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## Thucydides' Exhortation

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### Abstract:

*Contemporary military, strategic and geopolitical thinking written in Spanish is poor but our history and experience is a real gold mine. It is especially a gold mine when it comes to thinking, rethinking and writing about irregular warfare and the grey zone.*

*The debt is not to the forgotten past but to the future. A shared historical vision, a common strategic and geopolitical thinking, would provide us with a vector of Ibero-American integration that in the long term would have important returns. We need an Ibero-American school of strategic and geopolitical thought and the study of military history to win the right to be heard in areas where we have no voice, both at home and abroad.*

*Twenty-five centuries ago, Thucydides, in his Peloponnesian War, warned us that "a nation that draws too broad a difference between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking being done by cowards and its fighting done by fools".*

### Keywords:

*Military history, Ibero-American thought, grey zone, asymmetric warfare, strategy, war among the people.*

**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

## La Exhortación de Tucídides

### Resumen:

El pensamiento militar, estratégico y geopolítico contemporáneo escrito en español es pobre pero nuestra historia y experiencia es una verdadera mina de oro. Especialmente, es una mina de oro cuando se trata de pensar, repensar y escribir sobre la guerra irregular y la zona gris.

La deuda no es con el pasado olvidado sino con el futuro. Una visión histórica compartida, un pensamiento estratégico y geopolítico común, nos dotarían de un vector de integración Iberoamericana que a largo plazo tendría importantes réditos. Necesitamos una escuela iberoamericana de pensamiento estratégico, geopolítico y de estudio de la historia militar para conquistar el derecho a ser escuchados, en ámbitos donde no tenemos voz, fuera y dentro de casa.

Hace 25 siglos Tucídides, en su guerra del Peloponeso, nos advertía que “una nación que establece demasiada diferencia entre sus estudiosos y sus guerreros termina depositando su pensamiento en cobardes y su combatividad en locos”.

### Palabras clave:

Historia militar, pensamiento iberoamericano, zona gris, guerra asimétrica, estrategia, guerra entre la gente.

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## Introduction

In December 2006, the United States of America, after 30 years without revising its counterinsurgency doctrine, decided to update it by publishing the field manual, FM-3-24. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan imposed the obligation to rethink how to deal with a type of warfare forgotten since Vietnam. The “Vietnam never again” became a “*Damnatio memoriae*”; a condemnation of memory that forced the world’s most powerful armed forces to recompose their understanding and conduct of war as they went along. The field manual, FM-3-24 “Counterinsurgency”, signed by the famous US generals David Petraeus and James Mattis, begins its preface by quoting a French lieutenant colonel, David Galula, who reappears several times in various chapters of the text.

French military experience in the colonial wars in Indochina and especially Algeria forced the French army to rethink its understanding of warfare against an asymmetric enemy. In the 1950s, a French school of military thought was born, dedicated to studying, understanding, guiding and proposing a different approach to employing armed force in its overseas territories with any chance of success. The three main theorists of French counter-insurgency warfare doctrine at the time were Charles Lacheroy, Roger Trinquier and David Galula. Paradoxically, Galula, the best known in the United States, is the most unknown in France.

Why did this author have so much influence within his school in the United States at a time of necessary inspiration? The reason is easy to understand. David Galula wrote a book entitled “Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice”, which was published in the United States and the United Kingdom in 1964.

In France, in a rare occurrence, the army and intellectual have become good friends. Under the republic, the officer was obliged to carry out the function of a teacher. The officer was an educator for citizens of republican France. The military man was a preceptor of the nation, becoming, together with the teacher, lay apostles of the republic. This singular function, beyond that of a combatant, with an unquestionable moral and political sense, clearly shows the necessary symbiosis between the officer’s status as a soldier and his intellectual aspirations as a political pedagogue. In other parts of the world, the pedagogical function has been replaced by policing or enforcing the peace in one’s own home.

