

Castro brothers' plan: The party must go on

By JAIME SUCHLICKI
The Miami Herald
Jul. 12, 2006

The recent reestablishment of the secretariat of Cuba's Communist Party, the purges and replacements of party officials and the growing prominence of Raúl Castro in the Cuba-controlled media strongly suggest that the younger brother is increasingly managing and running the government's day-to-day operations.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of subsidies to Cuba some 15 years ago, Fidel Castro streamlined the party and eliminated its secretariat. Only the politburo remained as the principal decision-making body within the party, under Fidel's and Raúl's leadership.

In the years following the end of communism in Europe, the military in Cuba increased significantly its control over society and the economy. Most major state enterprises and key sectors of the economy fell under the control of active or retired military officers. During these years the party took a back stage role and became more bureaucratized and corrupt.

The reappearance of the secretariat earlier this month, led by Fidel and Raúl and composed primarily of party officials from the various provinces, signals the revival of the Communist Party, the only party allowed in Cuba, as a key player in the succession process. As Raúl has emphasized, the future leadership of Cuba after Fidel's disappearance should not be embodied in a personalized *caudillo*, but rather it should be represented by Cuba's key communist institutions.

The Castro brothers hope for an institutionalized succession that would guarantee the continuance of the present system and ideology into the indefinite future. The military, the party, and the security apparatus are to ensure the continuation of the revolution "into the next millennium."

Fidel's deteriorating health and Raúl's own frailty (he's 75 years old and a heavy drinker) are accelerating the move toward succession in Cuba and the search for an institutionalized model that would preserve the current system. The message from the leadership is clear: There will be no "glasnost" or "perestroika" in Cuba and no Gorbachev will be allowed to emerge.

Ideological rigidity and political and economic centralization are the policies to guarantee a successful succession and prevent Cuba's transformation into a democratic, market-oriented economy. In the international arena, maintaining an anti-American posture, solidifying alliances with friendly regimes primarily in Venezuela, China and Iran, and seeking new anti-American allies and supporters throughout the world are the key moves that strengthen the Castro brothers' strategy and could guarantee the longevity of successor regimes.

Jaime Suchlicki is professor of history and director, Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, University of Miami.