

The Miami Herald asked Cuba experts, analysts and activists to take a closer look at the letter Fidel Castro wrote announcing he would step down from power after 49 years on the job. Here's what they said.



Ernesto Betancourt
Former director of Radio Martí



Ramón Colas
Founder of the Independent Libraries of Cuba



John de Leon
Vice president of the ACLU



María Dolores Espino
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Cuban-American activist



Phil Peters
Vice President at the Lexington Institute



María Werlau
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DISSECTING CASTRO'S LETTER TO THE CUBAN PEOPLE

TRANSLATION

But Raúl, who is also minister of the Armed Forces on account of his own personal merits, and the other comrades of the Party and State leadership were unwilling to consider me out of public life despite my unstable health condition.

ANALYSIS

de Leon: "Fidel, as has generally been the case, has refused to play by the rules of someone else's game, particularly those of the United States or of the exiles in Miami. So for those of us who felt he had effectively given up power on July 31, 2006, he says: wrong. He stayed in the game until now, because to completely have given up power back in 2006 would have created a potentially unstable situation for his government. So despite his infirmity, he stuck around, both because his friends in line to take control insisted (including his brother Raúl, to whom he throws a plug), and he did not want to create a situation that would embolden the United States or its agents to take action to undermine the revolution at his moment of great personal physical weakness."

Freyre: "First of all, I don't think anyone can make Fidel Castro to do anything, especially in Cuba ... not even his brother."

Werlau: "I don't buy that. I see this as typical 'stroke the ego of the Megalomaniac-in-Chief' language that excuses the failure and attempts to avoid the embarrassment of not knocking him out before, at least officially, when he had been out of the picture for almost 19 months, and it was clear he was incapable of governing."

TRANSLATION

Fortunately, our Revolution can still count on cadres from the old guard and others who were very young in the early stages of the process. Some were very young, almost children, when they joined the fight on the mountains and later they have given glory to the country with their heroic performance and their internationalist missions

ANALYSIS

Betancourt: "The people who are in power now are all mediocre. Ever since the attack on Moncada, he surrounded himself with inferior people who would not challenge him mentally. Wait until Sunday. Raúl is his heir, but when he delegated his responsibilities when he first got sick, he gave his job to seven different people. Why did he do that to Raúl? Because he knew he was mediocre."

Colas: "He's saying people like [Health Minister] José Ramón Balaguer and [Politburo member] Ramón Machado Ventura are going to be key in this process. They are the orthodox, the ones who follow the Castro dictatorship to the letter of the law. He's referring to them to give them some weight, and avoid having Raúl cut them off."

Freyre: "I read this one three times. On the third time, I saw something else: that he's making way for the new generation. He's saying, 'Let's not forget the people who have been there all along. Let's use their experience as we make way for a new generation.'"

Peters: "If you are looking for a clue as to who is going to succeed him, not only are there none, but he muddies the issue further by saying they are both ready to take over the revolution. He thinks either can take over. So if you're looking to find out who will be named president on Sunday, he's of no help whatsoever."

Queridos compatriotas:

Les prometí el pasado viernes 15 de febrero que en la próxima reflexión abordaría un tema de interés para muchos compatriotas. La misma adquiere esta vez forma de mensaje.

Ha llegado el momento de postular y elegir al Consejo de Estado, su Presidente, Vicepresidentes y Secretario.

Desempeñé el honroso cargo de Presidente a lo largo de muchos años. El 15 de febrero de 1976 se aprobó la Constitución Socialista por voto libre, directo y secreto de más del 95% de los ciudadanos con derecho a votar. La primera Asamblea Nacional se constituyó el 2 de diciembre de ese año y eligió el Consejo de Estado y su Presidencia. Antes había ejercido el cargo de Primer Ministro durante casi 18 años. Siempre dispuse de las prerrogativas necesarias para llevar adelante la obra revolucionaria con el apoyo de la inmensa mayoría del pueblo.

Conociendo mi estado crítico de salud, muchos en el exterior pensaban que la renuncia provisional al cargo de Presidente del Consejo de Estado el 31 de julio de 2006, que dejé en manos del Primer Vicepresidente, Raúl Castro Ruz, era definitiva. El propio Raúl, quien adicionalmente ocupa el cargo de Ministro de las F.A.R. por méritos personales, y los demás compañeros de la dirección del Partido y el Estado, fueron renuentes a considerarme apartado de mis cargos a pesar de mi estado precario de salud.