Republican France demands a ruling minority, a command aristocracy at the service of the state. The French armies have provided their republic with inspirational role models, not without controversy. Each of them differing in their capacity to influence, Hubert Lyautey, Pétain, Foch, De Gaulle, Charles Lacheroy, Roger Trinquier, David Galula and, more recently, Pierre de Villiers. Many of them, in addition to their deeds of arms and military careers, completed their personal contribution of service to the nation by thinking and sometimes writing to illuminate the destiny of the French in war and peace.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, military history has an important place in the publishing market. Every self-respecting bookshop has a section devoted to military history and military thought. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the Spanish-speaking world. We do not read as much as others, and there is not a lot of interest in reading about military, strategic or geopolitical issues in our Ibero-American world.

On the other hand, many Anglo-Saxon universities have departments of military history and studies related to strategy, operational art and even military tactics. The UK stands out in particular for both its historical research and its attention to security and defence issues, both in publishing and academia. In Spain there are no professorships dedicated to the study of military history, geopolitics, strategy, geo-economics, operational art and the military arts and sciences.

In Spain and Ibero-America, civilians and the military have not had the same inclination to publish their strategic, operational or tactical thinking. When they have done so, they have failed to construct a story with a doctrinal foundation or with strategic or geopolitical projection, sufficiently attractive to end up becoming must-read classics. Nor have we had our own school of strategic and geopolitical thought. No schools, no teachers. Without schools and teachers there is no continuity... the most we can expect is to have discontinuous and isolated actions.

“Spain’s strategic thinking has not lived up to its historical importance as a nation”.<sup>1</sup> This quote by Spanish Army Colonel José Luis Calvo Albero can be applied to all Ibero-American countries. The debt is not only to the forgotten and wasted past, but also and above all to the future. A shared historical vision and common strategic and geopolitical

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<sup>1</sup> CALVO ALBERO, José Luis (2020). “El pensamiento estratégico militar en España e Iberoamérica”. Multi-authored monograph, “El pensamiento estratégico desde el Renacimiento”. Araucaria, Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política, Humanidades y Relaciones Internacionales, year 22, issue 44, Seville.

thinking would provide us with a vector of Ibero-American integration that would have important long-term benefits. We need an Ibero-American school for strategic and geopolitical thinking and the study of military history in order to win the right to be heard in areas where we have no voice, at home and abroad.

### **In the 21st century, people think and write in English**

The War of Independence, which began on 8 May 1808 with the uprising of the people of Madrid against the invader, is primarily written by British scholars. It is one of the clearest and most painful cases of oblivion in our history. It does not take painstaking research to discover that the vast majority of books on the Spanish war against Napoleon have been written in English, some in French and very few in Spanish. One of the consequences is that much of the world knows this devastating war, an essential milestone in understanding contemporary Spanish history in both hemispheres, as "The Peninsular War".

But if the war against Napoleon is unknown to Spaniards, we are much more ignorant of the Hispanic wars fought in America, which ended with the emancipation of the continent's sister republics. This should not be surprising given the level of interest in military historical research in Spain. Although there are few history books on the war and the militia in Spain, most of them are written using the same sources and, not infrequently, dispensing with more ambitious research into primary sources.

In terms of strategic and geopolitical thinking, we can say that we basically translate without, in many cases, even going a little further by trying to interpret. A number of the books related to strategy or geopolitics translated into Spanish show that those in charge of changing the language of the work did not have sufficient knowledge of the subject or sufficient linguistic resources.

The United Kingdom and the United States are far ahead of the Hispanic world when it comes to studies and research related to military history, strategy and geopolitics. Without claiming to be exhaustive, it is worth reviewing the activities of some British universities with chairs and centres devoted to strategic studies and military history. Recognising the commendable efforts of Anglo-Saxons in analysis, research and publication in fields so little explored in the Hispanic world may be a first step in trying to emulate them. Having one's own strategic thinking, an accurate perception of the lessons of the history of war

and geopolitics, can be very useful for Ibero-Americans. Particularly valuable could be schools of thought that focus not only on the study of the national perspective, but also on the shared perspective. A look at the past and at the future, common to all, would facilitate Ibero-American integration.

