

Ailing Castro Temporarily Gives Up Power

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HAVANA, July 31 (AP) — [Fidel Castro](#), who took control of [Cuba](#) in 1959, rebuffed repeated attempts by the United States to oust him and survived Communism's demise almost everywhere else, temporarily relinquished power to his brother Raúl on Monday night because of surgery.

The Cuban leader said he had undergone surgery after suffering gastrointestinal bleeding, apparently as a result of stress from recent public appearances in Argentina and Cuba, according to the letter read live on television by his secretary, Carlos Valenciaga.

"The operation obligates me to undertake several weeks of rest," the letter read, adding that extreme stress "had provoked in me a sharp intestinal crisis with sustained bleeding that obligated me to undergo a complicated surgical procedure."

Mr. Castro said he was temporarily relinquishing the presidency to his younger brother and successor, Raúl Castro, the defense minister, but said the move was of "a provisional character."

The elder Mr. Castro asked that celebrations scheduled for his 80th birthday on Aug. 13 be postponed until Dec. 2, the 50th anniversary of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

Mr. Castro said he would also temporarily relinquish his duties as first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba to Raúl Castro, who turned 75 in June and has been taking on a more public profile in recent weeks.

In power since the triumph of the Cuban revolution on Jan. 1, 1959, Mr. Castro is the world's longest-ruling head of government. Only King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, crowned in 1946, and Queen Elizabeth, crowned in 1952, have been heads of state longer.

The announcement drew cheering in the streets in Miami. People waved Cuban flags on Calle Ocho in Little Havana, shouting "Cuba,

Cuba, Cuba,” hoping that the end is near for the man most of them consider to be a ruthless dictator.

There were hugs, cheers and dancing as drivers honked their horns. Many of the revelers had fled the Communist island or have parents and grandparents who did.

In the Cuban capital, waiters at a popular cafe were momentarily stunned as they watched the news. But they quickly got back to work and put on brave faces.

“He’ll get better, without a doubt,” said Agustín López, 40. “There are really good doctors here, and he’s extremely strong.”

Mr. Castro rose to power after an armed revolution he led drove out then-President Fulgencio Batista.

The United States was the first country to recognize Mr. Castro, but his radical economic reforms and rapid trials of Batista supporters quickly unsettled American leaders.

Washington eventually imposed a trade embargo on the island and severed diplomatic ties. Mr. Castro seized American property and businesses and turned to the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance.

On April 16, 1961, Mr. Castro declared his revolution to be socialist. The next day, he humiliated the United States by capturing more than 1,100 exile soldiers in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The world neared nuclear conflict on Oct. 22, 1962, when President [John F. Kennedy](#) announced that there were Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. After a tense week of diplomacy, the Soviet leader, Nikita S. Khrushchev, removed them.

Talk of Mr. Castro’s mortality was long taboo on the island, but that ended on June 23, 2001, when he fainted during a speech in the sun.

Mr. Castro typically laughed off rumors about his health. “They have tried to kill me off so many times,” Mr. Castro said in a 2005 speech, adding he felt “better than ever.”

