

Foes report signs of troop movement

Though it was business as usual in most of Cuba, increased military activity and the roundup of reservists was reported in Havana and other cities.

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Most Cubans reported normalcy on the island Tuesday after Fidel Castro shocked the world by temporarily surrendering power to his brother, but some reported unusual troop movements in Havana and the often roiled eastern end of Cuba.

Government opponents in the eastern city of Guantánamo said armed forces units were seen rounding up reservists as state security agents paid unfriendly visits to dissidents.

"We know the military is mobilized: they have us corralled," Guantánamo dissident Mariela Castro Fernández told The Miami Herald in a telephone interview. "There is a terrible silence outside."

Fidel Castro issued a statement saying his health was a state secret and his spirits were fine. Assembly speaker Ricardo Alarcón told Prensa Latina news service that demonstrations in Miami were enough to make him throw up.

Raúl Castro, to whom Fidel Castro delegated power, was nowhere to be seen.

In Havana, the government tried hard to portray an air of normalcy. The two-humped buses known as "camels" were packed as usual and 50-year-old Fords chugged along busy streets, residents reported. In Chinatown, people lined up to buy soft drinks to beat the heat.

But travelers who arrived from Havana at Miami International Airport on Tuesday reported seeing increased military presence around the capital.

"I think I saw a million militiamen on the drive to airport," said Manuel Rodríguez, returning four days into what was supposed to be a 10-day visit to his mother in Cuba.

Other arriving passengers confirmed they too saw the military trucks and soldiers walking through the city's main thoroughfares. They said it seemed to them to be just for show.

Havana dissident leader Vladimiro Roca said he received reports that two government critics in the central region of Santa Clara were harassed by government supporters.

But the most serious reports came from eastern Cuba, especially the former province of Oriente, which surrounds the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay.

Néstor Rodríguez, a dissident in Cuba's easternmost city of Baracoa, said his Cuban Youth for Democracy movement held a 15th anniversary celebration Saturday. That night, police went to his house and ordered him to the station.

On Monday, hours before Castro's announcement, security forces returned and threatened his life while a warrant was issued for a friend's arrest, he said.

On Tuesday, Rodríguez said, his city showed a high presence of military forces. Vehicles belonging to the armed forces and the Ministry of Interior were visible all over town, he said.

"The situation is very tense. It's important for the people to know that the security forces are nervous," he said. "Of course they already knew this [the announcement of Fidel Castro's ailment] was coming -- this is an organized system."

In Guantánamo, Castro Fernández said the military presence in her city was obvious: she saw the soldiers come take two neighbors away for military service.

"Of course everything is calm. It's like the cat and the mouse," she said. "If the cat is out threatening, the mouse stays in, because he knows if he doesn't, he'll be eaten."

Leonor Padilla, a member of the Youth for Democracy Movement, said she was visited by state security Friday when she went to the beach, while another group was at her Guantánamo home.

"I feel afraid, panicked. I have not dared go outside," she said by phone from Guantánamo. "They know about our most minimal movements. What would happen if people took to the streets? Only a nut would do that."

But the majority of Cubans contacted Tuesday said they did not notice anything out of the ordinary. Residents in Santiago de Cuba reported that everything was quiet in that key eastern city.

"Everything's normal, everybody went out to work as usual, although with a heavy heart, because the president is ill," said a man who identified himself only as Jesús.

The Spanish and the Argentine embassies in Havana reported everything was quiet.

"Everything is normal and quiet. It's just another normal summer day here, at least for now," said Eduardo Gómez, a spokesman for the Argentine embassy. "We are *tranquilito*," said a woman named Andrea, 66, who runs a daycare in her home in the capital's Santos Suárez neighborhood. "Tranquilito as we have been all our lives."

"Nothing is happening. There is no news, no activity on the street," she said, giggling. "What can we say? We can't say anything. We don't know anything."

Government work centers brought employees together for small rallies throughout Havana, the Associated Press reported from Havana.

"For this man, we must give our life," a customs worker told a crowd waving Cuban flags and shouting "Long live Fidel!"

The proclamation from Castro was met with deep distrust among members of other government opposition groups.

"What we have right now is a signed proclamation of Fidel Castro's. There can be any trick at all behind that," Roca said.

His theory? "The scenario I believe is that they raise expectations of a very serious condition, when it can be anything that affects a person of the age of 80," he said. "Remember we are dealing with Superman here, so they can create the legend that he recovered quickly. It's to create and maintain the myth of Fidel Castro."

Laura Pollán, a member of Ladies in White -- wives and mothers of political prisoners -- worried that instead of being a harbinger of change, Castro's illness could complicate the lives of the 300-plus jailed dissidents.