At Oxford University, the Faculty of History offers nine postgraduate degrees. One of them is entitled "History of war". The master's degree includes subjects and papers on subjects unusual in the Spanish academic world, such as:

- War and technological innovation.
- History of operational art.
- Civil-military relations.
- Social and cultural history of the armed forces.
- Counter-insurgency and other forms of asymmetric warfare.
- Resources, mobilisation, logistics and the socio-economic impact of the war.
- War and medicine.

Oxford's history faculty also offers the opportunity to conduct research and participate in seminars on many aspects of war and military issues.<sup>2</sup>

King's College London, founded in 1829 by one of our acquaintances who made his name in our midst during the War of Independence and went on to glory at Waterloo, Duke Wellington, offers a master's degree in the history of war.

King's College is home to the Sir Michael Howard Centre for the History of War<sup>3</sup>. The centre has more historians dedicated to the study of the war than any other comparable institution.<sup>4</sup> Also at King's College is the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, which provides extensive primary and historical research documentation for students at the University.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1960s, Michael Howard understood that it was necessary to discover how the history of war affects history in general. With this vision, he founded the Department of War Studies at King's College London, and was also Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University and Professor of Military and Naval History at Yale University. In

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/history-of-war#collapse1683936>

<sup>3</sup> "Sir Michael Howard Centre for the History of War"

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/sir-michael-howard-centre-for-the-history-of-war-3>

<sup>5</sup> Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA)



1958, he was involved in founding one of the world's most prestigious think tanks, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).<sup>6</sup>

King's College has had a long tradition of military studies stemming back to 1927. In 1953, a department was established at the university dedicated to the study of warfare –the only university department of its kind in Britain– offering a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees to its students. The University offers 14 master's degrees dedicated to the specialised study of different aspects related to the use of force and warfare, some as interesting as strategic communication, national security studies, security science and studies, conflict resolution in fragmented societies, terrorism, modern warfare and of course the aforementioned history of warfare.

Undoubtedly, from a military point of view, the partnership between King's College and Cranfield University with the UK Defence Academy and its joint staff college, the Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC), is of unique relevance. Many of the professors at the above-mentioned military establishments come from the university. The professors' teaching careers have been devoted to the study of war and armed conflict with all its possible derivatives and relationships. Being a professor of higher military studies is the result of a lifetime of work and study. We should not be satisfied with understanding this teaching function as just another military posting. Collaboration with the university enriches and complements both parties.

Focusing exclusively on strategic and warfare studies in the UK, there are 32 postgraduate degrees at 22 universities.<sup>7</sup> It should come as no surprise that this broad range of studies is the basis for further professional development of this knowledge in think tanks, government agencies, consultancy firms, academia and the world of journalism. In the 21st century in the West, strategic thinking, military thinking, doctrine is written in English, mainly by the Anglo-Saxons, leaving everything that does not fall within their focus of interest in oblivion.

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<sup>6</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.postgraduatesearch.com/pgs/search?course=war-studies&qualification=masters&page\\_no=2](https://www.postgraduatesearch.com/pgs/search?course=war-studies&qualification=masters&page_no=2)

## General Valencia's diagnosis

At the time, I was struck by how the lack of interest in thinking and rethinking military history, strategy and geopolitical issues was identified as a disease, accurately diagnosed by Colombian General Valencia Tovar. General Valencia noted that the Colombian military does not feel the need to write.

On this occasion, it could be said that the speaker does not live up to the standard they are announcing. General Valencia Tovar was undoubtedly an outstanding military man. His service record includes a life in the armed forces filled with complex assignments and combat actions. He rose to three-star general, in this case three suns, at the age of 53.<sup>8</sup> His last posting was commander of the Colombian National Army. At his funeral, the President of the Republic, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, bade him farewell, saying: "He was a great man, a great warrior and a man of peace."<sup>9</sup>

General Valencia wrote a biography of Simón Bolívar entitled "El ser guerrero del libertador", which curiously was required reading in the FARC. He also wrote a military history of Colombia and several books about his experiences in the fight against the guerrillas. He even had time to write a novel, entitled "Uisheda", a book of children's stories, "Hitch Your Wagon to a Star", and some poems.

