

THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE (Part Four)

When in the previous reflection I asked McCain what he thought of the Five antiterrorist Cuban Heroes, I did so because I remembered what he had published on page 206 of his book *Faith of My Fathers*, co-written with his assistant Mark Salter:

"It's an awful thing, solitary. It crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance more effectively than any other form of mistreatment. Having no one else to rely on, to share confidences with, to seek counsel from, you begin to doubt your judgment and your courage. But you eventually adjust to solitary, as you can to almost any hardship, by devising various methods to keep your mind off your troubles and greedily grasping any opportunity for human contact."

"When in 1970 my period of solitary confinement was finally ended, I was overwhelmed by the compulsion to talk nonstop..."

If this is a subject of interest to you, in the United States today there are five Cuban prisoners, separated one from the other by thousands of miles. They have no area that can be sarcastically called the "Hanoi Hilton". Their suffering and the injustice of which they are victims will be known the world over; don't doubt it for a minute. I decided to revisit the subject remembering that, in one of your many declarations, you were trying to locate the spot turned into a prison for the pilots of the bombers brought down as they were attacking Vietnam.

I was housed in the former residence of the French Governor of all Indochina when I visited Vietnam in 1973, a country where I arrived on September 12 after the agreement between the United States and Vietnam, to which you referred. There I was visited by Pham Van Dong, the Prime Minister at the time, who wept as he remembered the human and material sacrifices imposed on his country; from there I left to visit the South -not yet totally liberated- up to the McNamara Line, where the steel bunkers had been taken by the Vietnamese combatants, despite the bombings and the continued U.S. air attacks.

All the bridges along the road, without exception, between Hanoi and the South visible from the air, were destroyed; the villages razed, and every day the cluster bomb grenades dropped for that purpose, were blowing up in the rice paddies where children, women and even very old people were working to produce food.

A great number of craters could be seen in each one of the entrances to the bridges. At that time there were no laser guided bombs, much more precise. I had to insist on making that trip. The Vietnamese were afraid that I would be the victim of some Yankee plot if they learned of my presence in that area. Pham Van Dong accompanied me at all times.

We flew over Nghe-An Province where Ho Chi Minh was born. In that province, as well as in Ha Tinh, two million Vietnamese starved to death in 1945, the last year of World War II. We landed in Dong Hoi. A million bombs were dropped over the province where that destroyed city lies. We crossed the Nhat Le on a raft. We visited an assistance center for the wounded of Quang Tri. We saw numerous captured M-48 tanks. We took wooden roads over what was once the National Highway that had been destroyed by bombs. We got together with young Vietnamese soldiers who covered themselves with glory at the Battle of Quang Tri. Calm, resolute, seasoned by the sun and the war, a slight tic quivered the eyelid of the battalion captain. No one knows how they could have stood up to so much bombing. They were worthy of praise. On that same afternoon on September 15, returning by a different route, we picked up three wounded children, two of which were in very serious condition; a 14 year old girl was in a state of shock with a metal fragment in her abdomen. The children were working in the fields when one of their

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tools accidentally touched a grenade. The Cuban doctors accompanying the delegation cared for them directly for hours and saved their lives. I was a witness, Mr. McCain, to the heroic deeds of the bombing raids on North Vietnam, the same ones you are so proud of.

During those days in September, Allende had been overthrown; the Presidential palace was attacked and many Chileans were tortured and murdered. The coup was promoted and organized from Washington.

All that unfortunately happened.

The basic problem at this time is to know whether the Republican candidate McCain is aware of the economic crisis which, shortly or immediately, will beset the United States. Only from that point of view will it be possible to evaluate any candidate with the possibility of assuming the leadership of that powerful country.

Two days ago on February 12, the international news agency IAR published an article signed by Manuel Freytas, a journalist, researcher and analyst, entitled "Why a recession in the United States can turn into a global crisis."

There is no need for many proofs to argue the case.

"In the current bleak forecast of the U.S. economy -he writes- key institutions of today's economic-financial system come together, such as the Federal Reserve and the United States Treasury, the World Bank, the WMF, the G-7 (the 7 wealthiest nations) and the central banks of Europe and Asia, seeing in the confluence of credit crisis-collapsing dollar-escalating oil prices, a potential central detonator in a recessive process in capitalism on a world scale.

"The fear of a U.S. recession and its impact on the world economy...has negatively impacted on the confidence of the system's economic and political elite.

"The Chairman of the United States Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, said that his country could fall into a recessive process and that it faces the double challenge of a falling real estate market, and at the same time the necessity of making sure that inflation does not push up the prices of oil and foods.

"In January, the United Nations Organization warned of the existence of an elevated risk of falling into a global economic recession..."

"At the Davos Forum held in January in the Swiss Alps, the leaders of the richest and most powerful world powers have just warned of a recession in the United States with worldwide implications, predicting a bleak forecast for this year.

"The Finance Ministers and the central banks of the seven wealthiest countries in the world (G-7) considered last Saturday that their economies are going to shortly suffer deceleration, according to the final communiqué at a meeting in Tokyo..."

"There are two key elements that explain why a recessive crisis in the United States would be immediately projected upon the entire world economy, both in the central countries as well as in the 'emerging' and 'peripheral' countries.

"a) In the current world economy globalized model, the United States is the principal buyer and consumer of products and energy resources, and represents 22.5 percent of the world economy, according to the latest calculations of the World Bank.

"b) The capitalist world economy is 'dollarized'. The dollar is the standard currency for all commercial and financial transactions on a world scale.

