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Fidel Castro: Mandela Is Dead, So Why Hide The Truth About Apartheid?

By Fidel Castro Ruz

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Maybe the empire thought that we would not honor our word when, during days of uncertainty in the past century, we affirmed that even if the USSR were to disappear Cuba would continue struggling.

World War II broke out on September 1, 1939 when Nazi-fascist troops invaded Poland and struck like a lightning over the heroic people of the USSR, who contributed 27 million lives to preserve mankind from that brutal massacre that ended the lives of 50 million persons.

War, on the other hand, is the only venture that the human race throughout history has failed to avoid, leading Einstein to say that he did not know how World War III would be like but most certainly the fourth would be fought with sticks and stones.

Added up, the means available to the two most powerful powers –United States and Russia— amount to 20,000 (twenty thousand) nuclear warheads. Mankind should know that three days before John F. Kennedy assumed the presidency of his country on January 20, 1961, a US B-52 bomber, in a routine flight, carrying two atomic bombs with a destructive capacity 260 times that of the bomb dropped in Hiroshima, had an accident and the aircraft crashed. For such cases sophisticated automatic equipment are in place to prevent the bombs from exploding. The first bomb landed without risks. In the case of the second, three of the four mechanisms failed, and

the fourth, in very critical conditions could barely function. The bomb did not explode by mere chance.

There is no present or past event I remember or have heard of that has impacted world public opinion so much as the death of Nelson Mandela, and not because of his wealth, but for his human quality and the loftiness of his ideas and feelings.

Throughout history and barely one and a half century ago — before robots and machines took over our modest tasks with a minimum energy cost— none of the phenomena that today shake mankind and inexorably rule each and every person —men and women, children and elders, young and adult, farmers and factory workers, manual workers or intellectuals— existed. The prevailing trend is to move to the cities, where the creation of jobs, transportation, and basic living conditions demand huge investments to the detriment of food production and other more rational ways of life.

Three powers have landed in our planet's Moon. The same day Nelson Mandela, covered with his country's flag, was buried in the backyard of the humble house where he was born 95 years ago, a sophisticated module from the Peoples Republic of China descended upon a bright spot in our Moon. The coincidence of both events was purely by chance.

Millions of scientists are studying earth and outer-space matters and radiations. Through them we now know that Titan, one of Saturn's rings, accumulated 40 times more oil than the existing amount in our planet when oil extraction began 125 years ago and which will last barely one more century at current consumption rates.

The fraternal feelings of profound brotherhood between the Cuban people and Nelson Mandela's homeland were born out of an event that has never been mentioned and about which we have never said a word during all these long years; Mandela, because he was an apostle of peace and did not want to hurt anyone; Cuba, because we have never done anything for the sake of glory and prestige.

Since the very triumph of the Revolution in Cuba we extended our solidarity to the Portuguese colonies in Africa. Liberation movements in that continent had colonialism and imperialism on the rack after World War II and the liberation of the Peoples Republic of China —the most highly populated country in the world— following the glorious triumph of the Russian Socialist Revolution.

Social revolutions were shaking the pillars of the old world order. In 1960 the inhabitants of the planet amounted to three billion. Along with this, the power of big transnational companies — almost all Americans— was growing and the American currency, underpinned by US gold monopoly and its intact industry so far removed from the battle fields, took control of the world economy. Richard Nixon unilaterally abolished the backing of US currency in gold and his country's companies took control over the main resources and raw materials in the planet which they bought with paper bills.

Nothing I have said till now is new.

But why do they try to hide the fact that the Apartheid regime –that brought so much suffering onto Africa and arouse so much indignation in most nations throughout the world– was the fruit of European colonial powers and was turned into a nuclear power by the United States and Israel, something Cuba, who supported Portuguese colonies in Africa fighting for their independence openly condemned?

Our people, handed over to the United States by Spain after 30 years of heroic struggle, never reconciled with the slavery regime imposed during almost 500 years.

In 1975, racist troops supported by light tanks equipped with 90-millimeter guns set off from Namibia –then occupied by South Africa— and penetrated more than one thousand kilometers into Angolan territory up to the vicinity of Luanda, where an airborne battalion of Cuban Special Troops and several Cuban crews for Soviet tanks with no crews, succeeded in delaying their advance. This happened in November 1975, 13 years before the Cuito Cuanavale Battle.

I've already said that we have done nothing for the sake of prestige or seeking benefit of any kind. It is a fact that Mandela was an upright man, a profound revolutionary and a radical socialist who endured with great stoicism 27 years of solitary confinement. I could not but admire his honesty, modesty and enormous merit.

Cuba was strictly fulfilling its internationalist duties by defending key positions and training thousands of Angolans in the use of weapons every year. The USSR was providing the weapons. At the time, however, we disagreed with the idea of the main advisor of the suppliers of military equipment. Thousands of young and healthy Angolans were constantly joining the units of their then incipient army. Their main adviser, however, was not a Zhúkov, Rokossovski, Malinowvsky or any of the many men that brought so much glory to Soviet military strategy. His obsessive idea was to send Angolan brigades carrying the best weapons to the territory where the tribal government of Savimbi – a mercenary serving the United States and South Africa– was supposedly located, which was tantamount to sending the troops fighting in Stalingrad to the border with the Falangist Spain that had sent over hundred thousand troops to fight against the USSR. That year a similar operation was going on.