He was not only a career military man. He was a historian, writer, journalist and undoubtedly a profound connoisseur of peace and security issues. From his column 'Clepsidra', published by the Colombian newspaper "El Tiempo", the general established

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<sup>8</sup> General Valencia was one of the most outstanding officers of the Colombian Armed Forces. He served as a major in the Colombia Battalion in the Korean War from 1951 to 1953. He was a staff officer with the United Nations Emergency Force in Egypt during the British and French occupation of the canal. He fought for years against the terrorist groups FARC, ELN, EPL and was a protagonist in the beginning of the peace talks with the M-19. He served as head of the Colombian Delegation to the Inter-American Defence Board in Washington. He was eventually appointed commander of the Colombian National Army. General Valencia also had time to write books, including "Historia de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia", "Inseguridad y Violencia en Colombia", "Testimonio de una época", "Mis adversarios guerrilleros", "El ser guerrero del libertador" and "Oración a la Infantería". He also published the novel "Uisheda", the children's storybook "Engancha tu carreta a una estrella", and some poems.

In retirement, he participated as an advisor to the government in the Colombian armed conflict, mediating between the government and the guerrillas of the 19th April Movement (M-19), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He also advised other governments and gave counter-insurgency lectures to officials in various Ibero-American countries. He was a columnist for the Colombian daily.

Available at: [https://caracol.com.co/radio/2014/07/09/nacional/1404892080\\_312898.html](https://caracol.com.co/radio/2014/07/09/nacional/1404892080_312898.html)

<sup>9</sup> Brief biography of General Valencia Tovar, available at:

<https://www.fac.mil.co/adi%C3%B3s-un-hidalgo-caballero-general-%C3%A1lvaro-valencia-tovar>



himself as one of the most influential opinion leaders in Colombia.<sup>10</sup> He also had the courage to run for the presidency of the republic, although he did not get many votes.

General Valencia pointed out that very few military officers have chosen to write about contemporary history, let alone their own lived history. Colombian soldiers are not in favour of writing their “memoirs”<sup>11</sup>. One of the reasons for this lack of interest in writing about the experiences of the Colombian military is the enormous distance that separates the civilian world from the military and vice versa. The military has a kind of complex about the dominance of the academic field of books and literature. In such a way that this feeling of inadequacy translates into an inner exile marked by silence, renouncing intellectual protagonism. Colombia may not be the only country with this problem.

### **War is too serious a matter to be left to the military**

Some Spaniards and Ibero-Americans probably think that military history and strategic studies are the exclusive domain of the military. This may have been the case in the past, but since the end of the First World War it seems clear that the political conduct of war is increasingly necessary, especially in democracies. Civilian control of military force requires civilian specialists' knowledge of warfare, armed forces, strategy, geopolitics and international relations.

Georges Clemenceau would be a forgotten figure if his name were not linked to an unmissable event. “War is too serious a matter to be left to the military.” Interestingly, it was his experience as prime minister and minister of war during the First World War that enabled him to forge this idea, precisely because he did not put it into practice.

The passage of time has given us enough perspective to conclude that peacebuilding is too serious a matter to be left to politicians who do not listen to the military. Clemenceau himself, with his aggressive stance on war reparations, much tougher than that of US President Woodrow Wilson and British Prime Minister Lloyd George, brought about the outbreak of the Second World War with the harshness of the Versailles Treaty's impositions on Germany.

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<sup>10</sup> Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-14213898>

<sup>11</sup> VALENCIA TOVAR, Álvaro, general (1992) “Testimonio de una época”. Editorial Planeta de Colombia. Santa Fe de Bogotá.

