

Cuba reiterates its invariable solidarity with Constitutional President Nicolás Maduro and the Bolivarian Revolution

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Press conference by Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, for the national and international media, held at Minrex headquarters, February 19, 2019, Year 61 of the Revolution

(Council of State transcript – GI translation)

Bruno Rodríguez: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here.

We are just a few days from the Constitutional referendum in our country which is holding all of our attention. The mobilization of our people has been intense, and I thank you for the coverage provided by the media you represent.

The government of the Republic of Cuba has consistently denounced that the United States of America is preparing a military aggression against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, using humanitarian pretexts.

In speeches by the First Secretary of our Party's Central Committee, on July 26, 2018, and January 1, 2019, and in those of the President of our Councils of State and Ministers, compañero Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, in July last year, and more recently, alerts have been sounded about the very serious consequences -economic, political, social, humanitarian, and to the peace and security of the region - that a new military adventure by the United States in Our America would have.

The Revolutionary Government statement dated February 13, with full responsibility and all necessary facts, affirmed, and I reiterate, that U.S. military transport flights are taking place, originating at U.S. military installations from which operate special forces units and marine infantry used for undercover actions, including those directed against leaders or persons considered valuable.

Entirely without the knowledge of governments in the areas involved, and with total disregard for the sovereignty of these states, the preparation of a military action continues, using a humanitarian pretext.

Yesterday afternoon, President Donald Trump and other high-ranking functionaries and spokespeople for the U.S. government repeated and confirmed that the military option is among those being considered. Yesterday, the President said: All options are open.

According to the media in the U.S. itself, high-ranking U.S. military commands, which do not, have never, taken charge of humanitarian aid, have held meetings with politicians in the U.S. and other nations, and have made visits to sites clearly related to the issue we are addressing.

We are all witnessing the fabrication of humanitarian pretexts. A deadline has been set to force the entry of "humanitarian aid" with the use of force, which in and of itself constitutes a contradiction. It is not possible that real humanitarian help be based on violence, on the use of weapons or the violation of international law. This very focus is a violation of international law that reveals the politicization of humanitarian aid, as has occurred at other moments, with the use of noble causes, of universal recognition, as pretexts for the launching of military aggression.

We must ask ourselves - given the setting of a deadline, given the statement made that the humanitarian aid will enter Venezuelan territory by any means, against the sovereign will of its people and the decision of its Constitutional government - what objectives are being pursued? What could they be, if not generating an incident that would endanger the lives of civilians, provoke violence or unpredictable situations?

There has been talk, these last few days, about the humanitarian aid lasting months or even years - as long as the "reconstruction" lasts, has been mentioned.

We could ask this Senator from Florida what reconstruction he is talking about. We are talking about a nation that is not at war, nor has suffered a war, but knows that war is good business for U.S. companies in the military-industrial complex, and for others later, during the so-called reconstruction.

The United States government continues to pressure member states of the United Nations Security Council to force the adoption of a resolution that would serve as the prelude to a "humanitarian intervention." Contained in the text is a diagnosis of the situation portraying the peace and security of this sister nation as broken, and calls on all types of international actors to adopt necessary measures.

Given the precedents, including recent ones, this language is well known to be followed by other calls for exclusive aerial zones, the protection of civilians, the establishment of humanitarian corridors, in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter that authorizes the use of force.

We are hopeful that the United Nations Security Council ensures that its vocation and responsibility as a guarantor of peace prevails, and does not lend itself to military adventures. We call on its members to act in accordance with international law and defend the peace, so precious to humanity, to Our America, and to the Venezuelan people, as well.

The government of the United States has invented, has fabricated in Washington, an imperialist coup, with a "President" constructed in this northern capital, which has not worked even internally. Numerous U.S. sources could be cited, accredited press media that have published all the details about how the coup was organized. At this time, the pressure that the United States government is putting on other countries is still brutal, trying to force recognition of the supposed "President," self-named and proclaimed by Washington, and the call for new elections in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, annulling those that its people, legitimately and constitutionally, just held.

The maneuvers of the White House National Security team, along with those of some State Department functionaries and U.S. embassies, are well known. Also underway is a huge publicity and political operation, generally seen as a prelude to broader action by this administration.

Coercive, unilateral - and therefore illegal - economic measures against the sister Republic of Venezuela are increasing: the seizure or freezing of financial assets in third countries; the tremendous pressure on governments that supply Venezuela and the Venezuelan oil industry; pressure on banks in third countries to block legitimate financial transactions, even in other currencies; the confiscation, practically theft, of the PDVSA subsidiary in the United States and other interests established in the country.

