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Fidel Castro Defies US Imperialism Even in Death

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At age 90, Fidel Castro passed away after decades of heroic struggle for social justice, not just for his native Cuba but for all people around the world. Even in his final decade of illness, the iconic revolutionary was still actively fighting; writing articles on international politics and upholding the cause for socialism.

One measure of his historical significance is expressed in the fact that he outlasted 10 US presidents by the time of his official retirement from politics in 2008 due to declining health. Counting incumbent Barack Obama, Fidel's political life spanned 11 US presidencies. All of them oversaw a barbarous policy to economically strangle Cuba with a trade blockade on the tiny Caribbean island nation. Several of these US leaders sanctioned criminal plots to assassinate Fidel and incite regime change. They all failed. Castro beat them all and died peacefully in his bed having lived his life to the full.

As news of his death reverberated around the world, even Western countries which had conspired to varying degrees to thwart the Cuban revolution were compelled to acknowledge Fidel's towering legacy. News channels were interrupted with «breaking news» of his death. America's *CNN* and Britain's *BBC* immediately ran biographical portraits of the man and his revolutionary past. Among the predictable slights referring to an «authoritarian figure», even the Western propagandists had to admit that Fidel liberated his people from squalor and poverty, bequeathing Cuba with immense social development, and, probably more importantly, giving the world's people monumental inspiration to continually strive in order to make this world a place of justice for everyone. To the end, he championed socialism, while denouncing capitalist exploitation, destruction and its imperialist warmongering.

Two early headlines about his passing stood out. *The Washington Post* couldn't refrain from denigration with this: «Former Cuban dictator Fidel Castro has died». The use of the word «dictator» was gratuitous and doubtless intended to slur the man's greatness even at his moment of death.

The New York Times appeared to be a little more magnanimous with its headline: «Fidel Castro has died at 90. The Cuban revolutionary was a nemesis for 11 American presidents».

But its florid words of apparent tribute contained the poison of defamation. The *NY Times* went on to ascribe the «fiery apostle of revolution» as having «brought the Cold War to the Western Hemisphere in 1959... and briefly pushing the world to the brink of nuclear war [in 1962]».

It wasn't Castro who brought the Cold War to the Western Hemisphere, nor was it he who nearly incited nuclear war. On both counts, it was US governments. Yet, insidiously, the US media impute Fidel with the evil of their own governments.

In 1960, months after Fidel overthrew the corrupt US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista, the leader of the revolution made an official visit to the US in a gesture of regional friendship. But he was snubbed by then President Eisenhower who refused to meet him.

Eisenhower then enacted diplomatic and trade embargoes on Cuba in revenge for Fidel's economic policies aimed at lifting the majority of Cubans out of decades of US-induced poverty.

In April 1961, under the new presidency of John F Kennedy, the CIA and Pentagon launched the Bay of Pigs invasion with a private mercenary army made up of Batista loyalists. JFK backed

down on a full-scale military assault and Fidel's forces eventually routed the attackers. The CIA and Cuban exiles never forgave JFK for this «betrayal» and exacted retribution by blowing the president's head off as his motorcade drove through Dallas on November 22, 1963.

Contrary to the above portrait in the *NY Times*, it was the US under Eisenhower and subsequently Kennedy that brought the Cold War to the Western Hemisphere. Not Fidel Castro.

If Castro responded to US aggression by embracing the Soviet Union and its nuclear missiles, it was evidently a policy of self-defense. The Cuban missile crisis during October 1962, when JFK and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev faced off in a dramatic nuclear showdown, was the outcome of the US having already embarked on a war policy against Cuba. The installation of Soviet nuclear weapons on Cuban territory 90 miles from the US mainland was first of all a legitimate act of sovereignty by the Cuban government, and, secondly, a reasonable act of self-defense given the US criminal aggression the year before at the Bay of Pigs.

Again, it was not Fidel Castro who «brought the world to the brink of nuclear war». It was US aggressive policy towards a newly independent impoverished nation whose people exercised their right to self-determination by supporting a socialist government.

US official vanity likes to recount that JFK forced the Soviets to withdraw their nuclear missiles from Cuba. But an important overlooked fact is that the deal to avert nuclear war worked out by Kennedy and Khrushchev relied on a commitment from the US to abandon its covert war plans against Cuba.

The US never fully lived up to its promise to leave Cuba in peace. Assassination plots against Castro and other Cuban leaders continued during subsequent US administrations, as did other acts of state-sponsored sabotage and terrorism such as the downing of a Cuban civilian airliner in 1976. The US-imposed trade embargo on the island nation of 11 million people that began in 1961 continues to this day under Barack Obama, albeit with a slight – some would say «cosmetic» – loosening.

However, one small mercy that came out of the «brink of nuclear war» in 1962 was that the US desisted from repeating the kind of overt aggression that was seen in the Bay of Pigs.

Fidel Castro was a giant who strode across two centuries. He was a giant of intellect and humanity, whose compassion for the oppressed and their liberation from under man-made exploitation and hegemony was as luminous as in the days of his youth. Fidel was a light for the world, and even in death his light for social justice shines on. Not even formidable political enemies can diminish this radiant revolutionary.

The *NY Times* said he «bedeviled 11 US presidents». That's another contemptible attempt to slander. Fidel didn't bedevil them; he transcended all of them and their malfeasance schemes with a humanity that outshines their corruption.

Of his splendid legacy, perhaps one attribute is that Fidel's life and struggle demonstrates with eloquent clarity the aggressive, destructive, warmongering nature of the US political system. In his lifetime, the world can clearly see that, despite the attempts to slander, it was the US governments that unleashed Cold War hostility and that were criminally reckless enough to push the world to nuclear war. This is an historical lesson bequeathed by Fidel that is as important now as it was then.

The aggression that the US inflicted on Cuba is extant today in its belligerence towards Russia, China or any other country that defies its hegemonic conduct. Understanding the history of Cuba and Fidel Castro's defiant revolution empowers us to understand the real cause and culprits of aggression in the world today.

Even in death, Fidel's revolutionary spirit lives, teaches, inspires.