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Analysis: The looming showdown

by Domingo Amuchastegui · November 10, 2021



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Cuban exile groups in Miami, together with figures of the “paid opposition” on the island are getting ready to measure forces with the Cuban government on Nov. 15. They are talking about a national strike and peaceful marches. Their expectations are to refashion the protests of July 11 and create a climate of confrontation aimed at precipitating the collapse of the government. The government refused to grant the permits requested, arguing the objective of the organizers is clearly destabilization.

From Miami, all the media and organizations are tuned in intensely, talking about a national strike. The approval and support of congresspeople and the Biden administration (via Juan Gonzalez, the western hemisphere chief at the State Department, and Undersecretary of State Brian Nichols, as well as Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas) have not been lacking. Meanwhile in Cuba, the “paid” regulars are calling for action through social networks. The stage is set for confrontation, and for everyone, the reference point is July 11.

The chosen date is not accidental. It seeks to produce a negative impact on the tourist season that will open that day. On the other hand, the organizers moved the action from Nov. 20, seeking to anticipate the revival of national Defense Day (regularly celebrated before the pandemic), an event that the organizers of the strike saw as an ominous warning.

All this is taking place in an international context that is particularly hostile to the Cuban government. In the wake of the July 11 protests, the United States and European Union have responded with criticism of the Cuban government and – in the Biden administration’s case, with the continuation of Trump’s economic war. All of this has a particularly negative impact on the economic and social situation facing most Cubans.

Pandemic lockdowns aside, how much responsibility of the current crisis is due to Cuban authorities’ serious mistakes and resistance against deepening reform, vs. Washington’s actions depends on the perspective. Cubans can blame the government for inflation and aggravated shortages, which have little or nothing to do with U.S. sanctions, but they cannot ignore either the enormous weight of the current economic war against the country. What is certain so far is that the blame mainly goes to domestic dysfunction.

We have reached the point where more than just a few Cubans on the island – in tune with the Miami message – look favorably at the extreme solution of U.S. intervention. This is not without precedent: Quite a few illustrious patriots were inclined towards U.S. intervention during and after our struggles with Spain in the late 19th and early 20th century, which is why the denouncing of “annexationism” and “plattismo” occupied a notable space in our history long before Fidel Castro came on the scene.

However, today’s call for a national strike and marches should be examined in the light of four very different premises:

a. True, the social outburst of July 11 was, essentially, a spontaneous event with internal roots. Even though the Cuban authorities insist that the events of that day “were conceived, organized and financed by the United States”, they surprised everybody. Disqualifying them as just “disturbances and vandalism is dishonest and useless.

b. But Nov. 15 is different: Very transparently, it is made in the U.S.A. through its main external and internal actors, from the recently “appeared” Archipélago, to Inspira, Directorio Democrático and others.

c. Meanwhile, the Cuban government has introduced some partial reforms aimed at somewhat improving the food supply, and conducted meetings with different social groups and especially in neglected neighborhoods. Although it has managed the pandemic quite effectively, it has been unable to stop or even reduce runaway inflation. It is difficult to assess to what extent such steps have attenuated the tensions that spurred July 11, and whether they accelerate or diminish the chances of a repeat or even greater protests. Tentatively, I’d venture to say that such initiatives tend to lessen tensions for the time being.

d. The Cuban authorities are perfectly aware of what may be coming, and they are preventively deploying their arsenal of resources, in addition to the vast mobilization that the preparations for Defense Days entail. In this context, it is difficult to imagine a successful outcome for the protesters.

As they say: “A prevented war won’t any kill soldiers”.



Domingo Amuchastegui

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