

Do not misunderstand this Chilean country

A recent visit by our President to Cuba has reminded many of our past century history and the position we stand on now as a country. The visit itself and what it tried to show in terms of some political proximity belongs to our past, held by a minority - then and now - that is nowadays considered part of our unique folklore. Likewise, the ensuing Bolivian maritime aspiration through Chilean territory as detailed by old unrepentant Fidel just exposes once again the oddity of the pretension and the lack of seriousness of its beneficiaries with such a speaker in chief. Still, misunderstanding mainstream Chile could lead to wrong conclusions.

Territorial integrity

We were all born out of the dismemberment of the Spanish empire at the beginning of the XIX century, an already crumbling power that received its final blow when Napoleon's forces entered into the Iberian Peninsula. From then on and for a century, newly born American countries were to be based upon the territory they were granted before as performing colonies. Undefined or non occupied areas were to be allocated through time with the effective occupation of territory, arbitration processes or wars.

Chilean northern boundaries were finally settled after a short war against both Peru and Bolivia 130 years ago. Chilean oriental boundaries with Argentina have been naturally agreed upon the Andes Mountains, with disagreements being arbitrated by third parties. As a then weaker country, Chile lost territories that today would not accept to lose and Argentina perhaps would not try to grab, more so after its reality check in the Falkland Islands war in 1.982. One collateral benefit from growth, political stability and openness to the world is to avoid being in that detrimental position again.

As of now, there is only an aspiration from Argentina to get a larger hold over a piece of Campo de Hielo Sur the size of the Maipo Valley, contrary to what the 1.902 Laudo Arbitral clearly allocated to Chile and Argentina in that Patagonian area. The "new precision" of the boundary, as authorized by the Chilean Congress, does not allow the executive power to lose one square meter, at the peril of being unconstitutional and non binding for Chile. Only a manageable border line respecting the 1.902 Laudo Arbitral with no loss of territory would be acceptable to this country.

As for our northern neighbors, Peru has been trying to unilaterally modify its southern maritime boundaries with Chile, precisely defined and respected by both countries since the 1929 Tratado de Lima, and later extended along the same bordering parallel line under the 200 nautical miles doctrine dated 1947. A surprising petition, as if it were free to ask for such a maritime territory - why not ask for Easter Island, based on its people origin theory, for example? -. A mistaken perception, as if a serious country will ever accept a unilateral change in boundaries. And finally, a non starter for any long term and mutually profitable friendship and unquestionably a deterrent to any change at all over all our boundaries and sovereign rights.

Chile has gained stability and is in peace with its neighbors and within it. It looks for an economic integration, for the benefit of all parties involved. What it does not understand is to go back into the past to again discuss borders, as if they were an unsettled issue and an excuse for underdevelopment. It is under this context that Bolivians raise the Mediterranean cause, avoiding that way to look into themselves. They look for a corridor; we just want to avoid another Gaza strip or Danzig corridor, sad examples of territorial instability. We look to the future whereas they look to a maritime past that never existed. It is a fantasy, of which successful and serious countries are never made of. Ultimately, it does not listen to our own voices: more than two thirds of Chilean population has for decades consistently opposed to changes in the northern boundaries. A no is a no, plain and simple.

In summary, it is a mistake to confuse gentlemanlike behavior with territorial largesse.

Divisions of the past and Cuba's side role

With respect to the intended political cathartic meaning of the visit and how a majority of Chileans might perceive it, it would be useful to recall how former President Eduardo Frei

Montalva understood the need for the military coup of September 11th, 1973 in his letter to Mariano Rumor and interview to ABC newspaper. A civil society breakdown predated the military intervention, sought by two thirds of the population. The declaration of the Camara de Diputados of August 22nd, 1973, with two thirds of support, stating the need to stop the socialist government relentless breaches of the Constitution and its laws with the final objective of conquering total power, was not to be taken lightly. Big Brother Fidel would have wanted a different turn of events for the radical government led by Allende. Chileans said otherwise. Sadly, abuses were later committed, but the grand picture is quite different: a tragedy fell over Chile, under extreme circumstances and ideological positions, out of which a stable democracy and a free and open market economy were born. It took almost one century to successfully have both. Regrettably, Cuba cannot say so of itself even after 60 years.

A visit does not magically transform a minority into a majority; it cannot pretend rewriting history either.

The future

This country looks for a better future for its entire people, under an effective but perfectible division of power and a market economy. It took long and hardship to be here; no one would like to seriously go back, either to radical socialism ideals or XIX century territorial disputes. Any other perception would be just an illusion.

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