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FEATURED Q&A

Will the End of the Castro Era Mean Change in Cuba?



Raúl Castro (R) ceded the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party to Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel (L) at the party's recent congress. // File Photo: Estudios Revolución via Granma.

Q The Castro era has come to an end in Cuba as Raúl Castro, at age 89, stepped down on Friday as the head of Cuba's Communist Party. As expected, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel succeeded him in the post on Monday. What will change in Cuba with Raúl Castro's departure from the party's leadership? To what extent will the younger generation of Cuba's leaders be willing to make further market-style reforms to the country's economy? To what extent will the Covid-19 pandemic accelerate political or economic changes in Cuba?

A William M. LeoGrande, professor of government in the School of Public Affairs at American University: "Raúl Castro's departure from the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party represents the final stage of the transition from the 'historic' generation that founded the revolutionary regime to a successor generation born after the triumph of the 1959 revolution. Miguel Díaz-Canel, who took Castro's place as president in 2018 and now assumes the mantle of party leader, has been a firm supporter of Raúl Castro's policies—first and foremost the economic reform program launched in 2011, which aims to replace Soviet-style central planning with a market-socialist model. His favorite hashtag is 'We Are Continuity,' and the just-concluded party congress was billed as the 'Congress of Continuity.' The party congress unveiled no dramatic new policies, but in his farewell speech, Castro underscored the need to move full speed ahead on economic reforms, which have lagged as a result of bureaucratic resistance. Whether Díaz-Canel will have any better luck bringing the

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United Nations Seeks \$29.2 Mn for Relief in St. Vincent

The United Nations launched an appeal for funding to help St. Vincent following destruction caused by the eruption of the La Soufrière volcano.

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Company in Argentina Produces Batch of Russian Vaccine

Argentina's Laboratorios Richmond has produced a batch of Russia's Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine.

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POLITICAL

U.S. to Offer 22,000 More Seasonal Guest Worker Visas

The United States will offer 22,000 more guest worker visas. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the program is designed to fill seasonal jobs.

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Mayorkas // File Photo: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. to Offer 22,000 Additional Guest Worker Visas

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden announced Tuesday that it will offer 22,000 additional seasonal worker guest visas this year, with 6,000 of them reserved for people from the so-called "Northern Triangle" countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. The non-agricultural visas are additional to the 66,000 that the United States makes available every year, the Department of Homeland Security said in making the announcement. "The H-2B program is designed to help U.S. employers fill temporary seasonal jobs, while safeguarding the livelihoods of American workers," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement. "This supplemental increase also demonstrates DHS's commitment to expanding lawful pathways for opportunity in the United States to individuals from the Northern Triangle." The additional visas will be made available to employers who attest that they are likely to suffer irreparable harm if they do not receive workers under the increase, the Department of Homeland Security said. Employers can only seek foreign workers under the visa program if there are not enough U.S. workers to do the temporary work they have available. In order to seek workers with the H-2B visas, they must also engage in additional recruitment efforts for U.S. workers, the Department of Homeland Security added. The additional allotment of visas "is based on a time-limited statutory authority and does not affect the H-2B program in future fiscal years," the department added. The announcement came after the Biden administration allowed the March 31 expiration of a ban on some work-based visas that the administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump had imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, The Wall Street Journal reported. The Trump administration implemented the ban last June, saying it was necessary to protect jobs for U.S. workers as the economy struggled amid the pandemic.

ECONOMIC NEWS

United Nations Seeks \$29.2 Million for Relief in St. Vincent

The United Nations on Tuesday launched an appeal for \$29.2 million in global funding to help St. Vincent and the Grenadines following major eruptions of the La Soufrière volcano. "The funding will provide immediate lifesaving humanitarian assistance, including clean water, and support a sustainable recovery for everyone impacted," the United Nations said in a statement. "The UN and partners will also

The devastating impact of this event on thousands of people is undeniable.
— Didier Trebucq

assess the economic, social and environmental toll on all the countries touched by the fallout, including ash removal and improving environmental health provisions." The United Nations said that it also is seeking to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the Caribbean nation. "Entire villages have been covered in ash, buildings damaged, schools and businesses closed, crops and livestock destroyed, and residents left with limited access to clean drinking water," the United Nations added. Didier Trebucq, the United Nations' resident coordinator for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean added, "The level of destruction that has befallen this beautiful country and the widespread disruption caused by this event will forever be etched in my mind. The devastating impact of this event on thousands of people is undeniable." St. Vincent's prime minister, Ralph Gonsalves, said officials in the Caribbean nation are still trying to quantify the damage from the volcanic eruptions, but he added that rebuilding will take "hundreds of millions of dollars" and "massive" humanitarian relief, the Associated Press reported. Ash is piled as high as 16 inches in some homes in the northern portion of St.