Era incómoda mi posición frente a un adversario que hizo todo lo imaginable por deshacerse de mí y en nada me agradaba complacerlo.

Más adelante pude alcanzar de nuevo el dominio total de mi mente, la posibilidad de leer y meditar mucho, obligado por el reposo. Me acompañaban las fuerzas físicas suficientes para escribir largas horas, las que compartía con la rehabilitación y los programas pertinentes de recuperación. Un elemental sentido común me indicaba que esa actividad estaba a mi alcance. Por otro lado me preocupó siempre, al hablar de mi salud, evitar ilusiones que en el caso de un desenlace adverso, traerían noticias traumáticas a nuestro pueblo en medio de la batalla. Prepararlo para mi ausencia, psicológica y políticamente, era mi primera obligación después de tantos años de lucha. Nunca dejé de señalar que se trataba de una recuperación "no exenta de riesgos".

Mi deseo fue siempre cumplir el deber hasta el último aliento. Es lo que puedo ofrecer.

A mis entrañables compatriotas, que me hicieron el inmenso honor de elegirme en días recientes como miembro del Parlamento, en cuyo seno se deben adoptar acuerdos importantes para el destino de nuestra Revolución, les comunico que no aspiraré ni aceptaré- repito- no aspiraré ni aceptaré, el cargo de Presidente del Consejo de Estado y Comandante en Jefe.

En breves cartas dirigidas a Randy Alonso, Director del programa Mesa Redonda de la Televisión Nacional, que a solicitud mía fueron divulgadas, se incluían discretamente elementos de este mensaje que hoy escribo, y ni siquiera el destinatario de las misivas conocía mi propósito. Tenía confianza en Randy porque lo conocí bien cuando era estudiante universitario de Periodismo, y me reunía casi todas las semanas con los representantes principales de los estudiantes universitarios, de lo que ya era conocido como el interior del país, en la biblioteca de la amplia casa de Kohly, donde se albergaban. Hoy todo el país es una inmensa Universidad.

Párrafos seleccionados de la carta enviada a Randy el 17 de diciembre de 2007:

"Mi más profunda convicción es que las respuestas a los problemas actuales de la sociedad cubana, que posee un promedio educacional cercano a 12 grados, casi un millón de graduados universitarios y la posibilidad real de estudio para sus ciudadanos sin discriminación alguna, requieren más variantes de respuesta para cada problema concreto que las contenidas en un tablero de ajedrez. Ni un solo detalle se puede ignorar, y no se trata de un camino fácil, si es que la inteligencia del ser humano en una sociedad revolucionaria ha de prevalecer sobre sus instintos.

"Mi deber elemental no es aferrarme a cargos, ni mucho menos obstruir el paso a personas más jóvenes, sino aportar experiencias e ideas cuyo modesto valor proviene de la época excepcional que me tocó vivir.

"Pienso como Niemeyer que hay que ser consecuente hasta el final."

Carta del 8 de enero de 2008:

"...Soy decidido partidario del voto unido (un principio que preserva el mérito ignorado). Fue lo que nos permitió evitar las tendencias a copiar lo que venía de los países del antiguo campo socialista, entre ellas el retrato de un candidato único, tan solitario como a la vez tan solidario con Cuba. Respeto mucho aquel primer intento de construir el socialismo, gracias al cual pudimos continuar el camino escogido."

"Tenía muy presente que toda la gloria del mundo cabe en un grano de maíz", reiteraba en aquella carta.

Traicionaría por tanto mi conciencia ocupar una responsabilidad que requiere movilidad y entrega total que no estoy en condiciones físicas de ofrecer. Lo explico sin dramatismo.

Afortunadamente nuestro proceso cuenta todavía con cuadros de la vieja guardia, junto a otros que eran muy jóvenes cuando se inició la primera etapa de la Revolución. Algunos casi niños se incorporaron a los combatientes de las montañas y después, con su heroísmo y sus misiones internacionalistas, llenaron de gloria al país. Cuentan con la autoridad y la experiencia para garantizar el reemplazo. Dispone igualmente nuestro proceso de la generación intermedia que aprendió junto a nosotros los elementos del complejo y casi inaccesible arte de organizar y dirigir una revolución.

