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# Trump and his distant forerunner

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President McKinley and Major-Generals Wheeler, Lawton, Shafter and Kiefer.  
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President McKinley with Spanish-American War Major Generals, 1899.

By glorifying the figure of William McKinley, president of the United States between March 4, 1897 and September 14, 1901, Donald Trump is trying to find a universally acclaimed precedent for his controversial policies in the political history of the United States. McKinley was assassinated, Trump miraculously escaped the same fate on July 13, 2024 in Pennsylvania. But unlike the New Yorker, McKinley was a man of the political class. Except for a short period of two years (1869-1871) when he practiced law, he spent his entire life in the world of politics.

At the age of 33 McKinley entered the House of Representatives for the Republican Party. In 1890 he proposed and succeeded in getting a law passed increasing import tariffs. Shortly afterwards he was elected governor of Ohio and, in 1897, president of the United States. It was during his term of office that the country became a world power: he achieved the annexation of Hawaii by taking on the local government's four million dollar debt and the following year he took advantage of the defeat that the Cuban mambises had inflicted on the Spanish army to get involved in the Cuban war of independence and seize the island, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam. The pretext was to "provide aid" to the Cuban patriots, even though they didn't need it. However, in order to strip Spain of its territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific, Washington needed to enter the war.

As the Cubans did not ask for their help, an incident had to be fabricated that would enrage US public opinion and justify US intervention. The self-inflicted attack on the battleship Maine, anchored in Havana Bay to evacuate the citizens of that country, which mysteriously blew up on February 15, 1898, precipitated the entry of the United States into a war that had already been won by the Cubans but was taken away from them precisely by McKinley. It was under his presidency that the United States went from being a regional power in Central America and the Caribbean to taking the first steps in the construction of a global empire.

And it is this man, McKinley, a supporter of economic warfare with his tariffs; of direct military action, as in the case of the war against Spain; or appealing to money to buy an island like Hawaii who, not by chance, has been repeatedly praised by Trump. It was he who, having defeated the Spanish monarchy in the Philippines and Guam, ordered Pentagon cartographers to include those two distant Pacific islands on US maps.

This brief sketch allows us to decipher and put into perspective some of Trump's initiatives. For example, ordering the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of

America. His blind faith in import tariffs has its most notable precedent in McKinley, only in today's highly interconnected global economy such a policy is doomed to failure, and Trump himself will pay dearly for it. As an unscrupulous businessman he believes that everything has a price, that anything can be bought or sold. Patriotism, honor or dignity are meaningless words to the tycoon.

If McKinley acquired Hawaii, why not do the same with Greenland, especially when Denmark and European governments are displaying a scandalous apathy in the face of Trump's outburst? Why not use economic blackmail to turn Canada into the 51st state of the United States? And although for now there would be no need for a self-attack – the current version of Maine – the lies, fake news and cowardice or passivity of many politicians can have the same effect. If George Bush convinced the world that there were “weapons of mass destruction in Iraq”, which was blatantly untrue, why would the powerful media apparatus that the United States controls on a global scale not be capable of deceiving half the world when spreading a lie as scandalous as “the presence of Chinese soldiers in the Panama Canal”, or that his administration is surreptitiously run by the Chinese Communist Party? Or to convince world public opinion that someone who enters the United States illegally is a criminal, as the serial liar Marco Rubio claimed?

Beyond these parallels, the truth is that with his bluster and contradictions Trump represents a danger to international coexistence and a return to the most brutal and brazen phase of imperialism. Those naïve souls who thought that it had disappeared, replaced by benevolent globalization, are now silent. Imperialism exists, and will continue to generate pain and death everywhere, destroying the environment, promoting wars and sowing poverty with both hands. Trump's illusory attempt to resurrect US unipolarism, or “American superiority”, is a chapter closed under lock and key by the history of an international system whose current architecture has been radically and irreversibly modified in the direction of a multipolar power configuration, whose gravitation grows day by day.

Source: [Cuba en Resumen](#)

