

Speech delivered by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the battles at the Bay of Pigs and the first major defeat of imperialism in the Americas. Playa Girón, April 19, 2001 [1]

**Date:**

19/04/2001

Families of the fallen;

Veterans of Playa Girón;

Compatriots:

Three days ago we commemorated the proclamation of the socialist nature of the Revolution, and paid tribute to the young artillerymen who died in combat while repelling the cowardly surprise attack by U.S. government-owned planes, disguised to look like they were from the Cuban Air Force. Today, we are commemorating the overwhelming victory of the revolutionary forces and the first defeat sustained by imperialism in the Americas.

The fact that the Bay of Pigs was back in our hands 66 hours after the invading forces' scouts set foot on our coasts shows the intensity of the devastating counterattack launched against the invaders. Our men fought relentlessly, day and night, without a moment's respite. Three miles off the coast, a large U.S. squadron, including an aircraft carrier and marine infantry ready to intervene, watched as the revolutionary counterstrike proceeded at such a pace that had they been given the order to take action, there would no longer have been an invading force to back up, nor a safe strip for a puppet government to land.

There is no need to dwell on details. At the conference recently held in Havana, The Bay of Pigs: 40 Years Later, a rather elaborate account of the events was given, and broadcast to the entire population during the Round Table programming slot over the course of nine days. New books have been written and will continue to be written. Two generations of Cubans needed to learn, in the most vivid and realistic way possible, of the momentous events that their parents and grandparents participated in or witnessed first-hand.

The eagerness to learn more grew over the last few weeks, after the aforementioned conference and the forthcoming date of the 40th anniversary. Undoubtedly, hearing about this moment in history straight from the mouths of those who can retell the story with memories that are still fresh and the necessary documents is quite different from learning about an episode through cold texts and ancient engravings, such as the taking of Havana by the British or Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, for example. After the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, no single event had such an impact on the fate and the future of our people as the battle of the Bay of Pigs.

On Monday we talked about what socialism meant for our country as a revolutionary process that has placed us at the top among Latin American and Caribbean nations today. I feel the special need at this

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moment to recall and invoke the words of José Martí. When he wrote his famous unfinished letter, he declared that everything he had done up until that day, and everything he would do later, was aimed at securing Cuba's independence in order to prevent the United States from falling upon the lands of the Americas with that added force.

When he wrote that letter, he could not have known that within a few brief hours, he would be dead. And although he may have physically died, he was reborn through his ideas, and was thus able to continue doing what he said he would do. Not only was Cuba's independence achieved in time to prevent it from adding to the force that would fall upon the peoples of the Americas. More than that, Cuba became a trench of ideas and impregnable strength in the face of the enemy of the Latin American peoples, and its sons and daughters, in serving their other homeland, which Martí called humanity, have also served the causes of many other peoples in the world. (Exclamations and Applause)

Martí's revolution was resumed the same year of the centennial anniversary of his birth, by those of us who had the privilege of receiving the inspiring light of his infinite patriotism. And after defeating countless setbacks and mountains of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, time and time again, that revolution has victoriously entered a new millennium.

By enduring 42 years of blockade and economic warfare imposed by that power which could not subdue Cuba; by resolutely withstanding sabotage, terrorism, attempts to assassinate its leaders, biological warfare, and even the threat of nuclear war, without surrendering an iota of its principles; by suffering 10 inconceivably hard years of a special period, when others failed to uphold the sacred duties they were privileged to be granted by human history; by unwaveringly carrying onward when it found itself alone before the empire foreseen by Martí, now turned into a hegemonic superpower that has used all of its political, ideological and economic might to isolate the Cuban people, to suffocate them, to bring them to their knees through hunger and disease; by doing all of this, Cuba has remained undefeated by the powerful empire. (Applause and shouts of "It will never be !")

The day we entered the new millennium, on January 1, 2001, at the exact time that each new year begins --which is also a time of indelible memories and unsurpassed symbolism for the Cuban Revolution-- we dealt imperialism its second major defeat before the eyes of the Americas and the world. (Applause.)

Homeland and Humanity have forever become inseparably united by history in the hearts and minds of the Cuban people. (Applause)

Your ideas, Martí, which have been sown in us along with those of the man who, like you told us, deserved to be honored for taking the side of the poor, and those of another giant, who studied in depth and described with irrefutable proof what you were the first to discover and call imperialism in the most modern sense of the concept, have proven to be much stronger than all of the power of the greatest empire that has ever existed. We dedicate to you this 40th anniversary of that first victory. (Exclamations) We swear to you that we will fight up until our last drop of blood for the Homeland and for Humanity. We swear to you that the sacrifices of those who have fallen, from La Demajagua to the Bay of Pigs, and of those who have given their young, generous and noble lives fighting in the mountains, plains and towns of every corner of our little homeland, or in other lands of the world that have called out for the contribution of their modest efforts, in distant reaches of our big homeland, have not and never will be in vain. (Shouts of "We swear !" )

The sweat and sacrifice of millions of anonymous heroes whose hard work and efforts have built and preserved the beautiful Cuba of today, and will bequeath the even more beautiful Cuba of tomorrow to future generations, have not and never will be in vain, either. (Exclamations)

Today, 11 comrades will be decorated with the high honor of Heroes of the Republic of Cuba, for having served the Revolution, the Homeland and Socialism for over 40 years. Some are veterans of the Bay of

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Pigs, some are not, but they all carry within them some or many pieces of our history throughout almost half a century, from the attack on the Moncada Garrison on July 26, 1953 until today, April 19, 2001. They never asked for it, perhaps they never even thought of it, and none of them knows that they will be receiving such a high honor today.

But we want to decorate them here, on this 40th anniversary of that great victory, as a tribute to all those who fought in those crucial days, and those who died for the lives and destinies of the 11 million people living in Cuba today, for the hundreds of millions of people in Latin America and the Caribbean, for the billions of human beings presently exploited and plundered in countries that were formerly colonies, sources of slaves, raw materials and gold, and today supply cheap labor and non-renewable natural resources under the unbearable weight of the imperialist yoke.

We promised to talk about interesting things related to the United States pyrrhic victory or moral defeat in Geneva. Yesterday, our people heard the first news. On Friday, the in-depth analysis will begin. The empire and its accomplices will have a lot to listen to.

Today is a day of glory that nothing and no one will ever be able to erase from history. Remembering the feat achieved, remembering the fallen, remembering the humble sons of the people who dealt a devastating blow to the pride and arrogance of the empire in this sacred place, full of symbolism, this time we will not say: "Homeland or Death" , "Socialism or Death"; instead, we will say, from the bottom of our hearts:

Long live our Homeland! (Shouts of Long live!)

Long live Socialism! (Shouts of Long live!)

Long live Victory! (Shouts of Long live!)

(Shouts of "Long live Fidel" !)

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