The enemy was advancing behind several Angolan brigades severely hitting them near the place they had been sent to, approximately 1,500 kilometers away from Luanda. They were returning from there, pursued by South African troops en route to Cuito Cuanavale, a former NATO military base, located some 100 kilometers away from where a Cuban Tank Brigade was stationed.

At such a critical point, the President of Angola requested the support of Cuban troops. The commander of our troops in the South, General Leopoldo Cintra Frías, sent us the request as usual. Our firm reply was that we would provide such support provided that all Angolan troops and equipment would be under the Cuban command in South Angola. Everybody understood that our request was a requirement to turn the former base into the ideal battle field to hit the racist South African forces.

There was a positive response from Angola in less than 24 hours.

It was decided that a Cuban Tank Brigade would be immediately sent there. Several other were in the same line towards the West. The main obstacle was the mud and humidity due to the rainy season and the fact that every stretch of land had to be checked for anti-personnel mines. The military personnel to operate the tanks and guns without crew were also sent to Cuito.

To the East, the base was separated from the territory by the large and fast-flowing Cuito River over which there was a solid bridge under the frantic attack of the racist army. A radio-controlled airplane full of explosives was hit, brought down on the bridge and put out of action. The retreating Angolan tanks still moving were crossed more to the North. Those that were not in good conditions were buried with their weapons facing East; a thick strip of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines turned the line into a mortal trap on the other side of the river. When the racist troops renewed their advance and ran into that defensive wall, the artillery and tanks of the revolutionary brigades came down on them shooting from their positions in the Cuito area.

The Mig-23 fighters had a special role to play. Flying at a speed of almost 1,000 kilometers per hour and 100 (one hundred) meters altitude they were able to distinguish if the artillery personnel was black or white and began firing relentlessly against them.

When the battered and immobilized enemy began to withdraw, the revolutionary forces began to get ready for the final combats.

Numerous Angolan and Cuban brigades began moving quickly and keeping proper distance to the West towards the only wide routes from which South Africans always began their military actions against Angola. The airport, however, was approximately 300 (three hundred) kilometers from the border with Namibia, which was totally occupied by the Apartheid army.

While troops reorganized and rearmed the urgent decision to build a runway for the Mig-23 was made. Our pilots were using the aircraft equipment provided by the USSR to Angola, whose pilots had lacked the time for a proper training. Several aircrafts were inoperative sometimes due to the action of our own artillerymen or anti-aircraft weapon operators. South Africans still occupied part of the main road going from the border of the Angolan plateau to Namibia. They began shooting from the bridges over the wide Cunene River –located between Southern Angola and Northern Namibia– with their 140-millimeter guns giving their projectiles a range of about 40 kilometers. The main problem was that the racist South Africans had, according to our estimates, 10 to 12 nuclear weapons. They had even tested them in the frozen areas or seas to the South. President Ronald Reagan had authorized such tests and the device for blasting the nuclear charge was among the equipment delivered by Israel. Our response was to organize the troops in combat groups of no more than 1,000 men, who would have to advance equipped with anti-aircraft tanks throughout an extensive territory at night.

According to reliable sources, South African nuclear weapons could not be transported by Mirage planes; heavy Canberra type bombers were required instead. In any case, our forces' air defense had many different types of missiles that could hit and destroy air targets located dozens of kilometers away from our troops. In addition, a dam with 80 million cubic meters of water located in Angolan territory had been occupied and mined by Cuban and Angolan fighters. The explosion of that dam would have been tantamount to the explosion of several nuclear weapons.

Nonetheless, a hydroelectric plant using the strong current of the Cunene River, before reaching the Namibian border, was being used by a South African army detachment.

When the racists began shooting with their 140-millimeter guns in this new theater of operations, the detachment of white soldiers was strongly hit by the Mig-23 and the survivors fled the place leaving some posters criticizing their high command. That was the situation when Cuban and Angolan troops marched over the enemy lines.

I learned that Katiuska Blanco, the author of some historical accounts, together with other reporters and press photographers were there. It was a tense situation but everybody kept cool.

It was then that we got the news that the enemy was willing to negotiate. We had succeeded in stopping the imperialist and racist adventure in a continent where, in 30 years time, the population will exceed that of China and India together.

The role of the Cuban delegation on the occasion of the demise of our brother and friend Nelson Mandela will be unforgettable.

I congratulate comrade Raul for his brilliant performance and particularly for his strength of character and dignity when in a kind but firm gesture greeted the United States Head of Government and told him in English: “Mr. President, I’m Castro”.

When my health imposed limits to my physical capacity, I did not hesitate in expressing my criteria on who, in my view, could assume the responsibility. A life is a minute in the history of the peoples and I believe that whoever holds today that responsibility must have the experience and authority required to choose among an increasing -almost infinite— number of alternatives.

Imperialism will always have several cards up its sleeve to subdue our island even if it has to depopulate it, depriving it from young men and women to whom they offer the scraps of the goods and natural resources it ransacks from the world.

Let the spokesmen of the empire now talk about how and why Apartheid came to life.