These measures constitute a gross violation of international law and international humanitarian law, creating hardship and human harm, which are totally incompatible with hypocritical calls for humanitarian aid by those responsible for the implementation of these cruel measures. The figures are obscene. There is talk about humanitarian aid worth some 20 million dollars to a country that is being deprived of more than 30 billion dollars, as a result of these arbitrary, illegal, and unjust measures.

The government of the Republic of Cuba calls on the international community to take action in defense of peace, to prevent a military intervention in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, with the joint efforts of all, without exception.

At this critical moment, when at stake are respect for and the relevance of the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter; when it is decided if the legitimacy of a government rests in the support and the votes of its people; when it is decided if foreign pressure can substitute the sovereign exercise of self-determination; in these circumstances, one can only be in favor or against peace. One can only be in favor or against war.

We encourage the Montevideo Mechanism, especially the governments of the United States of Mexico, the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, the governments of the Caribbean Community and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, to continue making their greatest efforts, in this urgent situation, to facilitate a resolution based on dialogue and absolute respect for the independence and sovereignty of Venezuela, and the validity of the principles of international law, especially non-intervention.

We call for an international mobilization for peace, against a U.S. military intervention in Latin America, against war; above and beyond political differences, ideological differences, in favor of the greater good of humanity which is peace, which is the right to live.

We call on all governments; parliaments; political forces; social, popular, indigenous movements; professional and social organizations; trade unions; farmers; women; students; intellectuals and artists; academics; and especially communicators and journalists - on you (gesturing toward the press) - on non-governmental organizations, on representatives of civil society.

At the same time, the government of the Republic of Cuba reiterates our firm, invariable solidarity with Constitutional President Nicolás Maduro and the Bolivarian Chavista Revolution, with the civic-military union, and the people, and insists that in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, today, the postulates of the proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace must be defended. There, today, the sovereignty of all, the independence of all, and the sovereign equality of states must be defended.

We witnessed in wonder, this afternoon, the speech by President Donald Trump. Suddenly, he decreed the “end of socialism,” and announced “a new day” for humanity. He solemnly proclaimed that, for the first time in history, there would be a hemisphere free of socialism.

He curiously also spoke of progress in negotiations with a large socialist country and had chosen another to host an important summit. How many times have figures in the United States announced the end of socialism or the end of history?

President Trump praised the “great leaders” from Florida present at the event: a governor, a couple senators, a representative, an ambassador, all fundamentalist Republicans, and five minutes later, apparently, they told him or he noticed that he had been deeply unjust by omitting the name of John Bolton, also present.

Bolton has been a war planner for decades, the principle organizer of the coup in Venezuela and a consistent advocate of the military option.

The President of the United States referred to human dignity. Apparently he forgets that it is under capitalism - in particular, imperialism - that injustice, exploitation, and manipulation of persons prevails.

He criticized corruption, perhaps without recognizing that the U.S. political system is corrupt by nature, that this is where special interests and corporate contributions reign, where money talks and now big data, where elections are won by manipulating the people.

He spoke of democracy, without mentioning the millions of U.S. citizens, mostly Black and Latino, who are not allowed to vote, or the 40 million living in poverty, half of them children.

He forgot to mention the more than 500,000 homeless, without a roof over their heads. Perhaps he is unaware that a pattern of racial discrimination prevails there, from disproportionate death penalty sentences and court sanctions, including police brutality that has perennially cost the lives of African-Americans.

He did not mention the low level of unionization of U.S. workers, or women without the right to equal pay for equal work.

He mentioned Venezuelan migrants, but not the wall on the Río Bravo. He didn't mention the under-aged Central Americans, cruelly separated from their parents, or the deaths in detention centers. He did not refer to repression of migrants, or minorities, or those murdered at the hands of the Border Patrol.



From February 14 to 20, the Cuban people expressed their support for the Venezuelan people and their defense of peace. **Photo:** Ismael Batista

President Trump promised the coup plotters success, because the United States is behind them, backing them. It appears that he is unaware that the coup has not worked, and this is why threats against Venezuela from abroad are escalating.

He presented himself as a head of state who loves peace. Successive U.S. administrations have provoked dozens of wars. This is the country that has tortured and tortures. This is the country that calls the deaths of innocent civilians in war adventures “collateral damage.” This country has sent tens of thousands of U.S. youth as cannon fodder to die in wars of imperialist plunder. This is the country that launched a war that cost the lives of more than a million on the basis of a lie about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Some of the current protagonists were responsible for that war and are now lying about Venezuela.

The (U.S.) President said that socialism does not respect borders. But it was that imperialism that militarily occupied Cuba more than once, that prevented our independence until the entry into Havana of Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz. It was that country that stripped Mexico of more than half of its territory, that imposed cruel military dictatorships in Latin America, and that today maintains aggressive military bases practically all over the planet.

