

Playa Girón: Fidel and Cuba's "Civic-Military Union"

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In the first of three books on Cuba, Latin America and the U.S., published in 1999 by Editorial José Martí (Havana), I wrote:

"During the 1960 May Day speech, Fidel Castro developed the notion of how the new state was a state of the majority in the true sense of the term. After the U.S. airstrikes took place as part of the overall policy to destroy the Revolution and to restore U.S. political and economic power, the people were faced with the real possibility of confronting full armed aggression. From this the notion of the militia arose." [i]

On May 1, 1960 at the annual May Day march in Havana, the publication quotes Fidel:

"Only a few months ago there was not a single organized worker or peasant militia. The appeal for the organization of the militia was issued in the month of October, on 26 October, to be precise, in connection with the protest against the air attack which cost our citizenry more than 40 victims.

Six months ago, we did not have a single workers' militia. Six months ago, the workers did not know how to handle weapons. Six months ago, the workers did not know how to march. Six months ago, we did not have a single company of militiamen to defend the Revolution in the event of attack. And in only six months we have organized the militia, we have trained and instructed them." [ii]

Then, further developing Fidel's unique vision of the militia, the book continues:

"The establishment of the militia meant far more than close ties between the state and the people. It signified in reality the masses of people becoming an extension of the state. The Rebel Army was the factor allowing the people to take political power, and out of it emerged the new state to protect and extend this political power in the hands of the majority. Therefore, the extent to which people participated in the armed protection and extension of the Revolution was necessarily an indication as to what point the people were actually in power. The Revolution and its defence had sunk such deep roots amongst the people that never did it cross the minds of the new government that the people may turn their arms against it. And so, guns were given to the people. This feature of the new Cuba was brought home in a most lively way by Fidel Castro on May 1, 1960 when he suggested the analogy of what would happen if armaments were handed out to the most oppressed section of the population in a country where exploitation and discrimination prevails.

From the same May 1, 1960 podium where Fidel spoke, the Historical Leader of the Cuban

Revolution is quoted once again in the book:

“A democracy exists when the people are made strong by uniting them! A democracy exists when guns are given to the peasants, and to the workers, and to the students, and to the women, and to the Negroes, and to the poor — to each citizen who is prepared to defend a just cause! A democracy exists when not only do the rights of the majority count, but when they are given weapons as well! And this can only be done by a truly democratic government, wherein the majority governs!

And this could never be done by a pseudo-democracy. We would like to know what would happen if the Negroes in the southern part of the United States, who have so many times been lynched, were each given a gun! What could never be done by an exploiting oligarchy, what never could be done by a military camp representing those who oppress and plunder the peoples, what could never be done by a minority government is to give each worker, each student, each young person, each humble citizen, each of those whomake up the majority of the people a gun.”[iii]

The role of the militia in defeating the U.S. was even highlighted by BBC in 2011:

“The American plan was to sneak ashore virtually unopposed, secure the area, take the airfield and fly in a government-in-exile who would then call for direct US support.

At the same time, they were relying on a mass uprising in Cuba against the revolutionaries.

It could not have gone more wrong: when an advance frogman lit a beacon to show the exiles where to land, it also alerted the Cuban militia to their presence.

Local fisherman Gregorio Moreira, who still lives in the same house beside the beach, was one of the first to raise the alarm.

“I went out of the house and saw a flare, like a candle, in the sky. So I headed to the trench with my father and my brothers,” 74-year-old Mr Moreira recalls.

He was joined on the beach by one of his neighbours, another fisherman, Domingo Rodriguez.

“We thought, ‘This is the invasion boys, be careful! They are trying to invade.’

“We had 11 rifles between us and at about 0400 they started the landing, so we opened fire.”

Reinforcements, including Cuban air force planes, quickly arrived.

The exiles had some air support, but US President John F Kennedy was determined to keep the U.S. involvement a secret and as the initiative turned against the invading force, he backed away from providing further critically needed air cover.

At the same time, Fidel Castro took personal charge of the operation, and within only three days [the battle was over.](#) “

Furthermore, Granma in reporting on the anniversary act in Playa Girón in 2017, points out the important role of Fidel and the militia:

His [Fidel] physical presence at the scene of the invasion contributed to keeping morale high among the militias and was decisive to their victory in those glorious days of April 1961, stated Kenia Otaño, a young [resident from Ciénaga de Zapata, speaking during the act.](#)

Today, on the anniversary of the victory in Playa Girón, Cuba is more than able to confront a similar Playa Girón-type military provocation by the U.S. Washington knows it.

In addition, now there are two “civic-military unions” in the region: Cuba and Venezuela. Furthermore, Cuba and Venezuela today have more friends than ever around the world in defense of the Cuban and Bolivarian Revolutions.

The Yanquis should pay attention to history.

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Notes

[i] August, Arnold, *Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 Elections*, Editorial José Martí, Havana, 1999, page 195.

[ii] Castro Ruz, Fidel, *Revolución*, La Habana, May 2, 1960 (Translation by author)

[iii] Castro Ruz, Fidel, *Ibid.*

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