Looking closer, the decisions taken by US diplomat Paul Bremer, as head of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in Iraq, can in no way be considered wise. The orientation of peacebuilding in both Iraq and Afghanistan, defined by the political purpose of implementing democracy by means of a roadmap associated with an electoral calendar, ignoring the reality and possibilities of the countries, without taking into account the opinion of the force commanders, was a major mistake. To which we might add that the invasion itself and the executive military plan were also insufficiently debated within the armed forces and in President Bush's own cabinet.<sup>12</sup>

At the present time, when all boundaries are blurring, drawing red lines between civilian and military in matters related to the design and use or threat of use of force to gain the possibility of building a more just peace is the result of inertia. Classics are classics because they remain relevant despite the passage of time. Twenty-five centuries ago Thucydides, in his Peloponnesian War, warned us that "a nation that makes too great a difference between its scholars and its warriors ends up by depositing its thinking in cowards and its fighting in fools".

On the other hand, unfortunately, the interest of the armed forces in these issues is decreasing. At the Armed Forces College, the department of Strategy and International Relations has disappeared. At the Army War College, the Strategy department has merged with the Organisation and Leadership departments. The study of military history is a curious hobby of a few but not a major element in forming the judgement of staff officers. Strategy and geopolitics are increasingly treated in a tangential, uncoordinated and scattered manner. The centrality of the tactical and operational leaves less and less room to study what moves above it.

The incomplete development of military, strategic and geopolitical history studies in the Hispanic world has to do with the insufficient attachment of Spaniards in both hemispheres to their history, particularly their military history, but also with the lack of interest in the strategic debates of the time. Thought paralysis –imposed or self-imposed– has won the day. As a result, we are often limited to translating ideas written in English and running around like headless chickens in our daydreams.

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<sup>12</sup> WOODWARD, Bob (2004) "Plan de ataque". Editorial Planeta, Barcelona.

## The war between people

The battle as the decisive event in the conflict has lost its centrality. Wars at the moment are not declared, they simply begin and do not end with the signing of a treaty, they tend to drag on beyond any agreement. However, interpreters of Napoleon and advocates of the focus on battle continue to dominate the stage of military culture.

War as an institution has slipped from its hinges. It is increasingly common for the weaker party to win in terms of military balance, and this outcome continues to amaze us. Since the end of the Second World War, reality has confirmed this curious discovery: David beats Goliath.<sup>13</sup>

More strength does not necessarily more power, in some cases it may be less. The victory of the weak is contradictory and unbearable for the more powerful, who suddenly feel vulnerable and awkward in the face of an enemy they despise and from whom they think they can learn nothing. If a war is normally an audit of institutions, it is especially so when the results are a frustrating defeat that humiliates the nation. The paradox that arises from the victory of the weak needs to be explained. One way to start is to recognise that the more conventional the armed forces are, the more irrelevant they become.

Conventional armies live on an illusion as unfortunate as Don Quixote's in the face of windmills. The mismatch of conventional means against new threats was foretold in the 1990s by Israeli historian Martin van Creveld, who prophesied that the irregular would become the most regular in the wars to come. "The armed forces of our day are dinosaurs on the verge of extinction. In quantitative terms, compared to the size they were in 1945, most of them have already disappeared."<sup>14</sup>

In the event that some armed forces were interested in achieving sufficient mastery in irregular warfare or even hybrid warfare, in grey zone warfare, if someone wanted to achieve new skills, the first step would be to turn the prevailing military narrative that has been constructed over time on its head.

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<sup>13</sup> ARREGUIN-TOFT, Ivan (2005) "How the weak win wars: A theory of Asymmetric Conflict". Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge University Press, New York.

In the period between 1800 and 2003, the percentage of asymmetric conflicts in which victory has been on the side of the tactically weaker side is close to 30 percent. Over time, the weak have gained more and more options, and it has become increasingly common and frequent for the less combat-resourced to gain the upper hand at the strategic and political levels over the more powerful. Looking only at the second half of the 20th century, the weak have prevailed in just over half of the conflicts.

<sup>14</sup> CREVELD, Martin van (2000) "The art of war: War and military thought". Cassell, Wellington House, London.