President Trump said that socialism promises unity, but provokes hate and division. What extraordinary cynicism, extraordinary hypocrisy! He is the representative of an amoral government, of a sector rejected even by traditional U.S. parties, that plays dirty politics, that incites the polarization of society with the language of hate and division, and that even prominent conservative exponents have condemned, as they lack the minimum standards of political decency.

The President also said that nothing is less democratic than socialism.

Mr. President Trump, try a constitutional reform, call a referendum on your policies, respect the will of your electorate. Remember that you are President despite having lost the popular vote by

more than three million ballots.

The accusation by the President of the United States that Cuba maintains a private army in Venezuela is vile. I demand that he present proof.

Our government categorically rejects this slander, while reaffirming the duty and commitment to continue providing our modest cooperation, in which slightly more than 20,000 Cuban collaborators participate, all civilian, 94% of them Health workers, others in Education, as they do in 83 countries around the world.

We Cubans will continue on our own path, and are preparing for a successful referendum just days from now. We will continue calmly and devotedly working, imbued with the certainty that we possess the necessary tools to build our future.

Cuban collaborators in Venezuela, last Saturday and Sunday, exercised their right to vote in the referendum. They did so massively.

They tell their relatives, who logically worry about the news they receive, that despite the circumstances, they live normally in Venezuela; that it isn't true that there are hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans dying of hunger, as certain deceitful spokespersons claim, and they reaffirm that they will continue to carry out their profoundly humanitarian work.

I firmly reject President Trump's attempt to intimidate those who, in a completely sovereign manner, in the exercise of self-determination, have decided to build and defend socialism, and the intimidation of numerous parties, organizations, and people who, as lovers of justice, equity, social and environmentally sustainable development, opponents of exploitation, neo-colonialism, neoliberalism and exclusion, have embraced socialist and revolutionary ideas with profound conviction, convinced that a better world is not only possible, not only essential, but inevitable.

As numerous U.S. analysts and politicians have recognized, yesterday's speech in Florida was very electoral. He wants to intimidate not only socialist and communist forces, but also Democratic leaders, voters, especially young voters who are frustrated with the system.

He proclaimed yesterday that there would never be socialism in "America."

He doesn't only seek to intimate the people, but also the Democrats. His position that whoever votes for the Democrats, in the electoral campaign that appears to have already begun, will be voting for the construction of socialism in this nation of the North, is well-known.

Trump's main "theoretical contribution" in his speech yesterday, was the incorporation of McCarthyism to the Monroe Doctrine, in advocating a single imperialist power, to which he added an extreme, visceral, old-fashioned, essentially outdated anticommunism, rooted in the Cold War. He will not earn any royalties. President Reagan, and beforehand Prime Minister Churchill, beat him to addressing the issue.

Churchill said 71 years ago: "Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy..." Reagan stated 36 years ago: "I believe that communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written... I believe this because the source of our strength in the quest for human freedom is not material, but spiritual."

It was a clumsy, crude declaration of imperialist domination over José Martí's Our America. "We have seen Cuba's future here in Miami," the U.S. President said yesterday. He is wrong; the future of Cuba is here. With or without additional blockade measures, the future is decided by Cuban women and men. We have done so, we have built and we will defend a socialist Revolution right under their noses.

We must recall the defeat of the Batista dictatorship, established and sustained by imperialist governments. We are proud of our victory at Playa Girón, or the Bay of Pigs. Of our bravery faced with the risk of holocaust in the October Crisis (Cuban Missile Crisis). Of our firm and virile response to state terrorism, faced with the mid-flight bombing of a Cuban civil aircraft; events that have caused 3,478 deaths and left 2,099 Cuban women and men disabled.

We reiterate to President Trump that our loyalty to Fidel and Raúl will be invariable, and that the process of continuity led by President Díaz-Canel is permanent and irreversible. We will be united together with our Communist Party of Cuba. Together we have written this new Constitution and we will vote for it on February 24, for the homeland and socialism. It will also be a response to President Trump's speech.

Many thanks.

Moderator.- We will now go to a brief Q&A session. I ask colleagues from the press to identify themselves, the media they represent, and to make use of the microphones available in the room.

Katell Abiden (AFP).- Good afternoon, Mr. Minister. I want to ask two questions. If a military intervention occurs in Venezuela, what will your reaction be?

On the other hand, I would like to have your opinion on the possible implementation of the Helms-Burton Act's Title III by the United States.

Bruno Rodríguez. – Yes. Your first question is hypothetical. Our call is to stop a U.S. military intervention in Venezuela, the time has come to unite and act together, in time to stop it.

