

"THE DISASTER IN JAPAN AND A VISIT FROM A FRIEND"

Today I had the pleasure of greeting Jimmy Carter, who from 1977 to 1981 was the President of the United States, the only one, in my opinion, who had enough serenity and courage to tackle the issue of US-Cuba relations.

Carter did what he could to reduce international tensions and to promote the establishment of Cuban and US Interest offices. His administration was the only one that took a few steps towards easing the criminal blockade imposed against our people.

The circumstances weren't exactly favorable given the complexities of our world at that time. The existence of a genuinely free and sovereign nation in our hemisphere was incompatible with the ideas of the fascist rightwing in the United States. This faction maneuvered to cause President Carter's plans to fail; plans that would make him worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize. Nobody gave it to him for free.

The Cuban Revolution always appreciated this brave gesture. In 2002 we gave Jimmy Carter a warm welcome. Now I take this opportunity to reiterate our respect and appreciation.

Will the oligarchy that governs this superpower ever be able to give up its insatiable drive to impose its will on the rest of the world? Can this even occur in a system that increasingly produces presidents such as Nixon, Reagan and Bush W. who have ever more destructive powers and ever less respect for the sovereignty of nations?

The complexity of the world today leaves little margin for relatively recent memories. The farewell we gave to Carter today, Wednesday, coincided with worrisome news on the nuclear accident caused by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. These reports keep coming in and cannot and should not be ignored, not only for their importance, but also because of the practical and almost immediate repercussion they have on the world economy.

Today AP reported the following from Japan:

"The crisis at the Japanese nuclear plant that was damaged by the tsunami worsened on Wednesday after tests of nearby ocean water showed the highest levels of radiation detected so far."

"In Fukushima, radiation has penetrated the ground, seeped into the ocean and turned up in vegetables, non-pasteurized milk and even in tap water in Tokyo, 220 kilometers to the south."

"Meanwhile, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko visited for an hour with a group of evacuees in Tokyo."

From Tokyo, Reuters reported:

"Japan said it would upgrade its safety standards for nuclear power plants on Wednesday, its first acknowledgement that norms were insufficient when an earthquake wrecked one of its facilities, triggering the world's worst atomic disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

"The announcement came as the government conceded that there was no end in sight to the crisis and a spike in radioactive iodine levels in seawater added to evidence of reactor leakages around the complex and beyond.

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"Plutonium finds in soil at the plant this week had already have raised public alarm over the accident, which has overshadowed the humanitarian calamity triggered by an earthquake and tsunami on March 11 that left 27,500 people dead or missing.

"Before the disaster, Japan's 55 nuclear reactors had provided about 30 percent of the nation's electric power. The percentage had been expected to rise to 50 percent by 2030, among the highest in the world.

"New readings showed a spike in radioactive iodine in the sea off the plant to 3,355 times the legal limit, the state nuclear safety agency said, although it played down the impact, saying people had left the area and fishing had stopped.

"Hundreds of engineers have been toiling for nearly three weeks to cool the plant's reactors and avert a catastrophic meltdown of fuel rods, although the situation appears to have moved back from that nightmare scenario.

"Jesper Koll, director of equity research at JPMorgan Securities in Tokyo, said a drawn-out battle to bring the plant under control and manage the radioactivity being released would perpetuate the uncertainty and act as a drag on the economy.

"'The worst-case scenario is that this drags on not one month or two months or six months, but for two years, or indefinitely,' he said.

"A by-product of atomic reactions and a prime ingredient in nuclear bombs, plutonium is highly carcinogenic and one of the most dangerous substances on the planet, experts say."

A third news agency, DPA, reported from Tokyo that:

"Japanese technicians continue to try to stop the nuclear crisis three weeks after the accidents took place at the Fukushima plant. Consequently, Tokyo authorities are beginning to consider taking extraordinary measures to stop the radioactive leak from the facilities.

"The idea is to cover the reactors with a sort of tissue. Recent high readings of iodine 131 in seawater indicate increasing radiation. The Greenpeace environmental organization warns of serious danger to the health of local inhabitants following its own assessment.

"Experts say that a process that would definitively rule out a possible fusion of the core may take months. Tepco has promised to improve the work conditions of the technicians, who are increasingly becoming more nervous and exhausted."

While these events take place in Japan, the president of Venezuela is visiting Argentina, Uruguay and is on his way to Bolivia to promote economic accords and to strengthen relations with the countries of our hemisphere, which are determined to be independent.

At the University of La Plata, where the tyranny promoted by the United States caused the disappearance of many thousands of Argentineans, including 700 students —40 from the Faculty of Journalism--, Chavez was granted the Rodolfo Walsh award, named after one of the heroic and revolutionary journalists who were murdered.

It is no longer Cuba alone; there are now many peoples willing to fight to death for their own homeland.

Fidel Castro Ruz
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