NEWS BRIEFS

Cuban President Discusses Cooperation in Call With Russia's Putin

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who was tapped this week as the leader of the country's Communist Party, on Tuesday spoke by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the two discussed strengthening the countries' "strategic partnership," the Russian foreign ministry said in a tweet. In the call, Putin and Díaz-Canel "confirmed their mutual willingness to strengthen the strategic partnership as well as to coordinate efforts in the fight against the spread of #COVID19," the tweet said.

Brazil in Talks to Buy 100 Million More Doses of Pfizer Vaccine

Brazil is in talks to buy an additional 100 million doses of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine, Communications Minister Fábio Faria said Tuesday on Twitter, Reuters reported. "The negotiation started about 20 days ago and the [government] seeks to speed up the process," he wrote. Brazil has registered more than 14 million cases of the novel coronavirus, the third-highest number in the world after the United States and India. It has also recorded the second-highest death rate, with more than 378,000 recorded deaths from the disease.

Two Mexican Police Officers Injured in Drone Attack

Two police officers were injured in the Mexican state of Michoacán on Tuesday when attackers, believed to be linked to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), dropped explosive devices onto them using drones, BBC News reported. Drones are thought to be the latest weapons in the country's drug war. The drones used in the attack appear to have been rigged in similar ways to two drones found in the car of suspected CJNG members last August.

Vincent, where the volcano is located, the wire service reported. More than 16,000 people were evacuated ahead of the volcano's first eruption on April 9. More than 6,200 people are currently staying in government shelters, with thousands more in private shelters or homes, the wire service reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Argentine Company Produces Batch of Russian Vaccine

Argentine pharmaceutical company Laboratorios Richmond has produced a batch of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine against Covid-19, the first in Latin America, the firm and Russian sovereign wealth fund RDIF announced Tuesday, Reuters reported. The company is looking to scale up manufacturing of the vaccine by mid-year as the country and region at large continue to struggle amid the unrelenting spread of the novel coronavirus. The batches manufactured as part of Richmond's test production will now go to Russia's Gamaleya Institute for quality inspection. "We estimate that, if the process is positive, scale production would begin in June 2021," Richmond said in a statement, Reuters reported. Argentina was among the first in the world to use the Russian vaccine on scale to inoculate its population. Russian scientist Denis Logunov, a lead developer of the drug, said last week that the vaccine had proven to be 97.6 effective against the virus in a real-world assessment. That rate is higher than the 91.6 percent outlined in earlier results. Major world powers have been engaging in so-called "vaccine diplomacy" in Latin America and the Caribbean. "China and Russia, with the pandemic more controlled than the United States at home, have exploited vaccine sales and donations to pursue agendas abroad," R. Evan Ellis, Latin America research professor at the U.S. Army War College of Strategic Studies Institute, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Tuesday.

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bureaucracy to heel, only time will tell. The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the Cuban economy. GDP fell 11 percent last year, resulting in shortages of basic goods, including food. Ironically, the crisis also accelerated the pace of change. Already this year, the government has undertaken two long-awaited reforms—a vast expansion of the scope of allowable private business and the unification of Cuba's dual currency and exchange rates. Still, much more remains to be done. The legitimacy of Cuba's new leaders will depend on their ability to deliver the goods—literally—to a population tired of perpetual austerity."

