

## Bush Imagines Cuba After Castro's Death

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NEWPORT, R.I., June 28 -- [President Bush](#) on Thursday openly anticipated the death of ailing Cuban President Fidel Castro, picturing it as an opportunity to bring freedom to the [Caribbean](#) island after nearly half a century of iron-fisted rule by the fiery communist leader.

"One day, the good Lord will take [Fidel Castro](#) away," Bush said during a question-and-answer session at the U.S. Naval War College here. As the audience laughed and began to applaud, Bush seemed to realize that cheering the death of another head of state, even an enemy, might appear unseemly and quickly quieted the crowd. "No, no, no," he told audience members.

But he then imagined what it would be like once Castro is gone and forecast a debate over how aggressively the United States should try to open up the totalitarian system in [Havana](#). "The question is, what will be the approach of the U.S. government?" he said. "My attitude is that we need to use the opportunity to call the world together to promote democracy as the alternative to the form of government they have been living with."

The discussion of [Cuba](#) came as a tangent in response to a man in the audience who asked Bush about [Colombia](#). Bush came here to talk about the war in [Iraq](#) and hail what he sees as signs of progress since the troop increase he ordered in January. Asked about the remark on Castro's death, spokesman Gordon Johndroe said, "The president was commenting on an inevitable event."

Castro, 80, turned over power temporarily to his brother Raúl last summer and announced that he had undergone intestinal surgery. He has not been seen in public since, but he appeared in a videotape this month in the first images made public in more than four months and appeared more robust than he had previously. He also signed an editorial mocking Bush's trip to [Albania](#) under the headline "The Tyrant Visits Tirana."

Although U.S. officials have for years hoped that Castro would die -- and [CIA](#) documents released this week showed how in the 1960s they even tried to hire the Mafia to kill him -- Bush and his aides have been careful not to appear ghoulish in public about the prospect since Castro fell ill last year. If nothing else, the administration does not want to alienate Latin Americans by seeming too eager for Castro's death.

In March, just before a trip to [Latin America](#), Bush stepped more gingerly around the topic when questioned by journalists from the region, but made much the same point about the aftermath. "How long he stays on earth, that's a decision that will be made by the Almighty," Bush said. "But once that happens, once -- you know, Fidel Castro may live, I don't know, I don't know how long he's going to live -- but, nevertheless, I do believe that the system of government that he's imposed upon the people ought not live if that's what the people decide."