"These two central factors explain why any economic-financial oscillation or imbalance having the United States as its protagonist impacts and immediately spreads throughout the 'system'.

"A recessive crisis in the United States...would immediately impact on the stock exchanges and the globalized money markets...completing the cycle of the collapse of today's model of capitalist economy on a world scale.

"The collapse of the model would break the equilibrium of political 'governability' and would unleash a wave of social and trade union conflicts that would equally affect the United States and the central powers as well as the 'emerging' countries."

Yesterday, February 13, various articles by well-known American journalists were pointing in the same direction, even though they took up different arguments. I shall quote only two; of these I have selected paragraphs that reflect the topicality and importance of their contents, using concepts that are completely accessible for the educational levels of our people.

Under the title of "The American Model is an Idea whose Time has Come", Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now!, an international daily news show broadcast by 650 radio and television stations in the U.S. and the world, wrote:

"Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., made it personal: "Would waterboarding be torture if it was done to you?" "I would feel that it was," Mukasey responded. Though he deflected questions, before and after Kennedy's, his personal answer rang true.

"Our attorney general should not have to be waterboarded to know that it is torture.

"Suharto ruled Indonesia for more than 30 years, shored up by the most powerful country on Earth, the United States.

"Throughout Suharto's reign, U.S. administrations—Democratic and Republican—armed, trained and financed the Indonesian military. In addition to the million Indonesians killed, hundreds of thousands were also killed during Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, a small country 300 miles above Australia.

"On Nov. 12, 1991, when I was covering a peaceful Timorese procession in Timor's capital, Dili, Suharto's occupying army opened fired on the crowd, killing 270 Timorese.

"The soldiers beat me with their boots and the butts of their U.S. M-16s. They fractured the skull of my colleague Allan Nairn, who was writing for The New Yorker magazine at the time.

"Transparency International estimated Suharto's fortune to be between \$15 billion and \$35 billion. The current U.S. ambassador to Indonesia, Cameron Hume, praised Suharto's memory this week, saying, "President Suharto led Indonesia for over 30 years, a period during which Indonesia achieved remarkable economic and social development.

"Whether it's waterboarding, waging an illegal war or holding hundreds of prisoners without charge for years at Guantanamo Bay or at CIA black sites around the world, I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the world's greatest nonviolent leaders. "What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless," he asked, "whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?"

"When asked what he thought of Western civilization, Gandhi responded, "I think it would be a good idea."

That same day, in CounterPunch, Robert Weissman wrote another article titled "The Shameful State of

the Union", translated for Rebelión by S. Seguí, where among other things he stated:

"The United States is spending more than \$700 billion a year on the military. The 2008 appropriations bills include \$506.9 billion for the Department of Defense and the nuclear weapons activities of the Department of Energy, plus an additional \$189.4 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Congress has approved nearly \$700 billion to fight the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. This is the appropriated amount. It doesn't include costs to society -- loss of life, injuries, etc.

"Depending on how you count, more than half of all discretionary federal spending is now directed to the military.

"Wealth is concentrating in the United States at a startling rate.

"In 1976, the top 1 percent of the population received 8.83 percent of national income. In 2005, they grabbed 21.93 percent.

"In the hyper-financialized economy, it's the finance guys who are getting truly rich...despite the huge losses being wracked up on Wall Street.

"But even the traditional investment banks can't match the outrageous compensation captured by private equity and hedge fund managers, a few of whom manage to pull in more than \$1 billion in a single year. Thanks to a tax loophole, these characters pay income tax at a rate less than half of what a dentist making \$200,000 a year pays.

"Corporations are capturing more of the nation's wealth.

"The housing bubble and the subprime mortgage meltdown are driving millions of families from their homes.

"The Center for Responsible Lending estimates that 2.2 million subprime home loans made in recent years have already failed or will end in foreclosure. Homeowners will lose \$164 billion from these foreclosures, the Center projects. Overall losses from deflated housing values may top \$2 trillion.

"The racial wealth divide remains a chasm with little prospect of being bridged -- and is likely growing worse.

"It would take 594 more years for African Americans to achieve parity with whites, according to United for a Fair Economy. But the subprime debacle is hitting minority communities disproportionately hard causing what United for a Fair Economy believes may be the worst deprivation of people of color's wealth in modern U.S. history.

"More than one in six children lives in poverty.

"More than 45 million people in the United States do not have health insurance.

"The 2006 U.S. trade deficit totaled \$763.6 billion. The trade deficit will eventually have to be balanced -- sooner than later, it now seems. As the dollar continues to swoon, expect to see inflation and higher interest rates over the medium term. The real standard of living, in economic terms, will decline as a result.

"U.S. fuel efficiency is worse now than it was two decades ago.

"The nation's infrastructure is crumbling. The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that \$1.6 trillion is needed over a five-year period to bring the nation's infrastructure to good condition.

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"Most of these conditions are worse now than at the start of the Bush administration, many dramatically worse. But they have their roots in a bipartisan policy approach over the last three decades, favoring deregulation, handover of government assets to corporations (privatization), corporate globalization, hyper-financialization, lunatic military expenditures, tax cuts for the rich and a slashed social safety net."

Robert Weissman, author of the article, is editor of the Washington D.C.-based Multinational Monitor and director of Essential Action.

So as not to impose on my readers, all that remains is Part Five.

Fidel Castro Ruz

February 14, 2008.

8:12 p.m.

Date:

14/02/2008

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