

Communism will remain after Castro, brother says

Raul Castro, the designated successor to Fidel Castro, said Cuba will still be a communist country after his brother leaves office.

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HAVANA - Fidel Castro's brother said the Communist Party will remain in control of Cuba if there is a leadership change, according to comments published in state-run media Thursday.

Raul Castro, defense minister and designated successor of his 79-year-old brother, dismissed claims that Cuba's political system would change dramatically after his brother is no longer president, saying the party would quickly fill any political vacuum.

"Only the Communist Party -- as the institution that brings together the revolutionary vanguard and will always guarantee the unity of Cubans -- can be the worthy heir of the trust deposited by the people in their leader," he said in a speech Wednesday marking a military anniversary. "Anything more is pure speculation."

As first vice president of the Council of State, Cuba's supreme governing body, Raul Castro, 74, is legally designated to assume his brother's role as president of the council in the event of "absence, illness or death."

Raul Castro appears to have the loyalty of the nation's top generals, giving him control over as many as 50,000 active troops and firepower that includes Soviet-era tanks and MiG fighter planes.

In his speech, he said Cuba's emphasis on building a strong military has been justified by the constant threat posed by the United States ever since Fidel Castro embraced communism.

"We Cubans are conscious of the fact that without the effort sustained by our people to consolidate the defensive capacity of the country, we would have ceased to exist as an independent nation a long time ago," he said.

He said the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq proved how far the United States will go with its ``imperialist aims of planetary hegemony."

With that war, he said, "It became obvious that the hawks of the empire were considering the possibility of settling scores with those who represented an obstacle to their dreams of world domination." Cuba, he added, is surely near the top of their "target" list.