On the second, I can reiterate: As we have explained before, and other leaders of our nation and Foreign Ministry spokespersons have said, our country is prepared to face any measure to tighten the blockade, including the implementation of new elements of the Helms-Burton Act. We have a program, with a predictable economic plan through 2030. The Cuban economy has strong international underpinnings. Our economic relations are diverse. We also count on the prevalence of the rule of international law, the rules of free trade, and freedom of navigation, and we are sure that the fiercely extraterritorial application of the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the United States against Cuba not only sparks huge international rejection, but that it will face strong resistance from our economic, investment, financial, tourism emissary counterparts, faced with the attempt to impose additional sanctions against the sovereignty of their states, against their national interests, and those of their businesspeople and citizens.

Axel Vera (ABC-Miami). – What evidence does the Cuban government currently possess that the United States is on the path to a military intervention? Could you explain more about that, please?

Bruno Rodríguez.- Yes. Thanks very much.

I can reiterate that I have all the data that allows me to state that flights from U.S. bases are taking place, where special operations and marine infantry units operate, used for missions of this nature, in preparation for actions against Venezuela.

If you would care to visit some airports, you may be able to personally note what I say. I categorically state that these are not humanitarian aid flights.

Governments are usually able to obtain this information but, even without the data that you are asking about, it is clear that an international situation has been created in which the U.S. government is moving toward the military threat.

I don't know how you could explain the summoning of tens of thousands of people on the Venezuelan border, to forcibly bring in humanitarian aid. I don't know what your media outlet expects to happen under those circumstances. I don't know how you interpret a senator's statement that U.S. capital will be necessary to rebuild Venezuela.

Lorena Cantó (EFE news agency).- You have said, returning to Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, that Cuba is prepared to confront an intensification of the sanctions, and I wanted to ask you if you hope that countries, above all Canada and other commercial partners of Cuba, adopt an active position like that which was initially produced when this disposition was approved, and that stopped its application and has resulted in its periodic suspension. I don't know if you have maintained contact with the governments of these countries, if they have conveyed that they will adopt a position now as active as at that time in 1996.

Bruno Rodríguez.- Many thanks.

We are necessarily discrete given our position, but I can tell you that I know of strong opposition from numerous European Union member states, and other industrialized nations; I have seen some statements. I also know of extensive diplomatic exchanges, and I am convinced that these nations will defend not only the sovereignty of their states, but their national interest and the interest of their companies and citizens, and I am sure that they will consider the attempt to establish discriminatory norms in favor of U.S. companies against those national interests unacceptable, as in fact I know is their position. They are supported by international law, the obligation to apply their own laws in their own territory, the existence of antidote laws that should also be applied according to their own legal system and international circumstances; as I have heard energetic, firm statements from numerous United States counterparts regarding trade and investment, considering U.S. trade policies, in terms of tariffs and other aspects, unacceptable.

Sergio Gómez (Cubadebate).- President Trump spoke yesterday in Miami as if there were global unanimity regarding the recognition of Guaidó. Does this, or does Minrex believe that such unanimity exists?

And in the same direction, has this aggressive agenda of John Bolton and Marco Rubio against Cuba that President Trump has assumed, been effective or not in achieving the isolation of Cuba from the international community? Because the latest we had in this regard was global approval of the reestablishment of relations between the two countries.

Bruno Rodríguez.- The isolation of Cuba, or of the United States?

Sergio Gómez.- No, whether it has been achieved, if that policy has been effective, in your opinion, in isolating Cuba from the international community that applauded the reestablishment of relations.

Bruno Rodríguez.- One reads numerous statements and information in the press. Less than a quarter of United Nations member states interfere in the internal affairs of Venezuela to demand elections or, in one way or another, recognize the “president” invented in Washington. So I think the information is irrefutable.

I am also aware of a recent debate in the United Nations Security Council, where the supposed accuser became the accused, faced with the defense of international law and the sovereignty of Venezuela by numerous United Nations member states.

I also know of a meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, that firmly expressed it was against a military adventure, and supports Venezuelan sovereignty.

So I think that we have to separate the propaganda from the reality, to not allow U.S. spokespersons, who sometimes want to confuse reality with their wishes, not ours, succeed.

If there were any doubt regarding the international situation surrounding Cuba, it would be enough to briefly review the minutes, or more entertaining, to see the video of what occurred November 1, in the United Nations General Assembly: 10 votes, practically unanimous, left the United States government isolated, still obsessed with a genocidal blockade.

Those who now speak of humanitarian aid, and generously over 20 million, have caused Cuba damages of approximately one trillion dollars at prices based on the value of gold, or more than 130 billion dollars at current prices. The blockade damages, as has been said, scrupulously calculated, using an internationally auditable methodology, reflect that without it, Cuba would have grown at an annual average of 10% over the last decade.

I think it is totally clear that the United States government, in its attempt to isolate Cuba, has ended up profoundly isolated.

Many thanks.