The so-called hybrid conflicts, now so fashionable, are a variant between great powers of an out-of-framework game, i.e. fundamentally low footprint and predominantly non-deterministically attributable actions. In the grey zone, nuclear forces have a role, as do the most advanced technological capabilities on land, at sea and in the air. However, the game is played in other domains that we could identify as irregular, understanding as regular everything that has to do with campaigns ordered by battles to prepare the culminating moment in a decisive military encounter, where the window of opportunity necessary to unbalance the adversary will open.

British General Sir Rupert Smith recognises that we are facing a new paradigm of warfare. His book "The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World" begins by asserting that "war no longer exists"; that is, war as "a battle between men and machines" or as "a decisive event in a dispute concerning international affairs". Thus emerges what General Smith calls "the war among the people". The result is a new configuration of warfare characterised by de-stabilisation, demilitarisation and the asymmetric use of violence.

The new form of warfare, which we still do not seem to have found a name for, has little to do with the hitherto prevailing "American way of war", a book written many years ago, which proposes a model of warfare adapted to the character and military experience of the United States of America.<sup>15</sup>

De-stabilisation, demilitarisation and the asymmetric use of violence are undoubtedly elements that have articulated the less brilliant and effective "Spanish way of war", a book that has yet to be written and that could certainly enlighten more than a few enthusiasts convinced of technological sufficiency.

In the grey zone, a valuable and under-explored point of reference is undoubtedly Hispanic military history. A historical review of the way we wage war can help change the corporate culture of many armed forces that are anchored in an outmoded conventionalism, helping to build a new intelligence of combat, operations, strategy and policy. Without a historical review, it is difficult to change the behaviours, perceptions, interpretations and principles of a military culture based on a way of understanding war or the use of force.

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<sup>15</sup> WEIGLEY, Russell F. (1973). "The American way of war: A history of United States Military Strategy and Policy". Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

The historical question is not a minor issue, it sets a narrative that puts in order and interprets the information, giving it meaning. In order to aspire to a transformation of the armed forces in line with a different way of waging war, an institutional narrative change is needed to facilitate the adoption and recognition of new internal patterns capable of setting in motion a different approach to conflict. The learning process involves assimilation and accommodation, i.e. time, work, new perceptions and parameters of measurement, new priorities and new readings.

Perhaps the most important feature of contemporary conflicts in grey zones is that they will occur between people with different levels of governance and effective security. This reality necessarily requires a review of the way we look at and understand the challenges facing capability acquisition, force generation, command and troop training, and unit training. Inevitably, everything is complicated by the emergence of new dimensions or domains, such as cyberspace, outer space, the media and networks, the cognitive domain, where new battles for the domination of language, ideas, concepts, feelings, fashions and customs, references and narratives, in short, people's hearts and minds, are taking place. The current security environment calls for reflection and raises uncomfortable questions about the effectiveness of existing models. Moreover, the concept of victory must be fundamentally re-examined in the context of a future environment in which conventional wars will be supplanted by population-centred conflicts and protracted asymmetric challenges.

Contemporary military and strategic thought written in Spanish is poor, but our history is a real gold mine. It is especially a gold mine when it comes to thinking, rethinking and writing about irregular warfare. Interestingly, on these kinds of issues, the Hispanic world here has a great depth of history and experience, which could give us an intellectual advantage.

Our long experience in frontier wars, wars of conquest in the most remote corners of the world against unknown empires, wars of colonisation, popular wars, irregular wars, guerrilla warfare, partisan warfare and raids, civil wars, revolutionary wars, subversive wars, protracted wars, the fight against terrorism and piracy, in short, wars without decisive battles, make us without a doubt an interesting focus for the study of asymmetric conflict and the effects that its effects have on a people. Hispanic history offers lessons learned and also lessons to be discovered that are not yet written and may never be written if we Spanish speakers do not do so.

As long as the world breathes, as long as the sphere turns,  
as long as the cordial wave encourages a reverie,  
as long as there is a lively passion, a noble commitment,  
an impossible quest, an impossible feat,  
a hidden America to find, Spain will live!

To King Oscar, Rubén Darío.

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