to prevent any progress in any field whatsoever.

Mr. Bush could be justifiably astounded if he were capable of thinking that our country is possibly the only one on earth that is striving for a general comprehensive education where in a few years time those who have only a first degree will be considered functionally illiterate. Then, we shall be able to compete with people in the United States and other developed countries not only in our ability to communicate via the Internet in several languages but also in educational and cultural levels. He would be better spending his time preparing the children and young people in his country for this not too distant future and most of all protecting them from the destructive and alienating effects of commercial and consumerist advertising.

Something even more shameful and unacceptable: Mr. Bush said that "if Cuba also begins to adopt meaningful market based reforms", that is capitalism, "then, and only then, I will work with the United States Congress to ease the ban on trade and travel between our two countries."

"We will continue to prohibit U.S. financing for Cuban purchases of U.S. agricultural goods, because this would just be a foreign aid program in disguise, which would benefit the current regime."

"If Mr. Castro refuses our offer, he will be protecting his cronies at the expense of his people. And eventually, despite all his tools of oppression, Fidel Castro will need to answer to his people." This is exactly what I am doing, Mr. Bush: responding to the people, accounting for my life and revolutionary conduct in order to prepare the reply with their help that we must give to the demands and threats which you had and have no right to make of a people that has the dignity and decorum the Cuban people has.

President Bush, either out of naiveté or insolent temerity, announced that he will "offer scholarships in the United States for Cuban students and professionals who try to build independent civil institutions in Cuba, and scholarships for family members of political prisoners".

In Cuba our adolescents and young people are the beneficiaries of almost half a million scholarships for all types of instruction. These scholarships are awarded according to academic achievement or

according to the student's needs, depending on the institutions involved. No child or young person is discriminated against. The idea that such awards could be given for political reasons is insulting and inadmissible.

Mr. Bush offers scholarships that the country has absolutely no need of and he does so with a hidden agenda. He shouldn't even think that we would cooperate with a plan aimed at creating something similar to the School of the Americas to train agents of subversion and destabilization to serve his interventionist and imperial ends.

Additionally, Cuba grants every year thousands of scholarships to young foreigners who are not discriminated against on ethnic or ideological grounds. It would be preferable if Mr. Bush were to grant these scholarships to young African or Native American students or to young people of Latin American descent who are unable to study in the United States.

The U.S. government is also making a mistake if it expects that people who work as hired hands of a foreign power will go unpunished, --that is an offence punished harshly by U.S. law-- nor should he think that those who visit Cuba under some disguise or other to bring in money and to conspire openly against the Revolution will find things easy; nor that officials of his Interest Section have any right to run all over the country as they please on the pretext of monitoring the situation of illegal immigrants who are returned to Cuba, or to organize rings of conspirators, breaking the rules that govern the conduct of diplomats.

We are not willing to allow our sovereignty to be violated or to allow the norms that govern diplomatic behavior to be flouted in a humiliating manner. Smuggling goods in the diplomatic pouches is also inadmissible. The responsibility will lie with the U.S. government if its repeated commission of such offences leads to the cancellation of the migration agreement and even to the withdrawal of the U.S. Interest Section from Havana. This is not something we wish for, since it would be a regrettable backward step in the few areas where progress has been made in the relations between the two countries.

On the other hand, we are prepared to do without anything, including life, except our country's dignity and sovereignty. We are not the ones attacking, being hostile to or blockading the United States. We are not demanding that its constitution and political and economic system be changed. We show the strictest respect for the rights of other countries. Our rights must also be respected.

We have given more than enough proof of a sincere spirit of cooperation in matters of common interest. We proposed three draft bilateral agreements to fight against narcotics traffic, trafficking in persons and terrorism.

Another example: when the Guantánamo Naval Base was illegally turned into a camp for foreign prisoners, we offered our help and took the necessary measures in that uneven, mountainous territory to avoid accidents which could affect both U.S. military personnel and the prisoners.

In his speech Mr. Bush mentioned political prisoners in Cuba but he made absolutely no mention of the Cuban heroes imprisoned by the empire and unjustly given sentences of years upon years in jail and several terms of life imprisonment. Thus, they speak of spies there and of political prisoners here; we speak of political prisoners there and counterrevolutionary prisoners and spies here.

Finally, a point that we cannot overlook: the slur and insult when he said in Miami that "trade with Cuba would do nothing more than line the pockets of Fidel Castro and his cronies".

Mr. Bush, I am absolutely not like those corrupt characters that you honor with your friendship in this world, or like those who, following capitalist and neo-liberal recipes, seized the State and transferred billions of dollars abroad, a large part of them laundered by famous and influential U.S. banks. Fond as you are of large fortunes, being a millionaire yourself and the son of a millionaire, you will perhaps

never be able to understand that there are people who cannot be bribed and who are indifferent to money.

I was not born completely poor. My father owned thousands of acres of land. When the Revolution triumphed, this land was handed over to workers and farmers. I take pride in saying that I do not have a single dollar. All my fortune, Mr. Bush, would fit in your shirt pocket. If one day I should need to store it somewhere well protected from pre-emptive and surprise attacks, I will ask you to lend it to me, and if that is too much, I will donate my fortune to you as a down payment on the rent.

It is strange to see that there was a subtle difference in President Bush's ambidextrous May 20 speech, given twice on the same day. The speech in the White House did not mention the word torture or the gross remark about Castro's pocket and his cronies. These were included in the speech at the James L. Knight Center to the great delight of his close friends in Miami, the same people who when Elian came back to his home and his family trampled on and set fire to U.S. flags in rage, something that has never happened in Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution.

I already spoke about his West Point speech in Santiago de Cuba. Today there are quite a few people in the world and even in his own country who share in the concerns over the philosophy that you explained there. I shall not say more on this occasion. I am merely pleased to inform you that in this dark corner of the world nobody is afraid of your threats about an unannounced surprise attack.

Every person has a given life span. We gave every minute of life remaining to us to our cause a long time ago.

As for you, Mr. President, you are losing authority. In theory, you are empowered to bring death to a large part of the world, but you can't do it alone. You need many other people to help you obliterate the rest of the world and among the military and civilian leaders who operate in your country's power structures there are many learned and talented people. A simple order would not suffice. You would have to persuade them, and they will be less and less willing to be persuaded as they see that your political advisors lacking in capacity and military experience make one mistake upon another. Dreadful and opportunistic lies do not suffice to launch pre-emptive and surprise attacks against any of the 60 or more countries, or against several of them, or against them all.

Likewise, there are in your country millions of scientists, intellectuals and professionals in the most diverse areas who know the difference between right and wrong, who are aware of the history and terrible realities in today's world, who have their opinions and who are opinion-makers. There is also the rest of the world that will not forget easily the tragedies to which your ideas and concepts may lead.

It is not my purpose to offend you personally, but I can tell you this because I have the modest possibility of meditating with objectivity and because, together with our valiant and heroic people, I lost long ago any notion of fear.

Long live socialism!

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