

# Bush revives pro-democracy tactics for Cuba

**He has announced incentives for change, but most experts say they'll have little impact.**

The Christian Science Monitor  
October 26, 2007

Washington - Having belatedly realized that Cuba's communist regime is not doomed to collapse simply with the passing from power of Fidel Castro, the Bush administration is launching new pro-democracy initiatives with the decades-old US hope of fostering a shift from communism.

But little suggests that the road to a democratic Cuba is suddenly open to new US measures – or to renewed American pressure. [Fidel's brother Raúl](#) has consolidated control of the Cuban system since the elder Castro relinquished power for health reasons in July 2006. And with Cuba's economy growing and the country benefiting from expanded ties to friendly governments such as Venezuela and China, new US efforts are unlikely to have much impact, most Cuba experts believe.

The administration "could have come up with something different to respond to the changes that have taken place in Cuba, but instead they are acting as if [the transition](#) to Raúl Castro hasn't happened," says Steven Clemons, director of the American strategy program at the New America Foundation in Washington. "What this does is keep US-Cuba relations in a cold-war cocoon at least a while longer."

## Internet access and scholarships

The new measures, ranging from enhanced Internet access and scholarships for Cuban youths to an international "freedom fund" for Cuba's reconstruction, would take effect only if Cuba's "ruling classes" make way for a democratic transition, administration officials say. That, they add, means multiparty elections, an emptying of political prisons, and adoption of the full freedoms of a [democracy](#).

Even President Bush, who announced the new measures in a speech before the families of jailed Cuban dissidents Wednesday, appeared to acknowledge that change in Cuba is unlikely to come quickly. "Cuba's transition from a shattered society to a free country may be long and difficult," Mr. Bush said. "Things will not always go as hoped."

Mr. Clemons, who supports enhanced contacts with the Cuban people in spite of the communist regime, says the speech "sounded like something Bush intended to give in south Florida before the election last year but only got around to now."

In fact, Cuban-Americans may have the most favorable reception of the White House announcement. That, some experts add, explains the audience of supportive Cuban-Americans at the speech.

The president had tough words for Raúl Castro, although he did not refer to him by name. Life for Cubans "will not improve by the exchange of one dictator for another," Bush said.

Yet he also castigated US allies in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere that have preferred engagement with Cuba over isolation.

One explanation for Bush's speech may be a desire to squelch any thinking that the transition to Raúl has led to a different US response. On the one hand, Cuba is holding elections among Communist candidates, and the number of political prisoners – always rising and falling under Fidel's regime – has fallen under Raúl so far. Moreover, the younger Castro is seen by some experts to be encouraging political dialogue and opening the country more to foreign investment.

But US Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, himself a Cuban-American, was clear after Bush's speech that the administration sees no interlocutor in Cuba's new leader. "We are not committed to a relationship with Raúl Castro," he said. "The president was very clear: We do not support the transition from one [dictator](#) to another."

Multibillion-dollar 'freedom fund'

Mr. Gutierrez and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were assigned to begin working with foreign governments and multilateral financial institutions to create what Bush said would be a "multibillion-dollar freedom fund" for Cuba's reconstruction.

In his speech, Bush also took the unusual step of directly addressing members of the Cuban military. "When Cubans rise up to demand their liberty ... you've got to make a choice," he said. "Will you defend a disgraced and dying order by using force against your own people? Or will you embrace your people's desire for change? There is a place for you in the free Cuba."