

# Castro: Bush could spark nuclear war

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HAVANA --

Fidel Castro is accusing President Bush of threatening the world with nuclear war and famine - an attack on Washington that comes as the White House is set to announce new plans to draw Cuba away from communism.

"The danger of a massive world famine is aggravated by Mr. Bush's recent initiative to transform foods into fuel," Castro wrote Tuesday in Cuban news media, referring to U.S. support for using corn and other food crops to produce gasoline substitutes.

The brief essay titled "Bush, Hunger and Death" also alleged that Bush "threatens humanity with World War III, this time using atomic weapons."

The White House on Tuesday brushed off Castro's comments - particularly his assertion that Bush was pursuing a forceful conquest of Cuba.

"Dictators say a lot of things, and most of them can be discounted, including that," said White House press secretary Dana Perino.

Perino said that Bush on Wednesday would urge other nations to join together in promoting democracy in Cuba.

"It is true that soon the decades-long debate about our policy towards Cuba will come to a time when we're going to have an opportunity here, when Castro is no longer leading Cuba, that the people there should be able to have a chance at freedom and democracy," she said. "That opportunity is coming."

In his essay, Castro predicted that Bush "will adopt new measures to accelerate the 'transition period' in our country, equivalent to a new conquest of Cuba by force."

Cuban officials have long denounced U.S. efforts to produce a "transition" from Castro's government to a Western-style representative democracy.

Ailing and 81, Castro has not been seen in public since undergoing emergency intestinal surgery and ceding power to a provisional government headed by his younger brother Raul in July 2006.

While he has looked upbeat and lucid in official videos, he also seems too frail to resume power.

Life on the island has changed little under Raul Castro, the 76-year-old defense minister who was his elder brother's hand-picked successor for decades.

Cuba staged municipal elections on Sunday, the first step in a process that will determine if Fidel Castro is re-elected or replaced next year as Cuban leader.