A **Otto Reich, president of Otto Reich Associates LLC and former assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere**

affairs: "Cuba to be led by someone not named Castro for the first time in six decades,' breathlessly proclaim many news headlines. That is also what they said three years ago, when Miguel Díaz-Canel replaced Raúl Castro as 'president.' Nothing changed in Cuba in the intervening three years, except that political repression and economic stagnation increased, and shortages of food and of every other basic human need intensified. This past weekend, the world media repeated those headlines. Their memories are short. Cuba remains a totalitarian dictatorship that forcibly stifles dissent and individual initiative in the name of 'socialism'; the succession remains meaningless. By brute force, Fidel Castro tried to build a communist society in the mold of the former Soviet Union. The Cuban Communist Party's designation of Díaz-Canel as Raúl's successor in the most important post in the land, secretary general of the Communist Party, is as inconsequential as the Soviet Communist Party's designation of General Secretaries Andropov and Chernenko to replace Leonid Brezhnev in the early 1980s. Not until Mikhail Gorbachev arrived to 'save Communism,' which the Russian said was

his objective, did any real changes begin in the USSR. But Castro, Inc. knows that was the beginning of the end of the USSR, because communism cannot be reformed, only replaced, which is why Fidel, while he

“ The succession remains meaningless...”

— Otto Reich

lived, prohibited talk of Glasnost, Perestroika or any such 'nonsense.' Díaz-Canel is no Gorbachev, but there is hope despite him: Cubans are losing fear of the secret police and challenging the party's iron rule; they are aware of the fact that Cuba was not 'a poor country' before Castro, contrary to what Raúl repeated at the party congress; that their brethren who have escaped or managed to reach free, capitalist societies have thrived and that 'with a little more sacrifice everything will be better soon' is a worn-out communist lie."

A **Camila Piñeiro Harnecker, professor and researcher on the social solidarity economy and enterprise sector in Cuba:** "Just

as with expectations about 'Cuba after Fidel,' the 'Cuba after Raúl' will likely not change in the way some in Miami and Washington would hope. Younger generations of Cuban leaders, whose main source of legitimacy is their ability to deliver on the promises for a 'prosperous and sustainable socialism'—as established in the Guidelines, Conceptualization, 2030 Plan and the new constitution—have no choice but to accelerate the reform process that Raúl started. Cuba is facing an economic crisis resulting both from structural deficiencies of the still-dominant statist model and the U.S. embargo, which was exacerbated by the Trump administration's efforts to strangle Cuba and the devastating effects of a global pandemic. President

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Díaz-Canel has shown determination to continue with the reforms nonetheless, even if it initially creates some pain for Cubans. The greatest obstacle to deeper economic and political reform in Cuba continues to be the hostility of 'regime change' policy that U.S. administrations have pursued for more than 60 years. The economic, financial and commercial sanctions that have been maintained—sometimes relaxed, sometimes toughened—coupled with incitement of social unrest, have produced a siege mentality among officials and everyday citizens. With tourism halted by the pandemic, Cuba desperately needs foreign investment and for the first time has called for Cuban-Americans to invest. The Biden administration has a great opportunity to restore the Obama administration's normalization path and bolster Cuban leaders who would advance reforms in favor of a greater role for the cooperative and private sectors, while undermining hardliners in both countries and benefiting all Cubans."

A **Lenier González, resident fellow at the Inter-American Dialogue and co-founder of Cuba Possible:** "The legitimacy of Cuba's 'historic generation' emanated from an insurrectionary epic that destroyed the institutional order of the second republic, radically transformed the life of the country and managed to involve politically several generations of Cubans in that transformation. The legitimacy of the new generation of leaders will strictly depend on the degree of material prosperity that they are capable of providing the Cuban people. In order to achieve this, the government has begun the monetary and exchange unification, it has announced that it will expand the scope of activity by the private sector, and it will possibly open the doors to small and

medium-sized private companies. However, tensions emerged in the eighth congress that the new generation of leaders must resolve. On the one hand, a greater 'role of the market' was announced, while at the same time 'red lines' that must not be crossed were drawn. These red lines refer to the market itself and to the possibility of privatizing

“ There is a transition from strong leadership to a more collegiate power structure...”

— Lenier González

sectors of the economy. If leaders decide to move toward a mixed economic model, with greater private-sector participation, the middle class will expand, and the autonomy quotas of broad social sectors would also be expanded. On the other hand, with the departure of Raúl Castro as first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party, there is a transition from strong leadership to a more collegiate power structure, with distributed political functions and a rotation in the exercise of power, although still without allowing the direct election of the main political posts. In parallel, and thanks to the island's connection to the Internet, the existence of a plurality of voices in Cuban society with real capacity to present agendas that challenge the party's main postulates, as well as to advocate for greater civil liberties, is more evident by the day. This entire universe of realities challenges the party, the new leadership and the political system as a whole."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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