El camino siempre será difícil y requerirá el esfuerzo inteligente de todos. Desconfío de las sendas aparentemente fáciles de la apologética, o la autoflagelación como antítesis. Prepararse siempre para la peor de las variantes. Ser tan prudentes en el éxito como firmes en la adversidad es un principio que no puede olvidarse. El adversario a derrotar es sumamente fuerte, pero lo hemos mantenido a raya durante medio siglo.

No me despidió de ustedes. Deseo solo combatir como un soldado de las ideas. Seguiré escribiendo bajo el título "Reflexiones del compañero Fidel". Será un arma más del arsenal con la cual se podrá contar. Tal vez mi voz se escuche. Seré cuidadoso.

Gracias

Fidel Castro Ruz
18 de febrero de 2008
5 y 30 p.m.

TRANSLATION

Later, in my necessary retreat, I was able to recover the full command of my mind as well as the possibility for much reading and meditation. I had enough physical strength to write for many hours, which I shared with the corresponding rehabilitation and recovery programs. Basic common sense indicated that such activity was within my reach. On the other hand, when referring to my health I was extremely careful to avoid raising expectations since I felt that an adverse ending would bring traumatic news to our people in the midst of the battle. Thus, my first duty was to prepare our people both politically and psychologically for my absence after so many years of struggle. I kept saying that my recovery "was not without risks."

ANALYSIS

Colas: "First of all, I have always said Fidel Castro is a psychopath, and sometimes that manifests itself with acts of schizoprenia. What's clear is the damage he suffered during the illness is still present. Someone with an ego like his would never make that kind of admission."

de Leon: "Fidel here views Cuba as his creation. In a very paternalistic way, he views his subjects as fragile and not able to function without his protection. For any great leader, this is a very unfortunate result. Cuba's health he views connected to his own.

Of course context is important and one can't ignore the nemesis to the north and Fidel's very personal relationship with that ongoing feud between himself and his David. That is a battle in which he engaged his entire country against a Goliath that would not go away. The rest of the world seemed to bet on David ... if only because they viewed Cuba as their surrogate in the battle against the powerful north. And in their world the poor far outnumbered the rich — a dynamic Fidel is almost genetically aware of."

Peters: "In this and the preceding paragraph he seems to be saying that only after multiple surgeries and recovery periods did he recover his full mental faculties. The 'adversary' reference isn't clear — it could be his illness, or the United States — but he treats his illness and the public information about it as a national security matter. As comandante en jefe, he wanted no unrealistic expectations about his return, and even as other officials talked about his recovery, Fidel kept expectations low."

Werlau: "I think he's senile. Not only would he never publicly admit something like this, neither would the people under him. I see this as an attempt to legitimize the resignation, to make people believe Fidel is a willing and mentally competent participant in the succession."

TRANSLATION

The path will always be difficult and require from everyone's intelligent effort. I distrust the seemingly easy path of apologists or its antithesis the self-flagellation.

ANALYSIS

Espino: "He's rejecting radical change. He's obviously not going to admit there was failure in the revolution. He's taking the Castro stand: Do not apologize. The Revolution has not failed."

Freyre: "I found this one very interesting. Maybe there is a little bit of 'Don't be too hasty with all this self-incrimination. Don't be too quick to blame everything on the revolution.' In the mind of someone who has been carrying on this project — for good or ill — there has to be a sense that things need to be preserved. I'm not sure he's saying this directly at any one particular person."

Werlau: "This is significant. From what I can pick up from this, there is a struggle between the reformers and the hard-liners like Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. Raúl and the reformers are pushing economic reforms, so what I'm reading is that the [hard-liners they call] the Talibans had a hand in this letter. It's really interesting. It's a signal to people not to get ahead of themselves with all this critical analysis going on.

TRANSLATION

This is not my farewell to you. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas. I shall continue to write under the heading of "Reflections by comrade Fidel." It will be just another weapon you can count on. Perhaps my voice will be heard. I shall be careful.

ANALYSIS

Betancourt: "He says he'll continue until the end. If Raúl makes changes he does not approve of, he is going to let everyone know it through his columns. He wants veto power."

Espino: "I think he's definitely hinting that the process is going to be monitored by the military. Whatever happens, the military will safeguard the process."

Freyre: " 'Perhaps my voice will be heard?' This is not the Fidel I know. The Fidel I know would never doubt his view will be heard. Perhaps there's a bit of an acknowledgement that we who are getting on in years are sometimes listened to, and sometimes not."