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Terror in Latin America and the Caribbean

by W.T. WHITNEY Jr.

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Cuban national hero José Martí referred to land lying between the Rio Grande River and the Straits of Magellan as “Our America.” In an essay with that title published in 1892, Martí evoked the Rio Grande boundary as a divide between peoples with their own history, culture and future and an industrializing, crass civilization to the north promising no good.

Indeed, U.S. agents or proxies would soon be sewing grief and despair. Early in the 20th century they launched military incursions. Subsequently less blatant interventions left terror in their wake. Anniversaries in September and October – a season of sorrow in Our America – recall murder and mayhem. One asks: Can international solidarity prevent victims? Who in North America, epicenter of terrorist plotting, will take on that job?

On September 9, 1954, deposed Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz left for exile. Three months earlier the CIA had colluded with Guatemala’s wealthy elite to engineer a military coup. Civil war between leftist insurgents and the CIA-supported Guatemalan military lasted three decades and took the lives of 200,000 mostly indigenous and poor Guatemalans.

On September 11, 1973, the Chilean military overthrew socialist President Salvador Allende. Speaking to officials plotting against his election three years earlier, National Security Council

director Henry Kissinger observed that: “I don’t see why we have to stand by and watch a country go communist by the irresponsibility of its own people.”

In power, President Allende’s Popular Unity party, an amalgam of diverse left political currents, faced a U.S. – assisted and financed destabilization campaign. A post-coup regime headed by General Augusto Pinochet killed more than 3,000 Chileans and jailed and tortured thousands more.

On September 21, 1976, exiled Allende colleague Orlando Letelier and his assistant Ronni Moffit died in a car-bomb explosion in Washington. Letelier had been ambassador to the United States, foreign minister, and defense minister. The main perpetrator was U.S. citizen, CIA employee, and Chilean intelligence agent Michael Townley. Others included three Cuban exiles linked to the CIA; Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who instructed U.S. diplomats in South America to accept state-sponsored assassination plots; and Cuban exiles and CIA assets Luis Posada and Orlando Bosch. Posada and Bosch headed CORU, an organization carrying out murders at the behest of Southern Cone regimes.

On October 6, 1976, a Cuban airliner in flight off Barbados went down. Posada and Bosch had arranged for a bomb explosion. All 73 passengers and crew died. At the time Posada headed Venezuela’s DISIP intelligence agency under CIA auspices. The two criminals found sanctuary in Miami.

On September 12, 1998, the Miami FBI arrested Cuban agents Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, and René González. Known since as the Cuban Five, they had been monitoring and reporting on private paramilitary groups in Florida well known for launching terror attacks against Cuba. A biased trial and cruel sentences followed.

On September 11, 2001, an assault from the air collapsed buildings in the United States and killed 2,977 people. President George W. Bush soon told a joint session of Congress that, “[W]e will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

In fact, the U.S. government itself had already joined “with the terrorists” in Our America. As with earlier interventions, it did so to stop social revolution. U.S. hypocrisy was obvious: official statements expressed horror and threatened retribution, yet victims in Our America already knew the pain of terrorism at U.S. hands.

Anti-communism had served as pretext for foreign interventions. But that rationale made little sense after socialism disappeared in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1990-1992, and “victory over communism” was proclaimed. The attacks on September 11, 2001 were useful for supplying a new catch-all justification. Henceforth targeted enemies were called “terrorists.”

From 1964 on, for example, the reason for U.S. government backing for Colombia, at war with the Marxist-oriented Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), morphed from anti-communism, to drug trafficking, to war against terror.

In Paraguay the United States operated an air base, deployed soldiers – oddly, on “medical missions” – and in early 2014 set up an “Emergency Operations Center” under Southern Command auspices. Its location in San Pedro Department is close to drug-trafficking Ciudad del Este, allegedly a “base for Islamic terrorist funding.” The Marxist-oriented Paraguayan People’s Army, “a group designated as terrorist,” operates nearby.

The U.S. State Department condemns Cuba for its “support for acts of international terrorism.” That designation became a tool to rationalize bullying of Cuba. Paradoxically enough, Cuba, accused of terror, still must deal with the threat of terror from the United States. In May 2014 authorities there arrested four newly arrived Miami-area residents allegedly with terror on their minds.

The case of the Cuban Five defenders against terrorism highlighted the notion of “good terrorists” and “bad terrorists.” Apparently for U.S. prosecutors the violent thugs whom the Five were watching were acceptable terrorists, no less so than U.S. agents scheming in Guatemala and Chile.

The far-seeing José Martí denounced U.S. annexationist longings for Cuba and anticipated U.S. punishment for Cuban independence. He had a remedy: nations of Our America would come together in solidarity and mutual support. Now, long after Martí’s battlefield death in Cuba’s Second War for Independence, regional integration is advancing. Alliances have proliferated.

On September 18, 2014, Panamanian Foreign Minister Isabel de Saint Malo announced Cuba would be invited to the seventh “Summit of the Americas,” organized by the Organization of American States (OAS) and to be hosted by Panama in April 2015.

The U.S. government established the OAS in 1948 as a cold-war tool. In accordance with that mission, the OAS expelled revolutionary Cuba in 1962. Now rebellion within OAS over Cuba is big news; exclusion of Cuba had epitomized its reason for being. Maybe these new dynamics will discourage U. S. terror plans for the region.

But not necessarily: presently the U.S. empire is up against the force of Martí’s good idea. But Martí, sympathetic to working people, to African-descended peoples, never let go of the notion that the interests of the poor and marginalized were shared among all socio-economic classes across the nation he hoped to build. He was weak on conflict between two great social classes. The rich and powerful in Our America of course have ties, real or imagined, to the capitalist giant in the north.

By contrast, working people feel safer with each other, whether at home or across international borders, than they do with big operators. Workers in the United States know that whatever serves globalized capitalist systems – here exploitation and domination in Our America – strengthens exploiters at home and is not good for them. It makes sense for them to join struggles of working and marginalized peoples there as their own. U.S. workers would take collective action to block U.S. sponsorship of militarization and of terror regimes.

They would be making good on a rudimentary, easily-understood prescription from revolutionary struggles of 19th century Europe: “Workers of the World Unite.” Ever since, the prospect of worker unity has terrified those in charge.