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## **Dominican Republic Commemorates 50th Anniversary of U.S. Invasion and Demands Official Apology**

by Crosby Girón

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In April this year, civil-society groups organized a series of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the US invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. These activities, led by the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD), aimed to raise awareness of this period of history and to break the silence surrounding these events that the business elite, in its view, has opted for.

Iván Grullón Fernández, rector of UASD, told the local press that 200 activities had been organized to "stoke the flame of dignity, respect, and recognition for the men and women, known and unknown, who risked their lives and made the ultimate sacrifice to defend their country's tarnished sovereignty."

As part of these activities, a photo exhibition was organized and the documentary *April: The Trench of Honor*, directed by Rene Fortunato, was screened. Roberto Cassá gave a conference titled "The impact of the North American military intervention of April 28, 1965."

US President Barack Obama and the US Congress received a letter penned by 50 Dominican youths demanding a public apology for the invasion. The letter was signed by factory workers, journalists, sociologists, activists, artists, historians, and political leaders demanding a public apology "for the damage done to the Dominican people and to their right to self-determination in 1965."

Added to this, they demanded an apology for the more than 8,000 deaths caused by the 42,000 Marines sent by the US Army at the time. Part of the text, published by alternative media outlets, reads that an apology is demanded for the "state crime committed by the armed forces by invading our territory, jeopardizing our democracy, hindering people's right to self-determination, and killing thousands of innocent people."

A copy of the letter was sent to Vice President Joseph Biden, president of the Senate, and to Rep. John Boehner, president of the lower chamber. The letter ends by stating, "We think it is fair that, after 50 years, President Obama, the US government should stop interfering in the Dominican Republic's domestic affairs."

Although the US intervention aimed to prevent the Dominican Republic from becoming another Cuba, it was heavily criticized at the time. President Lyndon B. Johnson used anti-communist rhetoric to whip up political support for the invasion.

### ***Origins of the invasion and its consequences***

President Juan Bosch (1962) was the first democratically elected president after the 30-year dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961). He was elected in December 1962 with a reformist proposal and the support of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD), which led to a backlash from the political right and the armed forces, which staged a coup seven months later that eventually became a full-blown civil war ([NotiCen, May 21, 1998](#)).

That was the perfect excuse that the US needed to carry out the invasion. The incursion was known as Operation Power Pack and had President Johnson's seal of approval, under the excuse that it was necessary to fight communism in Latin American.

If the US initially sought to bring back its citizens from the Dominican Republic, it soon became clear that its real aim was to repress the military-civilian uprising that began on April 24, 1965, which supported Juan Bosch's return to power and the restoration of the 1963 Constitution.

After the coup, Donald Reid Cabral (1963-1965) came to power and suspended the Constitution, which granted the right to political and religious freedom, freedom of expression, the right to housing, and the return of political dissidents and those exiled under the Trujillo regime.

In an article published in El País newspaper, historian Abraham F. Lowenthal said that half a century later it is important to refute some of the conventional explanations that Washington has given regarding the US's reasons for invading the Dominican Republic.

One of those justifications was precisely the specter of communism. Washington has tried to explain the invasion in terms of the effectiveness of the use of force, says Lowenthal, because the cost of the invasion has not been analyzed in sufficient depth.

Although the material and cost of the invasion was undoubtedly high for the Dominican Republic, Lowenthal points out that the invasion also had a series of "intangible costs."

"The invasion of the Dominican Republic made the peaceful reforms that many US government officials wanted increasingly unlikely. Some Latin American conservatives—especially in Central America—came to the conclusion that the US wasn't going to allow reformist movements to succeed," writes Lowenthal.

He adds that opposition to those reforms made many Latin Americans who were committed to democratic change consider the possibility of joining extreme left-wing groups.

Other intangible costs were the deepening of political divisions as well as dependency on the US, which made it difficult to develop effective political institutions. And although Lowenthal points out that the immigration reform implemented by the US led to an increase in the numbers of Dominicans who emigrated to the US and he regards "remittances and the flow of ideas and experiences" as "an asset," he expresses doubts about whether the reform, which was recently modified, was truly beneficial for the Dominican Republic.

Internationally, critics say, it was clear that the Organization of American States (OAS) "became a loyal tool of US foreign policy." Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela opposed the invasion.

The US faced the dilemma of supporting the Army that it had created at the beginning of the century to keep the Dominican Republic under control or to promote democracy, but its actions in the two years following the invasion led to thousands of civilian deaths.

Fifty years later, the Dominican people weigh these historical events and try to make sense of their history and of the lives of those who resisted and overcame the onslaught of the US Army. Of course, the outcome was not entirely positive. Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978, 1960-1962, 1986-1996), the candidate favored by the US, won the 1966 elections, ushering in a period of repression against political opponents and attacks on civil liberties ([NotiCen, July 18, 2002](#)).

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