

then, it has evolved into the most comprehensive international security organization the world has ever known and has become a reliable cornerstone of America's national security.

As many of my Senate colleagues know, I was an active proponent of NATO expansion in 1999 and again in 2004. For me, the debate over whether to expand NATO had deep personal resonance. For many of the countries aspiring to join NATO at that time, freedom did not come to every nation in Europe at the end of the Second World War. For those countries caught behind the Iron Curtain, the end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a long struggle for freedom and democracy. Even after the Iron Curtain fell, their freedom and security was not ensured. For many of those countries, joining NATO in the expansion rounds in 1999 and 2004 provided true security for the first time.

For me, growing up as a Polish American in east Baltimore, I learned about the burning of Warsaw. I knew about the occupation of Poland by the Nazis. I learned about the burning of Warsaw at the end of World War II, when the Germans burned it because of the Warsaw uprising. Soviet troops stood on the other side of the Vistula River and watched it burn. I learned about the Katyn massacre, where Russians murdered more than 4,000 military officers and intellectuals in the Katyn Forest at the start of the Second World War, so there would not be an intellectual force in Poland, ever, to lead it to democracy. I learned that these terrible events must never be permitted again. When the Senate voted to ratify the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary into NATO, I knew that Poland could finally emerge from the shadow of the Cold War to join the family of Western nations.

In the 60 years since it was created, NATO has been an unprecedented success in deterring conflict and promoting peace and stability. To remain relevant and successful in the future, NATO must keep its doors open to those European democracies ready to bear the responsibilities, as well as the burdens, of membership. We must all remember that for many nations that have been occupied and oppressed over the last 100 years, NATO represents an institution that will guard against a repeat of the despicable and inhumane practices of the old century.

LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA FROM CUBAN PATRIOTS

Mr. MARTINEZ. Mr. President, I wish to share with my colleagues a recent letter from 17 courageous activists within Cuba who are calling for democracy for their country. These individuals represent peaceful local movements across the nation. They represent Cuba's future more than the aged military elite now ruling that country alongside Raul Castro. They

are asking for the support of the United States, including a policy that does not "sacrifice the moral leadership of the United States in the face of commercial temptations."

Though Cubans have suffered oppression under the Castro regime for more than 50 years, this is an especially appropriate time to raise awareness of the ongoing plight of the Cuban people. In recent weeks, the Cuban regime has tightened its grip on the reins of power and installed hard-line military officers in top government posts. Ironically, at a time with increasing harassment and imprisonments taking place in Cuba, there are efforts within this Congress to adjust U.S. policy in a way that would essentially reward the Cuban regime.

Before any Member of this body or the President considers loosening the sanctions we have on Cuba, I commend the following letter to their reading:

The material follows:

[Informal Translation]

DEAR PRESIDENT OBAMA, Your election is a formidable symbol of what civic determination can do to institute transcendental social and political change. By assuming and conducting your important Presidential duties, you honor the millions of Americans who have fought for liberty, social justice, civil rights and human dignity.

In Cuba, there is a movement representing a broad racial and religious spectrum, formed by women, men, workers, and young people that—despite being the object of terrible repression by the regime in power—is conducting a peaceful civic struggle for democracy and human rights.

Our movement includes the desire for CHANGE by thousands of Cubans who have defied the repression, the intimidation and have overcome the fear to sign their names in petitions for constitutional reforms and academic freedom. Thousands more have refused to join in the attacks or "actos de repudio" ordered by the political police against those who aspire for peaceful political change. We are sustained by the inspiration of the more than 1.4 million Cubans that boycotted the elections of a single party and candidate organized by the regime in January and February 2008. Every day, in subtle and not so subtle ways, in visible and invisible ways, the Cuban people increasingly deny their support to the regime in power through acts of civil disobedience.

A great majority of Cubans, including many within the government, yearn for deep democratic changes in Cuba.

The great example of the civil rights movement in the United States is a ray of hope that the full dignity of every Cuban will be restored. We want to determine our future through democratic means.

It is our understanding that your administration will redirect the policy of the United States on Cuba and the regime. We ask that you do not put commercial considerations ahead of political freedom for our people. The regime's repression has increased considerably during the last year, and the militarization at high levels of government is a clear signal of the government's lack of will to initiate real changes. Today, hundreds of political prisoners languish in terrible conditions in Castro's jails. Their only crime has been to fight for the same freedoms that Americans such as Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave their lives for. Have no doubt Mr. President Obama that their fight is our fight now.

We ask that you consider an international, multilateral strategy that would compel the regime to open itself to its own people by freeing the political prisoners, restoring the civil rights of the Cuban people and organizing free elections with international supervision. Such a policy would reinforce and strengthen the work of many groups of Cubans dedicated to the peaceful political change.

This movement for change seeks to peacefully and deeply transform the political scene of Cuba.

We invite you to not sacrifice the moral leadership of the United States in the face of commercial temptations. Your presidency is a tribute to everything that can be conquered when a cause is just and correct. We dedicate our lives to the movement for the freedom of Cuba and expect—one day—to have a democratically-elected Cuban president who would welcome you to Havana.

Do not forget us. We need your support. We, too, "have a dream" of freedom.

Attentively,

1. Jorge Luis García Pérez "Antúnez", Presidio Político Pedro Luis Boitel

2. Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina, Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia, La Habana

3. Rolando Rodríguez Lobaina, Alianza Democrática Oriental, Guantánamo

4. Idania Yáñez Contreras, Coalición Central Opositora, Villa Clara

5. Juan Carlos González Leiva, Consejo de Relatores de Derechos Humanos, La Habana

6. Iris Pérez Aguilera, Movimiento Feminista de Derecho Civiles Rosa Parks, Villa Clara

7. Alejandro Tur Valladares, Jagua Press, Cienfuegos

8. Ana Margarita Perdígón Brito, Presidio Político Pedro Luis Boitel, Sancti Spiritus

9. Joaquín Cabezas de León, Movimiento Cubano Reflexión, Villa Clara

10. Ricardo Pupo Sierra, Plantados hasta la Libertad y la Democracia, Cienfuegos

11. Enyor Díaz Allen, Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia, Guantánamo

12. Cristián Toranzo, Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia, Holguín

13. Marta Díaz Rondón, Movimiento Feminista de Derecho Civiles Rosa Parks, Holguín

14. Margarito Broche Espinosa, Consejo de Relatores de Derechos Humanos de Cuba, Villa Clara

15. María de la Caridad Noa González, Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Familiar, Villa Clara

16. Virgilio Mantilla Arango, Fundación Cubana de Derechos Humanos, Camagüey

17. Yorledis Duvalón Gibert, Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia, Santiago de Cuba

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, since I last came to the floor to discuss a proposal for a Commission of Inquiry, Americans have learned disturbing new facts that underscore the need for such a nonpartisan review. In the last 8 years, expansive views of Presidential authority and misguided policies have dominated the question of how best to preserve and protect national security. As Senators, we each take an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States." In the months and years following 9/11, driven by an inflated view of executive power, the Bush-Cheney administration compromised many of the very laws and